

# **San Francisco In Solidarity With Palestine**

**By: Lisa Marie Alatorre and Raul Fernandez-Berriozabal, Sept. 2014**

In the aftermath of Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" in Gaza, staff and volunteers at the Coalition On Homelessness felt the international heart pangs that come with genocide and the unnecessary deaths of 2,104 Palestinians (85% of them were civilians) solely based on their national identity and legit demands for self-determination.

Humankind has a horrible track record of repressing and even eliminating certain groups of people, whether it be based on their ethnicity, religious practices, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status – we have left behind a long legacy of abuse, suffering, repression, incarceration, and genocide. As Palestinians continue to struggle for their right to self-determination and liberation from Israel's illegal occupation of their land, we stand in solidarity as poor and homeless people in San Francisco also fighting for our own liberation and struggle for our own homes in the face of oppression.

As at least 400 Palestinian children were assassinated during five weeks of Israeli hostilities in Gaza, our homeless children and youth are sick and dying in their parents' arms from preventable deaths. As Palestinian mothers struggle to gather enough food and clean water for their families, homeless mothers are forced to beg and steal food for their loved ones to survive. As the Israeli occupying forces restrict the freedom of movement of Palestinians in their own land, police departments and Homeland Security officers patrol and repress people of color in their geographic neighborhoods often restricting movement and setting up random check-points. As Palestinian homes and neighborhoods are stolen and demolished, making way for new Israeli settlements – homeless encampments and affordable housing is taken away and reverted into luxury homes and public spaces for the new affluent residents of San Francisco. Not to mention the generations of indigenous displacement that lays the backdrop to our special city.

None of these strategies are new and none of them happen in a vacuum. In fact, we have seen these strategies implemented time and time again with the same devastating results. Massive deaths, collective trauma, unrest, and poverty inherited by generations to come. When we fight to end homelessness and chronic poverty in the U.S., we are also fighting against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, illegal land annexation, apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

Following "Operation Protective Edge" at least 500,000 out of the estimated 1.8 million Palestinians living in Gaza have been left homeless. The homeless population of city of San Francisco (perhaps the most affluent city in the nation) has been estimated at 7,000–10,000 people, both staggering and outrageous realities. In San Francisco the conditions within the shelters are downright terrifying, including instances of violence, racism, and homophobia and transphobia. Additionally, there are only 1,339 available shelter beds for the approximately 10,000 people sleeping outdoors. Our struggles are interlaced with each other, not only because in both cases those in positions of power criminalize the underprivileged, but also because the U.S. Federal Government provides 3-4 billion dollars in grants annually to Israel where homelessness is virtually non-existent. Those billions and billions of dollars could end Palestinian occupation and end homelessness in the U.S.

The San Francisco Bay Area has responded to the attacks on Gaza with massive rallies, boycotts, and other acts of solidarity that include peaceful blockades in the Port of Oakland to prevent the unloading of cargo carried by the ships of Zim Integrated, a company partially owned by the Israeli government. Union workers honored the picket lines and stood on the side of justice, as they historically have stood

against apartheid in South Africa and Israel in acts of resistance designed to stop millions of dollars from going into the pockets of the elites that endorse apartheid in the occupied territories while sending a strong message to the rest of the world: Occupation, illegal land annexation, ethnic cleansing and genocide are not welcome to the Bay Area. This momentum needs to be kept up and include the larger struggles against poverty and systemic oppression.

These local actions and blockades follow the principles of the global campaign Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) that call for boycotting all products and companies (Israeli and international) that profit from the violation of Palestinian rights, as well as Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions and the divestment from university investment portfolios and pension funds used to finance corporations complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights.

Here in the U.S. we have failed miserably at holding our leaders accountable for maintaining the cycle of poverty and homelessness. We also failed at sharing our struggle with the rest of the world perpetuating the myth of the U.S. as the land of freedom, prosperity and opportunity, however, here at the Coalition On Homelessness we know all too well how limited the access to this opportunity and prosperity really is.

As we stand with the Palestinian people, we acknowledge we share the same struggle and the same and demands. Our voices are sending a dignified call for equal rights and justice from San Francisco to Ferguson, from Ferguson to Palestine: Racism, apartheid, and militarism have no place in our communities. The Palestinian struggle for liberation is also our struggle for liberation – we are all in this together! One struggle, one fight! The inspirational leader Nelson Mandela said it best at the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on December 4, 1997 in Pretoria: “We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.”