

MAY 21 1979

conf. Search  
PED. NE  
Projects  
Speakers -  
Palestinian  
Mayors

Report of Visit to the United States of Mohammed Milhem, Mayor of Halhoul, West Bank

Mohammed Milhem, the Mayor of the West Bank municipality of Halhoul, came to the United States to speak at the American Friends Service Committee conference "Search for Peace in the Middle East: The New Context" and to speak to legislators, government officials, civic and religious leaders and the press. He arrived in Washington on April 25, 1979 and left on May 2nd.

Mayor Milhem came to office as the mayor of Halhoul in elections in 1976 in which nine out of ten mayors of West Bank municipalities were elected on pro-nationalist platforms and support of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians in negotiations for a peace settlement. The Mayor comes from a family of farmers and taught English for ten years in Saudi Arabia.

In his presentations to audiences Mr. Milhem made the following points: "Instead of peace we (the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories) were given the Camp David accords. These accords have borne bitter fruits. We in Halhoul suffered from the death of two of our youngsters at the hands of Israeli soldiers and the imposition of a 23 hour per day curfew for sixteen continuous days.

During this curfew the Israeli military authorities prevented the farmers of Halhoul from spraying their vineyards so that 40% of this year's crop was spoiled. It also resulted in arbitrary mass arrests and detentions. If a child went out of his house when the curfew was on, the Israeli occupation authorities would break the windows in his house to punish the family - this happened to at least 20 families. Israeli soldiers also stole jewelry from at least five houses during the curfew.

During the curfew the Israeli occupation authorities went as far as preventing the arrival into Halhoul of food provisions which had been sent to alleviate the intolerable conditions of the people. In addition the authorities prevented other mayors of West Bank municipalities from making any statements expressing solidarity with or concern for the people of Halhoul.

To add further injury to my people, after the curfew had ended the military governor announced the cancellation of an important program that we had planned for two years, namely the establishment of a wholesale vegetable market that would have alleviated some of the economic problems.

For us these were the fruits of a "peace" treaty. What we ask is what lies ahead? What new oppression will be inflicted upon us? Will we experience more curfews, new deportations, exiles and expropriation of the land upon which we live?

More than half a century ago, the international community - through the League of Nations - determined that the Palestinian people were entitled to self-government and national independence. Instead, we are today offered a plan which grants autonomy over one-third of the Palestinian people but no autonomy over our land.

We know of no convincing justification for this severe diminishment of our national rights, except that it is dictated by the presently prevailing configuration of power. Equally, we know of no convincing reason why we should undermine our rights and the chances for an authentic regional peace by accepting, and therefore legitimizing this new injustice. We owe it to ourselves, to the peoples of our region, and to the cause of lasting peace to hold out and strive

for an equitable peace which can be willingly embraced rather than for an oppressive settlement which must be grudgingly and temporarily endured, divorced from our aspirations for freedom and statehood. We are alarmed and angered by the present mutation of our hope for a comprehensive regional peace into a partial, bilateral settlement.

During the past few years, the community of nations gradually developed a consensus regarding the nature of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

This international consensus, from which only a handful of states have chosen to deviate, and which we the Palestinians find to be an acceptable basis for a just and lasting peace, includes the following two principal formulations:

1. Peace must be comprehensive, if it is not to be continually in danger of collapse; it should satisfy all the parties involved.
2. A just and lasting peace, therefore, must include the realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination including their right to political independence in a national state on their native soil.

Any settlement which fails to satisfy these two principles will be, of necessity, partial and imposed, and will produce a truce rather than a state of peace.

The "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" agreed to at Camp David and the subsequent negotiations and agreements, including the treaty between the Arab Republic and Egypt and Israel professed a commitment to the proposition that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East is an "urgent necessity," but they failed to demonstrate fidelity to this commitment by seeking formulas which blatantly ignore and circumvent both of the basic and essential pre-requisites of such a peace. They seek, instead, to impose on our region a settlement which leaves more unresolved issues than those to which it addresses itself.

We, the Palestinians, and all the peoples of our region have a right to a genuine peace. Equally, we share the obligation and the responsibility to reject and resist attempts to foist upon us a tranquilizing substitute. We believe that Israel sought and obtained at Camp David a formula which can only and of necessity lead to the closed road of unilateral settlement with Egypt. This is evident from the fact that while the accords conceded the mutual claims of Israel and Egypt they failed to maintain the symmetry by conceding even in principle the claims of any of the other parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As far as the Palestinian dimension of the conflict is concerned, the agreement was deliberately designed to provoke Palestinian rejection for the following reasons:

1. It addresses "the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" rather than the Palestinian people. A minority cannot legitimately act on behalf of the whole. Second, it is the majority of our people, ignored by the agreements, who suffered most. While the residents of the West Bank and Gaza live under occupation, they at least live in their homeland. The rest are the victims of forced exile.

