



The Palestinian committee to "fight apartheid" and slander Israel meets for the first time to discuss policy

December 18, 2022

Overview

- ▶ **On December 11, 2022 the Palestinian National Anti-Apartheid Committee met for the first time.** It was organized by the PLO anti-apartheid department, appointed in July 2022 and chaired by Ramzi Rabah, a senior member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).¹ The meeting was held in coordination with the Palestinian Authority (PA) ministry of justice, various NGOs, the PA human rights organization and the BDS movement.² Its objective, as stated by the organizers, was to unite all the groups acting against what they claimed was "Israeli apartheid." So far it is unclear what prompted the establishment of the department at this time but apparently its overall objective is to merge and coordinate anti-Israeli activities.
- ▶ The meeting was attended by several PA government ministers and members of the PLO's Executive Committee, as well as diplomats serving in the PA, Israeli Arab representatives, and Palestinian and Israeli academics.
- ▶ **The committee recommended the establishment of a "united global front" to combat "Israeli apartheid" and stressed the need to create Palestinian, Arab and international alliances which would form the foundation for the front.** In addition, they voted to launch a campaign to prevent the passage of laws banning "resistance to the Zionist occupation and its racism." They also called for developing strategies and tactics, headed by the "popular resistance" [popular terrorism], in which Palestinian organizations and sources of power would participate, wherever they were located, such as calling for the establishment of a monitoring center of representatives from the PLO, the PA foreign ministry and forces operating within Israeli Arab society.
- ▶ The Palestinians have often claimed that Israel conducts a "policy of apartheid" for the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria, comparing themselves to the non-white population in South Africa. According to the Rome Accords of 2002, apartheid is considered a

¹ See the Appendix for the department and its employees.

² Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement.

crime. The Palestinians base their claim on international human rights organizations such as Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem, which often issue reports claiming the measures used by Israel in the PA territories are "apartheid" (Wafa, March 14, 2022).

► For the PA, libeling and slandering Israel around the world and in the UN is an important component of its "popular resistance" strategy. It is a useful tool in the political, propaganda and lawfare campaign it wages against Israel and a way of exerting pressure not only on Israel but on the rest of the world and UN agencies. So far, the PA has made use mainly of the claims raised by human rights organizations against Israel. **Establishing a PLO department dedicated to "apartheid" is perhaps a sign that the PA intends to institutionalize and expand its activities and to coordinate activities and groups to unify their policies and the tone of their public statements.**

The Palestinian National Anti-Apartheid Committee

The meeting in al-Bireh and its objectives

► On December 11, 2022, **the PLO's anti-apartheid department** held a meeting in al-Bireh, attended by the representatives from the PA's ministry of justice, NGOs, the PA human rights organization and the BDS movement.

► Present were members of the PLO's Executive Committee, and PA government ministers including Muhammad al-Shalalkeh, the minister of justice, and Mai al-Kayla, the minister of health. Also in attendance were foreign ambassadors, consuls and representatives, among them Khalil Atiya, deputy speaker of the Arab Parliament and a member of the Jordanian House of Representatives; the South African representative to the PA; Arab Israelis such as Muhammad Barake, chairman of the Israeli Arab Monitoring Committee; Palestinian and Israeli academics, among them Prof. Ilan Pappé (an extreme leftist who was born in Israel but lives in the UK and is part of the BDS movement).



The meeting in al-Bireh (Watan TV, December 11, 2022).

► The day-long meeting was divided into three sessions: the Zionist movement and apartheid; international responsibility, international law and horizons for lawfare and confrontation with "Israeli apartheid;" and the international campaign to isolate and punish Israel. **According to Ramzi Rabah, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and head of the PLO's anti-apartheid department**, the objectives of the meeting were to establish an international coalition that would work to "end apartheid," operate in the international arena through political channels and with human rights organizations and civilian society, and to increase awareness of Israel's [alleged] "apartheid regime" as one of the tools used by the "colonialist Zionist occupation." He stressed that the objective of the meeting was to strengthen the currently-needed collaboration with all local, regional and international anti-apartheid institutions because of the formation of an extremist right-wing government in Israel (Wafa, December 11, 2022).



Right: The South African representative to the PA speaks at the meeting. Left: Extreme leftist historian Ilan Pappé (Watan TV, December 11, 2022).



PA minister of health Mai al-Kayla (Watan TV, December 11, 2022).

Recommendations

- ▶ The meeting voted on a number of recommendations, including the following (Watan TV, December 11, 2022; Ma'an, December 12, 2022).
 - ◆ The creation of Palestinian, Arab and international alliances which would form the foundation for the global front against "Israeli apartheid."
 - ◆ Launching campaigns to prevent the passing of laws banning "resistance" to "the Israeli occupation and its racism" [anti-terrorism laws].
 - ◆ Developing strategies and tactics in which Palestinian organizations and sources of power would participate, wherever they were located, led by the **"popular resistance"** [popular terrorism].
 - ◆ Establishing of a monitoring center composed of representatives from the PLO, the PA foreign ministry and forces operating within Israeli Arab society. The center would monitor the actions of Israel's "apartheid regime," document them and establish a digital archive to preserve them.
 - ◆ Establishing an international coalition of legal institutions and human rights organizations to lobby against Israel and persecute it in international and legal forums.
 - ◆ Establishing an official and Palestinian, Arab and international campaign to determine that "the racist, fascist political parties that constitute the government of the apartheid country" are "terrorist organizations."

