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Commission on Human Rights

PALESTINE RECONSIDERED

in the Light of One-State Alternative

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An international conference took place recently at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) on the “rebellious” theme of “One Democratic State in Israel/Palestine”, in which I also participated. A declaration following the three-day deliberations stated that some prominent Israelis, Palestinians, other Arabs and speakers from various corners of the world discussed the chronic conflict, with an emphasis on the option of one-state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean to serve the full political, economic and security interests of the Jews, Muslim and Christian Arabs and all the rest now residing in both states. The participants agreed that eventually one democratic and secular state may well be the best vehicle to achieve a lasting peace.

Is this idea new? Not entirely. A number of distinguished Jews, Arabs and others had indicated, even in the early decades of the 20th century, that an Israeli state, then made up of a minority of the population but open to waves of Jewish settlers from outside, planted in the heart of an Arab majority would only cause alienation, enmity, bloodshed and wars. The early suggestions for one-state embracing all inhabitants is now re-emerging as a possible solution in some future date, as a reaction to the dramatic events since 1947.

There must have been some motivation, even a rationale, behind the alternative suggestion of the one-state formula that expressed itself anew only a few weeks ago. Why have scholars, writers, journalists and activists, some 200 largely well-known figures from all over the world including far away places such as Australia, Canada or South Africa met in the auditorium of a prestigious European academic center to consider what many will describe as a “radical” alternative?

I do not intend to scrutinize here the whole of the Palestine question, on which I have published rather voluminously since the 1967 War. But a few comments relative to the motivations of the Lausanne meeting may be well-timed. Certain facts of the past and the present may be instructive to understand the full options of the future.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947) envisaged for the historic land of Palestine an Arab and a Jewish state as well as a temporary international regime for Jerusaleöm. The town of Jaffa was to form an Arab enclave within Jewish territory, and steps were set out dealing with citizenship, transit, an economic union and free access to holy places along with religious and minority rights

The General Assembly resolutions, on the other hand, are only recommendations with no legally binding force. Moreover, the Palestinians were never consulted, and the final voting, just a bare minimum for Partition, was influenced by the undue influence surrounding the approaching American presidential elections of 1948. The U.N. Charter does not convey any authority to the General Assembly to create some sovereign entities or to deny sovereign rights to some others. If the voting on the draft resolution seeking advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice would have been the other way around, instead of 21 to 20 rejecting the move, many breathtaking dramas, such as acquisition of land through war and repetitive waves of displaced Palestinians, of the later periods could have been avoided.

Decades, punctuated by violence, passed when the Madrid "peace process" and the Oslo agreements of 1993 and 1995 were reached. The latter were concluded, nevertheless, when an independent Arab position in international affairs had been completely lost, and the Palestinians were deprived even the narrow margin of political action. Although the Palestinian leadership eventually recognized the Israeli entity, the Oslo accords do not make any reference to the General Assembly resolutions where the Palestinian right of self-determination has been explicitly mentioned. In contrast to the Palestinian acknowledgement of the existence of Israel, the Oslo agreements seem to deliberately avoid any unambiguous reference to Palestinian self-determination. The latter's National Authority is expected to remain under the illegitimate control of the occupying power. Fictitious sovereignty did not work in the South African so-called "homelands"; it can pacify neither the Palestinian people, nor world public opinion.

It is no wonder, then, that the world witnesses in agony sieges of Palestinian public buildings, indiscriminate assaults from tanks, helicopters and military watchtowers, assassinations of selected targets, growing number of civilian victims on both sides, suicide bombings, burnt down agricultural complexes, devastated livestock, destroyed crops, bulldozed water wells, uprooted trees, arrest campaigns, prolonged detentions, and a new concrete separation wall with deep ditches and high-voltage electric fences snaking into Palestinian-owned lands. The Arabs lived and worked in peaceful coexistence with Jews and others during the Ottoman period of more than 400 years with no bloodshed whatsoever on this same land.

Presently, there occur repeated statements from the high-ranking decision-makers of adverseries that Chairman Y. Arafat should abandon his official position and, more dramatically, that he is the "next target" apparently to be assassinated. The person in question happens to be the leader of his people and possesses certain inalienable rights including the right to live. Some Israelis in the ruling circles are also up in clouds on a premise of expelling all Palestinians, who are not going to abandon their homes this time.

An international conference on the idea of "One Democratic State", as it took place in the heart of Europe, should be regarded as reasonable under the circumstances that has been drifting for the last 57 years. If there is going to be a repressive state on the 78 percent of the Palestinian land, which is now described by some commentators as the only "apartheid" entity left in the world, a second alternative of a single democratic and secular regime in the combined lands of Israel and Palestine, whatever the governmental structure may be, does not sound irrational and untimely. If discrimination and subjugation continue, this one-state movement stands to become eventually popular with the Jewish and the Arab peoples, who will more and more visualize a peaceful

future of mutual acceptance and cohabitation.