2. The Camp David agreements and the subsequent negotiations accept the premise that the peoples concerned are free to designate their spokesmen and representatives. The Palestinian people alone are denied this right. The Palestine Liberation Organization is accepted by the Palestinian people and by the overwhelming majority of the nations of the world as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The Camp David agreements require the Palestinians to seek a substitute leadership as a condition for any sort of participation.

3. The agreements envision "autonomy" for the inhabitants of one-fifth of Palestine. In political terminology, autonomy is less than independence, and an autonomous region is a part of a larger state. The agreements, therefore, rule out the possibility of independence. We see no reason why we should be interested in negotiating a settlement which rules out in advance the option of independence for the Palestinian people. We have no interest in legitimizing Israeli occupation by consenting to a thinly camouflaged version of it.

4. Jerusalem is the heart of Palestinian history and heritage. It is also the geographic link between the northern and southern halves of the West Bank. We are neither willing nor able to envision a future without it.

5. Any agreement which does not require, without equivocation, an internationally supervised cessation to Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza betrays lack of good faith and a cruel disregard for the future of our people. It is the sine qua non of the confidence-building process which is alleged to be the principal achievement and merit of the ongoing diplomacy.

6. The agreements represent a regression from earlier international commitments to the Palestinian refugees. They make no mention of their internationally recognized right to choose repatriation or compensation. Before Camp David there were agreed-upon solutions needing implementation. Now there is simply a "problem" which will someday be considered, without principles agreed upon in advance, upon which negotiations can be based.

The Palestinian people are aware of the complexity of the issues. They certainly do not expect that the accumulated injustices would vanish overnight, and they do not day-dream of easy and sudden freedom. But they are equally aware of the sterility of negotiating a settlement which in advance rules out the essence of their national identity, rights, and aspirations."

During his visit to Washington and New York, Mayor Milhem met with the following people and organizations:

Harold Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs

William Quandt, National Security Council

Landrum Bolling, President, Council on Foundations

Hisham Sharabi, President, National Association of Arab-Americans

Herman Edelsberg, former International Affairs Director of B'nai B'rith

A group of representatives of nongovernmental organizations from American Near East Refugee Aid, U.S. Catholic Conference, B'nai B'rith and United Methodist Church, Carnegie Endowment

Public address to 200 persons attending AFSC's conference "Search For Peace In The Middle East: The New Context"

700 members of the Ramallah Federation of America

Luncheon given for Ambassadors from Arab countries given by the Arab League

Television interview on "Another Voice" by Chuck Stone, produced by PBS and aired on 160 television stations nationwide

Meeting with various members of the Middle East Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee

Radio interviews on Voice of America, ABC and the Canadian Broadcasting Company, Associated Press Radio

At two luncheons, one hosted by the Washington Public Affairs Program of AFSC, the other by the Washington Press Club, the Mayor met with the following journalists:

Stephen Rosenfeld, editor, Washington Post

Richard Halloran, New York Times

Karen Elliot House, Wall Street Journal

Betty Dukert, producer, Meet The Press

John Conley, Christian Science Monitor

Steve Bell, American Broadcasting Company

Marguerite Sullivan, Copley News Service

Richard Ryan, Detroit News

A journalist from the New York Daily News

Oswald Johnson, Los Angeles Times

Jean-Pierre Altier, Agence France-Press

Jeffrey Antevil, New York Daily News

Patti Berman, Associated Press Radio

Paul Brink, Information Services, AFSC Philadelphia

Jim Cary, Copley News Service

John Cooley, Christian Science Monitor

Philippe Debeusscher, Agence France Presse

Bob Cullen, Associated Press

Kathy Fluellen, WHUR Radio

Richard Halloran, New York Times

John McLean, Chicago Tribune

Edward P. Morgan, Atlantic Dateline

Askia Muhammed, Pacifica Radio

Lawrence M. O'Rourke, Philadelphia Bulletin

Patrick Oster, Chicago Sun Times

Anita Sama, Gannett News Service

Clive Small, British Broadcasting Corporation

Damu Smith, Washington Public Affairs Program, AFSC

Jim Wesley, WETA-TV

Don Agurs, Mutual Black Network

Address by Mohammed Milhém  
Mayor of Halhoul

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

A PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVE

I would like you to bear with me. My English is not terribly good, but I will try to express my views.

If there is a single people in the region, especially in the occupied territories, who is more anxious than any other to see peace, it is the Palestinian people. This is the people who have suffered enormously at the hands of British colonialism and from fragmentation and exile, and are suffering today from continuous bombing by Israeli Phantoms. Our people suffer equally enormously from statelessness and destitution on the five continents of the globe. You can see this very clearly at immigration checkpoints and in any part of the world where people are crossing borders. The Palestinian people continue to suffer from an occupation that is already twelve years old - indeed, I should say an occupation that is thirty years old. This occupation sows a terror that has never been known by any people in the world. This occupation was not even experienced by the European people under the Nazi occupation. This occupation must be characterized by its mass arrests, deportations, torture, the blowing up of homes and the expropriation of land, as well as harassment of people at checkpoints and on the streets of their own villages and towns - and so on, and so forth.

Do you not, ladies and gentlemen, believe that a people who has suffered all these painful experiences deserves to have a peace and is, in fact, in need of peace more than any other people around it?

I arrived in the United States last Wednesday and left my occupied city of Halhoul last Sunday, five days ago.

*Ron Schneider*

4-28-79

In all sincerity and genuiness, I feel that my conscience calls upon me to reach out to all people of the world, including the American people, to reach out to all individuals regardless of their background, regardless of whether they are Moslems, Christians or Jews so that they may come to understand fully what is happening today in our homeland.

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen , that the so-called Camp David accords, which resulted in a treaty-signing ceremony at the White House recently, have in fact, resulted for all of us in Halhoul, the city of which I am a mayor, in the death of two youngsters, namely two students, whose death I witnessed on the fifteenth day of March. Ladies and gentlemen, the culmination of these Camp David agreements has also resulted recently in a 23 hour curfew, I repeat a 23 hour curfew, in Halhoul, that prevented the people of Halhoul from conducting their daily lives, trade and education for sixteen continuous days.

As a result, in the city of Halhoul, all the members of the city council were detained on the outskirts of town for eight hours. Also, the Israeli military authorities prevented the people of Halhoul from spraying their vineyards so that 40% of this year's crop was spoiled. It also resulted in arbitrary mass arrests and detentions. If one child went out of his house when the curfew was on, the Israeli occupation authorities would break the windows in his house to punish the family. Israeli soldiers also stole jewelry from the houses of the people during the curfew.

People were also prevented from walking in the funeral procession for the two young students who were killed. The

authorities also scheduled the burial for soon after sunset to prevent people from attending the funeral. The Israeli especially maltreated our women and used abusive language and intolerable behavior towards them.

Another painful result was the cancellation of an important program that the people of Halhoul had planned for many years, namely the establishment of a marketplace in the town that would have been of great economic benefit and alleviates some of our economic problems.

During the 23 hour curfew, which as I explained, lasted for sixteen days, the Israeli occupation authorities even went as far as preventing the arrival into Halhoul of food provisions that had been sent to alleviate the intolerable condition of the people. The Israeli authorities also prevented other mayors in the West Bank from making any statements expressing solidarity with the people of Halhoul.

Ladies and gentlemen, this particular incident took place only in the town of Halhoul and I am speaking to you from firsthand experience. But I suspect in many towns in the West Bank, something similar has taken place directly after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty. These are the fruits of the so-called peace treaty. What else lies ahead? What will we witness in the future? What oppression will be inflicted upon us as a result of these Camp David agreements - more deportation, more exile, more oppression, more expropriation of the land that we live on.

More than half a century ago, the international community -- through the League of Nations -- determined that the Palestinian people were entitled to self-government and national independence. Today, we are offered "autonomy" for one-third of our people in one-fifth of our country.

We know of no convincing justification for this severe diminishment of our national rights, except that it is dictated by the presently prevailing configuration of power. Equally, we know of no convincing reason why we should undermine our rights and the chances for an authentic regional peace by accepting, and therefore legitimizing this new injustice. We owe it to ourselves, to the peoples of our region, and to the cause of lasting peace to hold out and strive for an equitable peace which can be willingly embraced rather than for an oppressive settlement which must be grudgingly and temporarily endured, divorced from our aspirations for freedom and statehood.

We, the Palestinian people, experienced greater pain and felt deeper deprivation as a consequence of conflict and war, than did the other peoples of the Middle East. It should be readily believed, therefore, that our need for peace is not less than theirs, and that our yearning for peace is not less sincere. It is precisely for this reason that we are alarmed and angered by the present mutation of our hope for a comprehensive regional peace into a partial, bilateral settlement.

During the past few years, the community of nations gradually developed a consensus regarding the nature of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This conception was affirmed and reaffirmed in numerous bilateral and multilateral statements, declarations, and resolutions by states as well as regional and international forums, governmental as well as non-governmental.

This international consensus, from which only a handful of states have chosen to deviate, and which we the Palestinians find to be an acceptable basis for a just and lasting peace, includes the following two principal formulations.

1. Peace must be comprehensive if it is not to be continually in danger of collapse. This means that the settlement should resolve all the tributary issues to the conflict, and that it should satisfy all the parties involved.

2. The basic underlying cause of the Middle East conflict is the Palestine problem, that is to say, the homelessness and statelessness of the Palestinian people. A just and lasting peace, therefore, must include the realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination including their right to political independence in a national state on their native soil.

Any settlement which fails to satisfy these two principles will be, of necessity, partial and imposed, and will produce a truce rather than a state of peace.

The "Framework for Peace in the Middle East" agreed to at Camp David and the subsequent negotiations and agreements, including the treaty between the Arab Republic of Egypt and Israel professed a commitment to the proposition that

a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East is an "urgent necessity," but they failed to demonstrate fidelity to this commitment by seeking formulas which blatantly ignore and circumvent both of the basic and essential pre-requisites of such a peace. They seek, instead, to impose on our region a settlement which leaves more unresolved issues than those to which it addresses itself.

We, the Palestinians, and all the peoples of our region have a right to a genuine peace. Equally, we share the obligation and the responsibility to reject and resist attempts to foist upon us a tranquilizing substitute. We believe that Israel sought and obtained at Camp David a formula which can only and of necessity lead to the closed road of unilateral settlement with Egypt. This is evident from the fact that while the accords conceded the mutual claims of Israel and Egypt (Israeli withdrawal from occupied Sinai and Egyptian recognition of Israel and the normalization of relations between them), they failed to maintain the symmetry by conceding even in principle the claims of any of the other parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As far as the Palestinian dimension of the conflict is concerned, the agreement was deliberately designed to provoke Palestinian rejection:

1. It addresses "the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" rather than the Palestinian people. A minority cannot legitimately act on behalf of the whole. Second, it is the majority of our people, ignored by the agreements, who suffered most. While the residents of the West Bank and Gaza live under occupation, they at least live in their

homeland, The rest are the victims of forced exile.

2. The Camp David agreements and the subsequent negotiations accept the premise that the peoples concerned are free to designate their spokesmen and representatives. The Palestinian people alone are denied this right. The Palestine Liberation Organization is accepted by the Palestinian people and by the overwhelming majority of the nations of the world as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The Camp David agreements require the Palestinians to seek a substitute leadership as a condition for any sort of participation.

3. The agreements envision "autonomy" for the inhabitants of one-fifth of Palestine. In political terminology, autonomy is less than independence, and an autonomous region is a part of a larger state. The agreements, therefore, rule out the possibility of independence. We see no reason why we should be interested in negotiating a settlement which rules out in advance the option of independence for the Palestinian people. We have no interest in legitimizing Israeli occupation by consenting to a thinly camouflaged version of it.

4. Jerusalem, the city built by the Arab Jabosites long before the Hebrews ever set foot on this land, is the heart of Palestinian history and heritage. It is also the geographic link between the northern and southern halves of the West Bank. We are neither willing nor able to envision a future without it.

5. Any agreement which does not require, without equivocation, an internationally supervised cessation to Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza betrays lack

of good faith and a cruel disregard for the future of our people. It is the sine qua non of the confidence-building process which is alleged to be the principal achievement and merit of the ongoing diplomacy.

6. The agreements represent a regression from earlier international commitments to the Palestinian refugees. They make no mention of their internationally recognized right to choose repatriation or compensation. Before Camp David there were agreed-upon solutions needing implementation. Now there is simply a problem which will someday be considered, without principles agreed upon in advance, upon which negotiations can be based.

\* \* \*

The Palestinian people are now unaware of the complexity of the issues. Therefore, they do understand and expect the need for lengthy and difficult negotiations. They certainly do not expect that the accumulated injustices would vanish overnight, and they do not day-dream of easy and sudden freedom. But they are equally aware of the sterility of negotiating a settlement which in advance rules out the essence of their national identity, rights, and aspirations.

The Palestinian people would be prepared to discuss how and when they are to achieve independence in their homeland. But they are not prepared, and no one has the right to expect them to be prepared, to discuss the modalities of denying them their freedom.

I wish to conclude by stressing that at this juncture in the history of Palestine, there exists between the Palestinian people and the Israelis an oppressive relationship

of occupier and occupied, victimizer and victimized, state and stateless. Should this condition continue, we shall have no choice, as a people seeking freedom, but to continue our struggle for justice, self-determination and statehood. It is incumbent upon you to stand in solidarity with us.