

## اتحاد الجاليات والمؤسسات الفلسطينية - أوروبا

UNION OF PALESTINIAN COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS - EUROPE



14 May 2020

To all Members of the European Commission, and;

To all Members of the European Parliament;

We write today on behalf of the Union of Palestinian Communities and Associations – Europe, an association bringing together Palestinian community organizations throughout the member states of the European Union. On this occasion, we mark the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the continuing Palestinian Nakba, the catastrophe: the displacement of the majority of the Palestinian people from our homes and lands inside occupied Palestine, the colonization and military occupation of Palestinian land, and the ongoing denial of Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes.

The Nakba is not simply a historical crime of the past; it remains an ongoing series of war crimes and crimes against humanity directed against the Palestinian people by Israel. Most recently, we witness the proclaimed intention to annex the Jordan Valley, the ongoing and deadly siege on Gaza, the expansion of settlement construction and land confiscation, the destruction of Palestinian homes as a form of collective punishment, the continuing imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians – including hundreds of children – despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and the continuing extrajudicial execution of Palestinians on the streets of occupied Palestine.

Europe and the European Union is neither a bystander nor an innocent party in these ongoing crimes. Despite mildly critical statements and expressions of concern from European officials regarding the latest and most extreme actions of the Israeli state, European powers were an essential partner in the Zionist colonization of Palestine and then in the Nakba and declaration of the Israeli state on the land of occupied Palestine. European powers sought some form of absolution for their crimes and genocidal practices inside Europe through the colonization of Palestine and the ongoing dispossession and displacement of the Palestinian people. European racism and colonial politics led directly to the Nakba and provided the basis for its ongoing implementation.

Today, European countries and the EU continue to provide strategic, diplomatic, political and even military support to the Israeli regime, fully implicating Europe in the Nakba and all of the continuing crimes that have followed, including and particularly the denial of the right of return of millions of Palestinian refugees. We emphasize that this right also continues to belong to Palestinian citizens of European countries who continue to have the right to land, property and citizenship that was confiscated from them due to their forced displacement in the Nakba and the

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ongoing denial of their right to return. Thus, the EU is directly complicit in the ongoing violation of the fundamental human rights of Palestinian citizens of European nations.

There is widespread and growing support of people of conscience, progressive parties and social movements for the rights of the Palestinian people, as well as a growing recognition that the Israeli state, its racist policies, fundamental vision and practices, is central to the burgeoning and dangerous international extreme right wing movement, as well as a highly militarized threat to the peace and security of the peoples of the region.

However, despite its claims of independence, the European Union has continued to follow largely in the footsteps of U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, despite the threat of war and invasion that the U.S. today poses to the world. This has included its ongoing practice of “politics as usual” of support for the Israeli occupation in practice, despite the growing escalation of violations targeting the Palestinian people. In particular, we draw your attention to the following points and urge immediate action to rectify and address these serious issues:

1. The European Union has imposed conditional funding policies on Palestinian organizations that undermine the ability of the Palestinian people under occupation to protect themselves from human rights violations, defend their land from confiscation, receive proper health care and education, and defend themselves against unjust political imprisonment. It is quite clear, despite all statements to the contrary, that these policies- which extend so far s to demand political litmus tests from recipients of social benefits, training and workshop participants – are in fact in accordance and compliance with the propaganda reports produced by the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Israeli-state-associated entities. The purpose of such restrictions, which attempt to criminalize most of the major Palestinian political parties and thus exclude a massive amount of the Palestinian people, is to undermine Palestinians’ ability to challenge Israeli violations and defend their rights. Thus, any statements of concern about rights violations on the part of the EU are empty and illegitimate as long as these conditional funding policies are applied to the Palestinian people. We note that Israel and Israeli companies are not subjected to any form of sanctions despite their ongoing and deep implication in the human rights abuses directed against the Palestinian people. **Conditional funding is an attack on the rights of the Palestinian people and must come to an end.**
2. Further, the entire practice of listing Palestinian organizations as “terrorist” highlights the EU’s heavily based policy in favor of the Israeli occupation. Palestinian political parties and movements, including the victors in the last Palestinian elections held under occupation in 2006, are listed by the EU s “terrorist” because Palestinians refuse to relinquish and continue to practice their fundamental right, upheld under international law, to resist colonization and military occupation. It further provides an excuse to impose conditional funding, smear human rights defenders, justify political repression and imprisonment and inhibit the fundamental freedoms of the Palestinian people. All Palestinian parties must be removed from the EU’s list of designated terrorist

