

The Jerusalem Declaration

Sam Bahour and Michael Dahan

Biography

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Additional articles may be found at: http://www.amin.org/eng/sam_bahour/index.html

THE MIDDLE EAST is a region locked in history. The core hinge holding closed the doors to a modern and prosperous Middle East is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This conflict may possibly be the most written about and studied in world history. Sadly, all of the writings and studies have done very little, if anything, to relieve the two peoples, Palestinians and Israelis, of a reality of despair and hopelessness. For Palestinians, the receivers of the long-standing Israeli military occupation, life is regularly equated to a living hell by anyone who dares to dig deeper than the daily newspaper headlines. Without a just political agreement soon, not only will the possibility of a two-state solution be lost forever, but also the conflict will move to a level of violence and despair that only those living the reality can feel and fear.

In light of the deteriorating political, security and human tragedy that have locked Palestinians and Israelis in a dance of death, it seems that the conflict will also log the most peace accords conceived in an attempt to solve the issue. From the Balfour Declaration in 1917 to the Geneva Accord in 2003, to date, all of them have failed miserably, leaving 83 years of suffering in their path. Likewise, nothing in the horizon seems to hold the key to a lasting peace, despite unusually loud rhetoric surrounding the latest two peace initiatives, the Geneva Accord and the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Statement.

We have little faith that either of these two documents will materialize to more than a positioning exercise between two weak leaderships, the Palestinian leadership and the Israeli leadership; and we are not convinced that the substance of either one can succeed in providing a framework for lasting peace. Nonetheless, we support and applaud both of these efforts.

Leaving aside the merits or drawbacks of the peace initiatives currently being floated, we would like to reinforce their foundation with a statement that is more strategic in its approach. Peace requires principles. Principles need to be clear and concise (consider the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which arguably ushered in the modern phase of the conflict - in only 67 words). If the two sides cannot agree to a clear, concise statement of basic and core principles, any exercise in drafting a solution on paper will miss the critical lesson of the failed Oslo Peace Accords – namely, that peace must be made by the two peoples, not by the documents their leaderships draft. The best-drafted and most broadly-publicized peace initiative in the world cannot put Palestinians and Israelis on a road to reconciliation if the Palestinian and Israeli people are not convinced and willing to bring the documents to life. Such a conviction will only materialize if the principles of peace become facts and if the reality on the ground takes a serious positive step forward.

Therefore, we, a Palestinian and Israeli, whose families, careers and futures are linked to the fact that peace must be realized and not only conceptualized, challenge our peoples and our leaders, both formal and informal ones, to sign on to the following letter that we call the Jerusalem Declaration:

Jerusalem

November, 2003

Dear Secretary-General Kofi Annan,

It saddens us in conveying to you, on behalf of our two peoples, that all attempts to resolve our conflict over the last 54 years have failed. We issue the following urgent call for assistance which reflects the aspirations of our two peoples:

"The Palestinian and Israeli peoples and their respective governments demand:

- 1. the establishment and recognition of two sovereign states, Palestine and Israel, in historic Palestine based upon the internationally recognized 1967 borders;*
- 2. the immediate end to the Israeli occupation;*

<http://www.wickedness.net/>

3. *the immediate deployment of an international peace-keeping force to bring security to both communities while final status negotiations are concluded.*

We request the United Nations to immediately facilitate the achievement of these objectives, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done in the process which may prejudice the legitimate rights and/or future claims of either party."

We should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Security Council for immediate ratification and action.

Yours sincerely,

Sam Bahour and Michael Dahan

If our two peoples and official representatives cannot sign on to this 98-word declaration (only 31 words more than the Balfour Declaration of 1917), then it is irrelevant to hide behind volumes of peace initiatives and accords that no one will read but the majority will oppose. The three points of the Jerusalem Declaration are the core issues at stake and their implementation should be viewed as a pre-condition to a final status agreement. The negotiations for such an agreement will take years to conclude and will not happen via a public relations or direct mail campaign. Ignoring the three Jerusalem Declaration points, any one of them, is reason to question any accord today, or one hundred years from today.

If the current situation persists, the only thing that will change while both sides draft and distribute volumes of documents will be the number of Palestinian and Israeli children who will lose their parents or will be lost to their parents.

We are not bystanders; our children's futures are on the line. We beg the world to intervene and impose a just solution today, for our sake and for theirs.