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A Call for Justice in a Tortured Land

by Ismail Zayid / August 4th, 2012.

Dissident Voice.

Larry Riteman, in his August 2 letter “Land ownership legal” to Halifax’s *Chronicle Herald* newspaper, claims, on the basis of the Balfour Declaration, that all Palestinian territory is for Jewish residency, including Jordan, and a bit of southern Lebanon and Syria.

It was November 2, 1917, when Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, issued his infamous declaration in the form of a letter written to a British Jew, Lord Rothschild. It read: “His Majesty’s Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people ... it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

It is interesting to note that the four-letter word “Arab” occurs not once in this document. To refer to the Arabs who constituted, at the time, 92 per cent of the population of Palestine and owned 98 per cent of its land, as the non-Jewish communities is preposterous.

This letter has no shred of legality, as Palestine did not belong to Balfour to assume such acts of generosity. Distinguished British historian Arnold Toynbee describes the British role, in issuing this document, accurately: “We were taking it upon ourselves to give away something that was not ours to give. We were promising rights of some kind in the Palestinian Arabs’ country to a third party.”

Similarly, well-known Jewish writer Arthur Koestler summed it up aptly when he described the Balfour Declaration as a document in which “one nation promised a second the country of a third.”

The Balfour Declaration, in essence, had no shred of legality to give the land of the Palestinians, who had lived in this land since history began, to a third party. Adding to that, Jordan and bits of Lebanon and Syria, as claimed by Mr. Riteman, were not part of Palestine or the British Mandate.

On Nov. 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181, recommending the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state on 56 per cent of the land, an Arab state on 42 per cent of the land, and an international zone in Jerusalem. At the time, the Jews, a large proportion of whom were recent or illegal immigrants, constituted 31 per cent of the population of Palestine and owned 5.6 per cent of its land. Is it surprising that the Arabs rejected this unjust resolution?

As for the war waged in 1948, it was a direct result of the massive ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians from their land, brought about by the Zionist groups, the Haganah, Stern, and Irgun, before the creation of the state of Israel and the occupation of major areas, including the cities of Jaffa and Acre, that were allotted to the Arab state by UN Resolution 181.

Furthermore, the UNGA Resolution 194 of December 1948 resolved that the Palestinian refugees must be allowed to return to their homes at the earliest practicable date. Israel continues, to this day, to defy this resolution, together with scores of other UN and Security Council resolutions.

To sum up, our call is that international law and UN resolutions must be complied with so that a modicum of justice is obtained, so that Arabs and Jews can live in peace and security in this tortured land.

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