

It's time to make the protests count

It's been more than 6 months since the events of October the 7th. The world responded; with protests erupting all over the world; calling for an end to the bombing, a ceasefire or for an end to the 'Israeli' occupation in Gaza. And yet, nothing has changed. If anything, as time goes by, the 'Israeli' forces are becoming increasingly arrogant and more blatant in their hatred for the Palestinians. And why wouldn't they? They clearly have the support of the international community – with governments all over the world, not just aiding 'Israel' in their attacks on the Palestinian people, but also censuring their own citizens and using force to stop the protests that are happening across the world.

Just recently, the news was inundated with reports of the brutal arrests of Pro-Palestinian protesters on the grounds of Columbia University in the USA. Similar events took place on the campus of Indiana University and Virginia Tech, where protestors were arrested on charges of criminal trespass and resisting arrest. Protests were also dispersed on the grounds of USC, Arizona State University and Washington University in St Louis. Police officers have used chemical irritants and Tasers to disperse the students in some instances.

Solidarity protests with Palestinian people banned in at least 12 European countries; including the UK, France, Switzerland, Germany, Czech Republic, and Austria. In Egypt, when hundreds of people gathered in downtown Cairo to demonstrate in solidarity with Gaza, Egyptian security officers made arrests. And Jordan's government has arrested at least 1,500 people since early October. Morocco is also prosecuting dozens of people arrested at pro-Palestinian protests. These are just a few examples – there are many more.

The protestors operate on the fact that they have a right to protest when they are against government policy – after all, isn't that the bedrock of a democracy, having a government that listens to the people? Citizens are taught that it is their right to become activists – in order to ensure that the governments are held accountable. Because apparently, that accountability, that voice of the people, is what is supposed to differentiate democratic nations from authoritarian ones.

We all know that it's a lie – we can see it. Protests are banned or forcibly dispersed by police. The organizers of the protests are harassed and arrested. Students are suspended from university.

The right to protest is a lie. It's a lie that's fed to the general public so they continue to look to the system for a solution. But this 'solution' only works when the politicians are willing to listen, and they are only willing to listen when it suits their agenda to do so. African Americans didn't get the right to vote in America until President Kennedy needed their votes to win the elections. The women in the West didn't receive their rights until governments needed them to enter to work force. This is despite the fact that each group of people were protesting for decades to receive what are essentially basic rights within a democracy.

So, why do we expect the same political apparatus to care about the women and children of Gaza? They certainly don't care about the women and children within their own countries – look at the gun violence in America, or the level of violence against women across the Western world.

Consider the history of these countries - the death and destruction left in their wake. The USA was built on the deaths of the Native Americans, the Western world flourished on the backs of black slaves. The European countries fought countless wars against each other in a bid for domination. The Germans killed the Jews.

Then consider the fact that this isn't the first time that the governments have ordered the police to disperse protests – look at their responses to the suffragette movements in the West. Look at their treatment of the African Americans when they protested for the rights that should have been theirs all along.

In a democracy, you aren't treated with respect unless the government decides to give it to you. And you are certainly not awarded your right to protest, unless it's in the interest of those same governments to allow it- in instances when they do not accept it, you are labeled as subversive, or a terrorist.

They tell us that they abide by their laws and expect others to do the same. It's so clearly a lie. They have continued to support a country that is in blatant violation of international law.

“Annexation or acquisition of territory by use of force or threat, is categorically prohibited under international law. It constitutes an act of aggression, a crime that falls under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, and poses a threat to international peace and security. ‘Israel’ has persistently pursued annexation in many parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. Over the last five decades, ‘Israel’ has confiscated or endorsed confiscation of Palestinian lands and resources, resulting in over 270 colonies housing 750,000 ‘Israeli’ settlers,” (Source)

Even going as far as to break their own laws in order to aid ‘Israel’ in their blatant genocide.

“Sending ‘Israel’ arms for its genocidal slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza is a violation of at least six U.S. laws regarding foreign assistance, weapons and military activity....U.S.’s arms transfers to ‘Israel’ have found that officials are breaking laws like the Leahy Law (which prohibits the Departments of state and defense from providing funds Assistance or training to foreign security Force units where there is credible information of human rights violations) and the Genocide Convention Implementation Act by supporting ‘Israel’s’ efforts to commit genocide in Gaza” (Source)

“At the international level, those states supporting ‘Israel’ with political, financial, or military support may face state responsibility for either failure to prevent (Article I GC) or complicity in genocide (Article III (e) GC).” (Source)

Then, there is the fact that the Western countries are blatantly targeting the right to protest, enacting laws that circumvent this right when they need to clamp down against political movements.

