**Event Report: Al Quds Day 2018**

Islamic Human Rights Commission

June 21, 2018

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IHRC are pleased to be approaching the end of Ramadan with another successful Al Quds Day, all Praise to the Highest, focusing on resistance, albeit without opposition.

Up to 8,000 demonstrators from all ethnic and religious backgrounds assembled at Curzon Street in Mayfair to listen to an amazing panel of speakers discuss the oppression and fight against Zionist crimes. Saudi Arabian embassy was selected as the rallying point because of Riyadh’s growing support for the Zionist regime, isolating the Palestinians and giving Israel the green light to accelerate its injustices.

Since the 2017 Al Quds Day, pro-Israel advocates had been applying pressure on London Mayor Sadiq Khan to ban the annual Al-Quds day march in London. This continuous smear campaign and false propaganda by Zionist groups was responsible for inciting Darren Osborne to drive a van into worshippers leaving late night Ramadan prayers in the Finsbury Park area of north London on 19 June 2017. Osborne’s intended target had been the Al-Quds day protest that took place the day before, but he was unable to reach it.

During Osborne’s trial it was recognised that he had been radicalised by false propaganda from far-right figures like Tommy Robinson, who campaigned against Al-Quds day. In fact, during Osborne’s sentencing the judge acknowledged that those attending the Al-Quds day event were law abiding citizens who were committing no crime.

Despite the legality of this event has been acknowledged by the police and the Home Secretary, Khan’s office failed to defend the rights of Londoners to peaceful political free speech last year. The police confirmed that this year’s counter demonstration will consist of a coalition of Zionists, far-right extremists and neo-Nazi groups.

IHRC wrote to Mr Khan in October 2017 and April 2018 requesting a response to the abuse and violence endured by peaceful Al Quds Day demonstrators in 2017. Zionists were screaming “you are terrorists” at women and children to neo-Nazis yelling “F\*\*\* the Palestinians”.

A callous response from Khan’s office ignored IHRC’s concerns of safety and disregarded actual racist abuse, including Islamophobic and anti-Semitic abuse, levelled at peaceful, law abiding anti-racist protestors in London. Khan’s continued support for the far-right and Zionist led campaigns against al-Quds Day makes him complicit in the violence against innocent people on the streets of London that results from that campaign, including as evidenced last year, murder at the hands of right-wing zealots.

Eventually Khan acknowledged our right to peaceful protest and mentioned that fundamental rights come with responsibilities and laws, should be used to deter and punish those who seek to go beyond protest and incite hate and violence against others.

On the Sunday, we were met with an aggressive Zionist counter-demonstration as well as a far-right EDL and Make Britain First remonstration. The pro-Israeli counter-protest was organised by the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. They played Israeli music blasted whilst pro-Palestine demonstrators prayed and also ironically featured Maajid Nawaaz as a speaker. The Zionist Federation was apparently concerned with the presence of Tommy Robinson’s herd who are incredibly anti-Semitic and yet they were seen walking together at one point.

The deplorable EDL members were seen shouting obscenities to the pro-Palestine crowd which included young children, yelling insults such as ‘paedos’ and Islamophobic expletives. The Metropolitan Police did not provide enough security and safety as many children and young activists were shocked by the shameful hooligan behaviour. The Metropolitan Police arrested a member of the EDL party for carrying a noxious substance.

The Zionists counter-demonstrators present themselves as people standing against violence and terrorism, and yet they are supporting apartheid, silencing any opposition to justify and legitimise genocide. They do not wish for peace and understanding, rather they wish to silence dissent, defend war crimes and silence the voice of resistance and Palestinians.

The Zionists were divided into two groups: around 40 people were in the designated area and another approximately 40 people were attempting to unlawfully block the peaceful pro-Palestine demonstrators during the march to Downing Street. The extreme right, numbering around 50 people, were spewing hateful remarks and trying to provoke violence.

Of course our wonderful host Nazim Ali did not let any bigots bring spirits down. Nazim led the rally, introducing all of the speakers, pumping up the crowd and singing catchy chants, the most memorable being ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free, we’ll be sitting in the Quds, sipping on some tea’.

The first speaker was Stephen Sizer, the Anglican Church cleric and director of Peacemaker Trust, a registered charity dedicated to peacemaking, especially where minorities are persecuted, where justice is denied, human rights are suppressed or reconciliation is needed. Sizer quoted Dr Martin Luther King’s 1963 ‘I have a dream’ speech in Washington. ‘Imagine if Martin Luther King had been a Palestinian. Imagine he was speaking here this afternoon. What would Dr King say? I believe his speech would be very similar. Let me quote a few sentences from his speech in 1963. Notice how prophetic it is today. I have simply substituted the word Palestinian for Negro.

I have a dream too, that one day soon Al Quds will be free. Free from walls that divide. Free from military occupation. Free from colonisation. Free from annexation. Free from segregation. Free from oppression. Free from apartheid. Free of racism. But it is not just my dream or your dream. It is God’s dream. God’s vision. God’s plan for Jerusalem.’

Visit Stephen Sizer’s website here to read his full speech.

Next to speak was spoken word poet, Abir Safa. Abir encouraged the demonstrators to not be dejected by the Zionists’ attempt to drown their voices with their music, but to stand tall and hold placards high, placards that show the face of Ahed Tamimi and Razan Al-Najjar, and say free Palestine with sheer conviction. Here is an excerpt from a Abir recited in honour of 21-year-old nurse Razzan Al-Najjar, murdered by an IDF soldier: ‘In the Arabic language, nurses are often called the angels of mercy. From up here she sees the world in all its beauty and in all its destruction, she gravitates over her land, over her people, she tells herself we do what we must do for our people. She flew up to the heavens that opened its gates for her, the heavens that brought her wings and shined her crown, and embraced her like the motherland embraces its indigenous people… heaven seems complete now. The earth however, cries in agony over her, as it embraces her in its soil, as it hears the cries of her blood that’s stained her armour… The heavens celebrate its angel, the earth mourns the loss of an angel’.

Travelling from Scotland, Mick Napier from the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, highlighted that ‘we are the many, and they [Zionists] were the few’, and talked about the ‘dirty role’ of the British government with their Israeli allies. Napier went on to say, ‘When we see what Israeli snipers are capable of, we know they are capable of genocide, they are capable of executing huge numbers Palestinians in cold blood and therefore we draw the conclusion that Palestinians are in great danger, and the response of the British government since the massacre in 2014, [is that] they have multiplied arms sales to Israel by 10 times… Britain licenses the sales of snipe rifle parts to the Israeli government; we sell sniper rifle parts while the snipers are killing wonderful Palestinians, noble and heroic.’

‘We witness unparalleled heroism and resistance which take us and themselves [Palestinians] by surprise, [they] inspire people around the world to support’.

Napier also mentioned the cancellation of a football match in Israel by the Argentinian team which arose from ‘the passion and depth of Argentines in support of Palestine’.

Napier asked the audience, why do Israel murder pal? Why do they kill? ‘Because they want them all to disappear, they bulldoze their homes… the Human Rights Watch said the massacre in Gaza has been organised in the highest levels by Israeli government’. He urged pro-Palestine supporters to ‘remember British government complicity… One day a boycott will that will isolate the genocidal state of Israel’.

Shaykh Bahmanpour from the Islamic Centre of England delivered an awe-inspiring speech, praising the One who eradicates the tyrants and the One who hears the voice of oppressed. Shaykh Bahmanpour sent a message for the Jewish people living in Palestine, saying ‘the British government decades ago used you to wipe Palestine off the map and you can make sure Palestine will be freed, and Israel will be wiped off the map, but not by genocide, shedding blood or ethnic cleansing, but honourably; not fighting civilians, but fighting armies, armed by the USA, the UK and forces of the West. People are afraid of Al Quds Day, [but] the true Al Quds Day is when we march to Al Quds with all the conscientious people who have human hearts, Muslims, Jews and Christians’.

Regarding the small number of Zionists counter-demonstrators and the Saudi Arabian government, the people standing on the wrong side, Shaykh Bahmanpour encouraged them to ‘come and join us, join the humanitarians. We are not talking about race, religion, culture, country, we are talking about humanity’.

Following Shaykh Bahmanpour’s speech, Jewish pro-Palestine, anti-fascist supporters from Neturei Karta, took part in desecrating the Israeli flag.

Les Levidow from Campaign Againt Criminlaisng Communities provided a powerful presentation on counter-terrorism by asking who the real terrorist is, in an ‘upside down world [where] terrorist states are sold arms in the name of security and the real counter-terror forces are stigmatised and criminalised as terrorist.

When Hamas won the Palestinian general election a decade ago, [they won] because they are a credible force for resisting Zionist terror. Since then Israel has imposed a siege on Gaza and periodic massacres in the name of security protection against terrorism. As a colonial settler state, Israel has no practical response other than terrorism against the Palestinians’.

Levidow went on to explain, ‘the UK government has always blamed Hamas for suffering of the Gazan people and even Israel’s massacres… and Hamas has been banned under terrorism act 2000. Even worse Mayor Sadiq Khan demanded the government should ban today’s event on grounds that some participants carry Hezbollah flags. This demand originally came from pro-Israel groups, who wrongly labelled Hezbollah as anti-Semitic and terrorist. Hezbollah’s military wing is banned, just like Hamas… Israel’s terror campaign against the Lebanese people, and its terrorist proxies in Lebanon failed to dominate because Hezbollah organised effective counter-terror resistance. So the UK ban on Hezbollah serves UK foreign policy by intimidating people from identifying with such resistance and suppressing debate on who is a terrorist’.

Furthermore, the ‘mayor has asked the UK government to close the loophole that allows demonstrators to display the flags (Hezbollah, Hamas and Kurdistan Workers’ Party). The government has responded to legislative proposals [which means] new powers would make it a terrorist offence for people to publically support a banned group… [and] it would become a terrorist offence to educate ourselves about banned organisations. Such a law with established thought crimes, as satirised by George Orwell’s in his novel 1984, blurs distinction between thought and action. In these ways, the British state protects terrorist, while we are the counter-terror force’.

Sandra Wafta, a Palestinian from InMinds talked about why 6000 Palestinians and over 300 children are imprisoned in Israeli occupation dungeons, why 40% of Palestinian male population have been caved in is prisons since 1967. The answer is because its resistance: ‘they resist so the occupation encages them. Resistance takes every form, a child still gets up gets ready go to school – that is resistance… A favourite pastime of Israeli occupation is to abduct children especially before exams so they are forced to retake the year. Writing poetry against occupation – that is resistance.

Daring to walk home – that is resistance’.

Wafta reflected on history and South African apartheid. ‘When we look at history successful struggles for freedom have including multiple forms of resistance including armed resistance. But once success is achieved there is a rush by historians and the media in the pay of the empire, to hide the armed struggle aspect of successful freedom movements, so as not to encourage other liberation struggles to learn from them, and in order for the empire to dictate the form of struggle allowed for a subjugated people. So whilst Mandela is now portrayed as an idol of peace and reconciliation, the reality is that following the Sharpeville massacre, where racist police killed 69 demonstrators, he along with Joe Slovo founded the military wing of the African National Congress… Mandela said ‘50 years of nonviolence had bought nothing but more and more repressive legislation and fewer and fewer rights… I and some colleagues came to the conclusion, it would be unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and nonviolence, at the time when the government met our peaceful demands with force’. He was branded a terrorist by the UK and now he is hailed as a hero, with his statue at Parliament Square. Unarmed Palestinians are gunned down by ruthless Israeli snipers, [and] 70 years of peace talks achieved nothing other than more dispossession, more ethnic cleansing and more suffering’.

Rabbi Cohen from Neturei Karta spoke about liberating Palestine from the authentic, orthodox Jewish perspective. Rabbi Cohen said they support the claim of Palestinians to Palestine and Jerusalem. The genuine Jewish teaching, for the last 2000 years or so, that despite the Jewish people are in a state of exile as decreed by the Almighty, they should be ‘loyal citizens in any country, including Palestine. Jewish people in Palestine have to be subservient to the Palestinian people who are the rightful occupants of Palestine’. Furthermore Rabbi Cohen continued to say that Zionism, a secular movement, preach colonialism which is totally forbidden by the Jewish religion. Zionists also teach brutal ignoring of human rights of Palestinian people, to extent of depriving them of their homes and lives, opposite to compassionate teachings of the Jewish religion. Zionists may be secular but also so-called religious, and they ignore distorted views who have misinterpreted reaching within holy Torah. Many nations in the world support Israel and accuse opponents of terrorism.

He said ‘we hope and pray it should never be necessary but if we want to end violence we have to look at the root cause: the very existence of illegitimate and rogue state of Israel. Our prayer is that the concept of Israel should come to a total end, hopefully peacefully which is entirely possible if nations in world were determined. When it comes to an end it should be replaced by a regime in accordance with aspirations of the Palestinian people where everyone in Palestine will be able to live peacefully together, whether Palestinian or Jew, or anyone else, as has been the case for hundreds of years, in Palestinian land and eastern countries’.

The penultimate speaker was Aryan Tawakoli from the Islamic Student Association. Tawakoli gave his condolences to Palestinian martyrs, killed for opposing illegal occupation. And there has been an overall increase in number of crimes and atrocities, and illegal settlements, despite naïve negotiations with the Zionist regime whilst having the US as a mediator. Israel will not settle for agreements. Negotiations with Israel do not lead to peace and freedom for Palestine, the only solution for Palestine is resistance. Some of the US allies in the Middle East such as Saudi Arabia do not make attempts to oppose Zionist crimes but engage in private and public dealings with regime as their survival is based upon the support of the USA. Imam Khomeini coined as the American Islam which is to show absolute silence in face of blatant injustices and provide economic and geopolitical interests.

Massoud Shadjareh, Chair of Islamic Human Rights Commission gave a reminder that it was ‘Imam Khomeini who started this movement, [when] one used to speak about Palestine… the Arab world and international communities sold Palestine and no one was standing up for them. Al Quds Day energised people on the ground to stand up for justice and we will carry that until we liberate all of Palestine.

Saudi Arabia sold out the Palestinians and humanity, killing everyone everywhere; Yemen, Syria, and they are the cause of some the deaths in Palestine and Gaza. That’s why we’re here, the largest demonstration to have stood in front of this embassy

Saudi Arabia, shame on you!’

IHRC would like to thank all of the demonstrators, speakers, volunteers, staff members and supporting organisations for participating in Al Quds Day and helping in the cause for freedom for Palestinians. A special thank you to Nazim Ali and Kerem Ali, and also InMinds for providing the placards.