

More to come

Angela Davis

Bonjour – c'est un très grand honneur d'être associé au Tribunal Russell sur la Palestine et de pouvoir présenter des idées du jury par à l'avenir. À la part du jury je veux dire merci à Stéphane Hessel, à Pierre Galland, à Franc Barat, à Virginie Vanhaeverbeke et tous ce qui ont organisés le travail formidable du Tribunal Russell sur la Palestine.

But I'm going to speak in English (*audience laughs*), and I want to begin by emphatically asserting that the important work of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine is not over. The Russell Tribunal on Palestine does not now intend to disestablish itself. Before he passed away, Stéphane Hessel urged the Tribunal to issue an international appeal to bring more pressure to bear on Israel, to halt its violations of international law, and to put pressure on the Secretary General of the United Nations to use all available UN instruments to force Israel to dismantle its system of apartheid. Stéphane, of course, was such a wonderful and powerful force in this work, so we must certainly see to it that his wishes are carried out. And in this context let me say that we encourage as many people as possible to visit Palestine and see for themselves. All of the members of the jury have visited Palestine – with the exception, of course, of those who have been barred by Israel. And we can guarantee you that anyone who visits the occupied territory of Palestine, whether seasoned activist or people just beginning their activist trajectories, will be completely transformed.

As you know, and as you have heard from previous members of the jury, we have concluded the process of collecting

◀ *Angela Davis had the task of charting the way forward, as the Russell Tribunal on Palestine drew to a close in Brussels. She emphasised the actions to come, commencing in impeccable French, learnt in Paris in the 1960s.*

Photo: Renaud Hoyois

evidence, and you have heard reports on the four previous sessions on the European Union in Barcelona, on corporations in London, on apartheid in Cape Town, and on the complicity of the United Nations and the United States in New York. And so now begins the process of making productive use of this evidence; the process of strategically utilising the evidence in order to rouse people to action everywhere in the world.

Now is the time to mobilise and organise in support of the cause of Palestinian freedom through as many channels as are available to us. And let me say that in this work we always follow the example of our courageous Palestinian sisters and brothers, who have been waging the campaign for self-determination on so many fronts for so many decades.

Now is the time to deepen and expand Palestinian solidarity efforts. This is a crucial historical moment, as you have heard from Michael Mansfield and from John Dugard that, given the fact that Palestine was just recently recognized as a non-member observer State by the United Nations General Assembly. Of course, as Michael pointed out, this happened despite the efforts of Israel and the US. And it might be helpful to point out that the other countries joining the US and Israel were Canada (and we should say ‘shame on Canada’), and Micronesia, and Palau, and the Czech Republic, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Panama. 130 in favour, 9 against, with some 41 abstentions including in this part of the world Germany, the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Poland, and then, of course, Australia.

So now is the time to issue the strongest possible condemnation of Israel. We demand that Israel immediately dismantle its system of apartheid, not only in the occupied territories but also in relation to Palestinian refugees and inside Israel itself. We demand in the strongest possible terms that Israel rescind all discriminatory laws and practices, and that it immediately halt its persecution of Palestinians wherever they may reside. Because Palestine is now in a position to sign and ratify the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court, and thus to become a full member of the ICC, we support Palestinian efforts to do so, and thus to have standing to bring charges against Israel for crimes against humanity, for war crimes, and crimes of aggression. We also support efforts to have Palestine ratify other important conventions such as the Geneva Conventions on the Laws of War, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, and the Law of the Sea Convention. As a matter of fact, this last Convention will give Palestine a legal basis to claim a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles, and an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles in respect of the waters of Gaza.

We have divided our strategic suggestions regarding the future into three sections: first, institutions and states; second, corporations; third, civil society.

And under institutions and states we first considered the United Nations. Because we think that the concept of apartheid is a thread that runs throughout the findings of the Tribunal, and because we see the movement against apartheid in South Africa to be a model for our movement today in support of the Palestinian struggle, we issue a call for the United Nations General Assembly to reconstitute the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, and to hold a special session of the General Assembly on Israeli apartheid.

We recognise the important work that social movements have done to begin to popularise the notion of Israeli apartheid. The Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, for example, based in Palestine, also the many student organisations in North America, Europe, Africa and elsewhere who have been, for some years now, observing Israeli Apartheid Week. They have played an absolutely important role in the public education, public political education of people everywhere on the issue of Palestine. They have made it clear that it is not an issue, as the very eloquent letter of Marwan Barghouti pointed out, it is not an issue of the Israeli-Palestine conflict as if they were two equal parties who historically have inflicted equal damage on one another. And, moreover, this public education continues to point out that Israel engages in a process of pink-washing. That is to say, representing itself as a safe haven for women and LGBT communities, thus bolstering the false notion that Israel is the model of democracy in the region. I have already indicated that we call for the support of Palestinian efforts to join the International Criminal Court. We further call upon the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to accept jurisdiction and to initiate an investigation, as called for by the Goldstone report – even though Goldstone retracted his support of his own report, the report stands, including crimes of apartheid and persecution. In this context, we passionately support the Palestinian civil society campaigns that are pressuring the Palestinian Authority to push for full membership in the ICC and other international bodies. In order to implement these new strategies it will be necessary to abolish the so-called ‘Quartet’, this less than legal formation that includes, of course, the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and Russia. With respect to the European Union, we support the implementation of the European Parliament’s resolution on the suspension of the EU-Israel association agreement, removing thus an important dimension of the context of

irresponsibility that Israel enjoys. Among the steps that the EU member states may take, we highlight the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Goldstone report. We support the EU campaign to ban settlement products, and this should be strengthened and broadened. We demand that states acknowledge and co-operate to bring an end to the illegal situation arising from Israel's practices of apartheid and persecution. In light of the obligation not to render aide or assistance, all states must consider appropriate measures to exert sufficient pressure on Israel, including the imposition of sanctions, severing diplomatic relations collectively through international organisations or, in the absence of such a consensus, individually, by breaking bilateral relations with Israel. Among the many states that are complicit with Israel, we necessarily single out the United States. And this is especially important given the upcoming trip [to Israel of President Obama].

The Tribunal finds that Israel's ongoing colonial settlement expansion, its racial separatist policies, as well as its violent militarism, would not be possible without the US's unequivocal support. Of course, the unconditional support that the US offers to this internationally recognised, occupying power has made Israel the largest recipient of US foreign aid since 1976, and the largest cumulative recipient since World War Two, in the amount of some \$115 billion. Aid to Israel has averaged about 25% of all US foreign aid. And then there is the question of diplomatic support. Between 1972 and 2012, the US has imposed the sole veto on UN resolutions critical of Israel 43 times, and of these resolutions, 30 concern the occupied territories. As a result, the international impunity that Israel enjoys for its consistent violations of the Geneva Conventions is largely attributable to the external protection that its special relationship with the US affords. And I could go on talking about the connection between Israel and the US, but let me simply say that Israel receives in terms of military aid 60% of US foreign military financing, making it the largest recipient of US military funding. And so this means, of course, that we must mount international pressure on the United States. It also means that those of us who happen to live in this country called the United States have special responsibility; as individuals we bear responsibility, and as organisations within the US we are especially responsible.

As we know, an entire session of the Russell Tribunal was devoted to a discussion of the role of corporations in bolstering the system of Israeli apartheid. Targeting corporations is an important dimension of our strategies for the future. There are many legal channels through which it is possible to render corporations accountable for their complicity with

Israeli apartheid. And, of course, as we attempt to follow the historical model of the struggle against South African apartheid, we call not only for a consciousness of general corporate responsibility, and it is important to point out that in The Netherlands their efforts to investigate corporate responsibility, we should encourage them to expand those efforts, but also we believe that we should target specific corporations for the purpose of mobilising masses of people all over the world. I am not sure how many of you in the audience here were directly involved in the anti-apartheid movement. I assume that those of you who are old enough to have experienced that, participated in the movement, right? And perhaps you remember that the focus on Shell Oil, as a target for the boycott of corporations complicit with South African apartheid, helped to deepen and expand the anti-apartheid movement. We call now for targeted boycotts of such corporations as Veolia, G4S, Caterpillar, IKEA and certain Israeli firms such as Ahava. Those of you who use cosmetics have probably encountered Ahava. In this targeting of corporations we follow the lead of the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Omar Barghouti and his co-workers have helped to create this global movement calling for the boycott of corporations that are complicit with Israeli apartheid, as well as the academic and cultural boycott.

I wanted to reserve the final section for a discussion on the importance of joining the campaign to free Palestinian political prisoners. And in that context I wanted to make a brief reference to my own historical predicament as a political prisoner. As I have said many times, one of the most moving moments of my own incarceration was when I received a message from Palestinian political prisoners incarcerated inside Israeli jails. When I was in Palestine about a year and a half ago, I recalled that message that was so profoundly moving to me because I felt like, ‘why should I be the beneficiary of solidarity from people who are suffering so much more than I am?’ And as I talked about this letter, I think people must have told others about it. Because at one point during the trip, we were in Jerusalem, I believe, a man came up to me and said: ‘I heard you made reference to a solidarity message that came from Palestinians to you when you were incarcerated and I want to tell you that I am one of the prisoners who signed that message’. And it was so incredible to be able to embrace him, and to recognise that we are joined together in an ongoing common struggle for justice and equality.

And so I’d like to give you just a little information on the historical and contemporary situation of Palestinian political prisoners. The prisoner rights organisation in Palestine (ADDAMEER) in its March 2013

submission to the Tribunal pointed out that, since the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory in 1967, more than 800,000 Palestinians have been detained. That is almost one million. They have been detained under Israeli military orders in the occupied territory. This number constitutes 20% of the total Palestinian population in the occupied territories. It includes approximately 10,000 women who have been jailed since 1967, as well as 8,000 Palestinian children arrested since the year 2000. And as you heard in the message from Marwan Barghouti, over 4,000 prisoners remain behind bars today.

So we are issuing a call. The Russell Tribunal is issuing a call for the formation of an international committee of former political prisoners, representing the Middle East, and Africa, and North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. This international committee will shed light in the predicament of political prisoners, their ongoing resistance, including the hunger strikes that continue, and we will call for the freedom of Marwan Barghouti and for the freedom of all Palestinian political prisoners (*applause!*).

And finally as we move forward, we recognise that it is necessary to encourage the media, including the electronic media, to devote more coverage to Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people; and to devote coverage to the organised outrage throughout the world against these crimes. We make an appeal to people involved in various social movements, to incorporate solidarity with Palestine in their own specific agendas and to develop parallels with their own historical struggles. And, of course, in the US we refer to the brutal, genocidal colonisation of indigenous people. We also refer to the parallels with the struggle against Jim Crow racism, pointing out that, most recently, young Palestinians who challenged the segregation of the highways and of the buses call themselves 'Palestinian freedom riders'. In Australia, of course, there are striking parallels with the struggles of aboriginal people, and so on.

We are convinced that this is the right moment to intensify our efforts to expose the crimes of the state of Israel, and therefore we invite you to join us, we invite you to bring your families, your friends, your comrades along. Israeli apartheid will be exposed before the world, and the Palestinian people will indeed be victorious.