- organizations, a formula imported from the U.S. after September 11, 2001. **Resistance is not terrorism, and it is long since time that Europe supported Palestinians' right to resist rather than criminalizing people defending themselves from Israeli aggression.**
3. Palestinian human rights are also under attack inside Europe, especially those of non-European citizens, which European countries claim to exclude from their human rights protections and commitments, thus rendering such protections meaningless. For example, in Germany, former Palestinian prisoner and torture survivor Rasmia Odeh was subjected to a political ban and the stripping of her duly granted visa for no reason other than political convenience and the intervention of Israeli and U.S. officials. Later, Palestinian writer Khaled Barakat was subjected to a political ban and then ordered expelled from Germany for four years again, only, for political positions in support of the Palestinian people. This comes in addition to the closing of bank accounts, the attempts to exclude groups in support of Palestinian rights from public space and intimidation attempts against German and international intellectuals and cultural figures. **Germany must be held accountable for its ongoing internal violations of Palestinian human rights, a racist policy that mirrors its support for Israeli occupation.**
  4. European powers continue to militarize the borders and undermine fundamental rights and refugee protections under such frameworks as the "EU-Turkey agreement," despite the serious risk to life that this poses to refugees, including Palestinian refugees who are forced to seek safety in Europe because they are denied their right to return home to Palestine by the Israeli occupation. Now, Frontex is not only pursuing its ongoing anti-migrant policies that threaten lives, health and security at the borders and in the sea, but is engaging in contracts to purchase military drones from Israeli corporations such as Elbit Systems and Israeli Aerospace Industries with contracts worth 59 million EUR to use Israeli surveillance technology against migrants seeking safety on Europe's shores. **These drones were tested on the occupied Palestinian people and the EU is rewarding Israeli attacks on Palestinians, especially its air attacks on Gaza, by purchasing these drones. These contracts must be cancelled immediately.**
  5. **The European Union must cancel the EU-Israel Association Agreement and all other special agreements with Israel** that give it priority access to EU funds and markets. This agreement continues to privilege trade with a notorious human rights abusing regime, rewarding Israel for its ongoing violations of Palestinian rights. When the EU issues mild statements of critique but continues to impose a privileged trade and funding policy, it is clear that its disapproval comes in the forms of words only; in practice, Europe continues to support the destruction of Palestinian lives, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the attempted liquidation of Palestinian rights.
  6. The European Union has been for nearly 14 years complicit in the ongoing siege of Gaza. The EU was first to remove its officials from the Rafah crossing, attempting to force its closure and force the Palestinian people in Gaza entirely to the will and control of the Israeli occupation regime. Since 2006 and 2007, the siege on Gaza has shortened lives, denied countless students opportunities, seen the destruction of the Palestinian economy in Gaza and created massive poverty and unemployment. The Israeli siege, with Egyptian

and European complicity, is an ongoing crime against the Palestinian people. **It is time for the EU to act to end the siege rather than continuing to foster its implementation as a massive form of collective punishment against 2 million Palestinians in the open-air cage of the Gaza Strip**, the majority of them refugees forcibly displaced to Gaza during the Nakba and since denied their right to return home.

7. Further, we note that even those EU statements that are mildly critical of Israeli annexation or settlement construction continue to state the importance of the “two state solution,” while ignoring entirely the most fundamental right of the Palestinian people: the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands inside Palestine, including the right of Palestinians exiled in Europe to return. The so-called “two state solution” is, in reality, no solution at all for the Palestinian people. It means the ongoing perpetuation of exclusivity, racism, apartheid and colonization throughout the majority of historic Palestine. **It is time to stand for one democratic Palestine with equal rights for all, respect Palestinian sovereignty and self-determination and, most essentially act to reverse the process of continuing Nakba through the implementation of Palestinians’ right to return.**

Europe holds political, legal and moral responsibility for the continuing Nakba in Palestine. As Palestinian communities and associations in Europe, we emphasize that it is urgent that Europe act to address these responsibilities by ending its involvement in Israeli war crimes and the persecution and oppression of the Palestinian people as described above. 72 years of apartheid, colonization and war crimes – 72 years of Nakba – must come to an end. It is time for justice for Palestine.

Sincerely yours,

Union of Palestinian Communities and Associations – Europe

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