Positions of the meeting's participants

- ▶ The speakers at the meeting were harshly critical of what they termed were Israel's "criminal, racist policies," and stated the need to fight them in various arenas. Many expressed concerns over the future Israeli government:

◆ **Deputy Fatah chairman Mahmoud al-'Aloul** stated the need to confront "Israel's crimes and fascist regime" through "popular resistance" [popular terrorism], by increasing global diplomatic efforts in the various UN agencies and by using lawfare to universally isolate Israel ("the occupation") and its racism. He claimed the "new extreme right government" brought great danger with it, as was already evident in the demands issued by new ministers to give them additional authority, such as the Galilee and Negev portfolios. He stated it obligated them to prepare for a confrontation with Israel. As to Israel's [alleged] "apartheid," he listed such things as building new roads for the settlers, stealing water, keeping the bodies of shaheeds and Israel's treatment of [Palestinian] prisoners in its jails (Wafa, December 11, 2022).



Mahmoud al-'Aloul speaks at the meeting (Wafa Facebook page, December 11, 2022).

◆ **Sanan Shaqdi³, chairman of the Palestinian National Council's anti-apartheid committee**, speaking via Zoom, stated the need to appoint Arab, international and regional committees, and to form a broad international coalition of organizations, political parties and countries which supported the rights of the Palestinians (Wafa, December 11, 2022).

Khalil Atiya, deputy speaker of the Arab Parliament and a member of the Jordanian House of Representatives, called the meeting an opportunity to unite efforts to deal with all aspects of the "apartheid Israeli regime." He said **establishing the PLO's anti-apartheid department was a strategy in the fight to expose "Israel's crimes" and the first step towards ending the occupation and the establishment of an independent**

³ A Palestinian-American. In reports issued in 2014 and 2015 he was representative as the coordinator of the coalition of organizations boycotting Israel in the United States, and in reports from December 2022 as a member of the PLO's Central Council.

Palestinian state. He said the position of the Jordanian House of Representatives was to do everything it could to support the Palestinians (Wafa, December 11, 2022).

► Some of the participants presented position papers expressing the opinions of the groups they represented (Wafa, December 11, 2022).

◆ **Muhammad al-Shalalkeh, the PA minister of justice**, presented a position paper entitled "International laws and UN resolutions related to the fight against apartheid, the demands for implementing them and forcing Israel to obey them" as the main avenues of the legal campaign. He said the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA) of 1973, the Rome Accords,⁴ and Article 7 of the ICC convention all strongly condemn the crime of apartheid. **He stressed the need to prove the crime of apartheid to prosecute Israel in the ICC**, and called for complaints to be presented to the ICC's chief prosecutor and to the European human rights court, and claims of war crimes to be made to the legal systems in European countries whose laws allow was criminals to be prosecuted.

◆ **Shawan Jabarin, director of the al-Haq institute**, presented a position paper entitled "Apparatuses for using reports from international organizations to prosecute the Israeli apartheid state," which stated the importance of creating a unified, focused Palestinian discourse on the issue.

◆ **Mahmoud Nawajaa, the general coordinator of the Palestinian BDS national committee (BNC)**, presented a position paper entitled "The strategy of the international campaign to boycott the colonial apartheid state," which stated that along with local and international partners, they were waging a campaign to exert pressure on the UN to investigate "Israel's crimes." He added that in 2020 they had called on the international community to commit itself to ending the apartheid regime and demanded support for efforts to revitalize the UN's anti-apartheid committee.

◆ **Muhammad Aboushi, chairman of the Palestinian NGO network's board of directors**, presented a position paper entitled "The role of international institutions and aid committees in enlisting energy [sic] for the fight against racism," which stated that local NGOs were operating to defend the Palestinians' legitimate rights and that the villages which were damaged by settlers had to be provided with services such as paving roads, waging campaigns for support and documenting Israel's crimes, etc.

⁴ The Rome Accords signed on July 17, 1998, established the International Criminal Court (ICC).

◆ **Ramzi Awda, general secretary of the international campaign to combat Israel's occupation and apartheid, presented a position paper entitled** "The elements of the strategy of the national campaign to confront apartheid," which stated legal strategies, such as presenting anti-Israeli suits in international courts; media strategies [propaganda] to increase public awareness of the "apartheid regime" and combat it; and a strategy for swaying world public opinion by creating knowledge [sic] and convincing international academics of the seriousness of the regime.

◆ **Husam Arafat, deputy head of the PLO's department of human rights and civilian society,** presented a position paper entitled "Launching a national coalition against the racist occupation," which stated that increased social awareness of apartheid as a tool of the colonial occupation was an urgent, necessary task at the Palestinian, Arab, regional and international levels. He said what was needed was to construct a national strategy to confront Israel ("the apartheid state") by exploiting the international trend to condemn apartheid; to develop means and tools for use in the campaign to end and prosecute apartheid; to strengthen and expand the circle of coalitions and alliances with official and popular Arab and international sectors which supported the Palestinian cause in order to exert pressure on the UN and Security Council to revive the anti-apartheid committee and to implement the UN resolutions relating to the Palestinian cause. To undertake such actions he recommended establishing an international coalition against Israel racism.

◆ **Taysir Khaled, head of the PLO's national office to "defend and the land and resist" the settlements,**⁵ presented a position paper entitled "The colonialism of the settlements lays the foundations for an apartheid Israel," which stated that through the settlements, Israel was constructing an apartheid regime in the Palestinian territories which was similar to some aspects to the apartheid regime in South Africa, for example, discrimination in the allotment of water resources, in infrastructure programs, the destruction of Palestinian buildings and assets, restrictions on freedom of movement, discrimination in the legal system, etc. **He called for the establishment of an international coalition** and the end of the evasions of Karim Khan, the ICC's

⁵ The PLO's national office to defend and the land and "resist" the settlements is a department established in 1996 on the initiative of Taysir Khaled, a former member of the PLO's Executive Committee and a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine's political bureau. Its office is located in Nablus.

chief prosecutor, regarding initiating a criminal investigation of Israel (website of the PLO's national office to defend the land and "resist" the settlements, December 12, 2022).

Appendix

The PLO's department of anti-discrimination and apartheid

► The PLO's department of anti-discrimination and apartheid was established in July 2022. It is headed by **Ramzi Rabah, a senior member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)**. According to Rabah, the department was established by the PLO's Executive Committee and is responsible for publicizing "Israel's crimes" locally and internationally, especially regarding the "apartheid regime" Israel continues to consolidate in Judea and Samaria and "historical Palestine" [the Arabs living in Israel] (Dunia al-Watan, July 5, 2022).



The department's logo (department Facebook page, November 27, 2022).

► Since its founding, the department has worked to create connections and to coordinate with all relevant local and international groups, including the various popular and civilian organizations, solidarity movements, human rights organizations and boycott committees. Its objective is to construct a broad international coalition that will exert pressure on international organizations and the international community to punish Israel for its [alleged] "crimes" and formulate a combined legal and media [propaganda] plan of action. One of the department's first steps was taken on July 4, 2022, when Ramzi Rabah met in PLO headquarters in Ramallah with a delegation from the BDS secretariat to discuss increased collaboration and coordination (Dunia al-Watan, July 5, 2022).

- ▶ The department is headed by Ramzi Rabah Farid (at birth named Farid Boutros Maroun Sarwa) (al-Hadath, March 22, 2021; website of the Palestinian Central Election Committee, 2006). He is 71 or 72 years old, Christian and a member of the DFLP's Central Committee. In February 2022 he was appointed by the PLO's Central Council to the Executive Committee, replacing Taysir Khaled, who died (Wafa, February 7, 2022).
- ▶ In an interview he claimed his family came from Biram in the Upper Galilee.⁶ He said he began his activities in Lebanon in 1966, and in 1969 joined the ranks of the DFLP, and was one of the organization's founders in Lebanon. In the 1970s he filled various roles in the organization in south Lebanon. After the PLO left Lebanon he remained behind with all the DFLP leaders. From there he went to Syria and between 1992 and 1996 was in charge of the DFLP's Syrian branch. Until 1998 he was in charge of the organization's branches abroad. At the end of 1998 he went to the Gaza Strip and had various leadership functions until 2010. From the Gaza Strip he went to Judea and Samaria where he had a role in the popular organizations (NPA website, April 14, 2022).



Ramzi Rabah, interviewed during the meeting in al-Bireh (Watan TV, December 11,2022).

- ▶ Other department members:
 - ◆ **Dr. Maher Amer:** department general manager (Petra, November 24, 2022; PLO website, December 9, 2022). He is a DFLP member (Dunia al-Watan, March 10, 2022). According to his Facebook page, he studied at al-Najah University in Nablus.

⁶ Biram was a Maronite village whose residents were displaced during the War of Independence and not permitted to return.



Dr. Maher Amer (right) in Brussels at the meeting which founded the European-Palestinian Initiative against Apartheid and the Settlements (Dr. Maher Amer's Facebook page, June 10, 2022).

◆ **Shadi Zahed:** head of the department's public relations unit (Petra, November 24, 2022). According to his Facebook page, he studied at al-Najah University in Nablus.



Shadi Zahed (his Facebook page, May 28, 2022).