



Is Israel an Apartheid State?

While Palestinians, global solidarity activists, and international academics have described Israel as an apartheid state for many years, more and more mainstream organizations are adopting the term apartheid when describing Israel. The organizations and people include:

- United Nations (e.g., UN Special Rapporteurs, UN Economic and Social Commission for W. Asia)
- International Human Rights Groups (e.g., Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch)
- Palestinian Civil Society (e.g., Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Palestinian NGO Network)
- Israeli Human Rights Groups (e.g., B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence, Combatants for Peace)
- Public Opinion (25% of Jewish Israelis and 75% of Palestinians living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea believe the term apartheid is a fitting or very fitting descriptor of Israel.)
- Notable Figures (e.g., UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon and former Israeli Attorney Generals)

These organizations and people have recognized that Israel is enforcing a system of apartheid against all Palestinians living under its control, whether living in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), or other countries as refugees.

Apartheid is a legal term referring to severe discriminatory oppression and a crime against humanity.

The definition of apartheid in the 1973 *Apartheid Convention* and the 1998 *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* is made up of three elements:

1. An intent to maintain the domination by one racial group over another.
2. Systematic oppression by one racial group over another.
3. One or more inhumane acts as part of that oppression.

The elements of these crimes of apartheid are present in Israel and the OPT as a result of the Israeli government's policy of domination by Jewish Israelis over Palestinians.

"We found that Israel's cruel policies of segregation, dispossession and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid."

Agnes Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General

Since the creation of Israel in 1948, its laws and policies have maintained a Jewish demographic majority and maximized Jewish Israeli control over land at the expense of Palestinians. The key components of their system of oppression and domination are the excessive and vastly disproportionate use of force to kill Palestinians and quell protests; territorial fragmentation; segregation and control; dispossession of land and property; and the denial of economic and social rights. For example:

- During the Nakba of 1948, approximately 720,000 Palestinian Arabs from 500 villages were murdered, expelled or forced to flee from their home territories that became Israel.

- To retain control over demographics, Palestinian refugees are denied the right to return to their former villages and homes in what has become Israel.
- Israeli Jews have superior nationality status that is distinct from citizenship and the foundation for differential treatment of Jewish and non-Jewish citizens.
- Palestinian restrictions to land and fishing areas in the Gaza Strip exacerbate the socioeconomic impact of Israel's illegal blockade.
- Israel imposes severe movement restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank visiting other areas of the OPT which are enforced by a network of checkpoints, road closures, and a permit system.
- Systematic denial of building permits to Palestinians in East Jerusalem is commonplace, leading to a steady flow of home demolitions and forced evictions.
- The slaughter of well over 2,000 civilians (many of them children) during the military offensive against Gaza in 2008 and indiscriminate killing of 214 demonstrators during the 2018-2019 Great March of Return.
- Expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem forcing Palestinians out of their homes and into smaller and smaller enclaves.

Apartheid is an international wrong and a crime against humanity. When a crime against humanity is committed, the international community has a legal obligation to bring the perpetrators to account. *Labour for Palestine* stands with increasing numbers of the international community and solidarity activists naming the system on the ground for what it is – APARTHEID – and calling Israeli authorities to end oppression of Palestinians and crimes against humanity.

Palestinian citizens of Israel, who comprise 19% of the population, face innumerable forms of institutionalized discrimination. In 2018, Israel implemented a constitutional law which enshrined Israel as the “nation state of the Jewish people” thereby legalizing discrimination against Palestinians. In addition, the law promotes building Jewish settlements and downgrades Arabic as an official language.

“One government rules everyone and everything between the river and the sea, following the same organizing principle everywhere under its control, working to advance and perpetuate the supremacy of one group of people – Jews – over another – Palestinians. This is apartheid.”

B'Tselem Israel's largest human rights organization

INSERT: Map of Israel and the OPT with approximate population numbers included.

FURTHER READINGS:

- *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by Ilan Pappé (One World Publications, 2006)
- *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, Human Rights Watch (2021).
- *Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity*, Amnesty International, (2021).
- *A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This Is Apartheid*, B'Tselem, (2021)