In USA, the Supreme Court refused to hear a petition to overturn the Fifth Circuit’s ruling on the case of *Mckesson v. Doe*. Despite the fact that the lower court’s ruling established a standard of liability that violates the First Amendment, posing an unconstitutional burden on our right to protest. The court’s ruling basically means that a protest organizer can be held responsible for what a stranger present at the protest does to someone else, not because the organizer asked or meant for them to do it, but merely because it was foreseeable that they might. This means that it is no longer safe to organize a protest in Louisiana, Mississippi, or Texas. ([source](#))

In 2022, in the UK, they passed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSC). This enables the police to impose new conditions on a protest beyond its location, timing and the numbers involved, as laid out in the 1986 Public Order Act. The maximum prison sentence for someone who has damaged a statue has been raised to 10 years. The threshold at which the home secretary can ban marches and protests due to safety concerns will also be lowered, it has suggested, and it is said that the law on glorifying proscribed terrorist groups, such as Hamas will be tightened. ([Source](#))

While these laws predate the recent events in Gaza, they give us an insight into the so-called democratic countries. They are willing to ignore existing laws and rights, that they once claimed to hold sacred, while enacting laws that allow them to limit their people’s say in their policy choices.

So, why do we still think protests that call on these governments will change anything?

Protests are not a method for change. They are a tool that can lead to change. But only when used correctly. And judging by what we have seen of these politicians, and the political elite in general, why do we think that utilizing democratic avenues for change will help the Palestinians?

As a people, we have been taught to rely on these avenues. We are told that if you want a voice, go out on the streets and demand to be heard. It’s not wrong, in of itself. But it is not a method for change.

People who support the democratic process will say yes, that’s true. It’s not the method for change – it’s a step towards it because it is a way of raising awareness. And that’s fair enough – but when you raise awareness within a democracy, you are aiming to be heard by politicians, by the members in the international community.

And they have all shown us their true colors. People were hoping for the UN to respond – they didn't. People looked at the ICJ to uphold international law- they didn't. People hoped that the governments across the world would sanction 'Israel' – they haven't.

And yet we still see protests within a democracy as being a method towards meaningful change. Why? You cannot say that we need time – democracy has had time. It's been over a century since democracy swept across the world and demanded that we all cling onto in hope for a better future. It's been over 75 years since 'Israel' was established on Palestinian land, and the First Nakba took place.

So what exactly are we waiting for? The Jewish entity has made it clear that it's unwilling to stop. The USA has made it clear that it will continue to aid it. The world has made it clear that it will support this stance.

Now, with the upcoming elections in countries across the world, there is a lot of discussion about who will be in government next. But we need to adopt a 'who cares' approach here – because we need to realize that it doesn't matter who is in power – the foreign policy won't change. 'Israel' will continue to exist and they will continue to find ways to harass, torture and kill the Palestinians.

All of this – protesting under the banner of a democracy, relying on the elections for a better policy, looking towards the international organizations for a semblance of hope- it confines our solutions to the choices that the democracy puts in front of us – short term 'ceasefires', if that, and allows the rulers to continue to make the choices that they wish to make.

So, what do we do?

When the Jewish entity's army launched their attacks against the people of Gaza, the Palestinians called out to the world for help. They sent messages calling for the Muslim Armies to intervene and repel the aggressors.

Should this not be a call that is echoed by us? Should we not be demanding that the Muslim Armies respond to the attack by the 'Israeli' armed forces. Common sense tells us that this isn't *an* option – it is the *only* option that is before us. When a military force attacks a civilian population – a military response is the only answer. When their own army is unable to protect them, the allies of the population intervene. This is common sense – and has happened time and time again, not just in the past but also in the present.

So, why do we think that the situation of Palestine is any different? Because that's what the traitorous rulers and hypocritical international community has told us? Because 'Israel' – a nation in which approximately 50% to 60% of 'Israeli' citizens serve in the military- has a right to defend themselves? We've all heard the arguments of why 'Israel' has a 'right to defend' themselves, so there's no need to go into detail here.

But consider the hypocrisy of the situation for a moment. And then consider why, with all that we know, with all that we have read we believe that we have any other option except for a military response by the armies of the Muslim Ummah.

Are the Palestinian men, women, and children not our allies? If so, why are we not running to protect them? Why are we allowing the rulers, and the international community, dictate our actions? Do we not understand why it's crucial to call for the Muslim armies to respond? And how not doing so makes us pawns within the democratic system?

Are we scared of the repercussions? The situation won't get better it'll only get worse – if the rulers across the world are willing to be so blatant in their disregard to their own laws, where does this end?

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Fatima Musab

Member of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir