

## **Letter to Ursula von der Leyen concerning the statement issued on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel**

ECCP letter to Ursula von der Leyen concerning the statement issued on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel.

**To the attention of: Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission**

**Dear Ms. von der Leyen,**

We, a coalition of 42 European organisations, write to express our deep concern and, frankly speaking, our anger, regarding your statement issued on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel.

Your statement ignored the historical fact that the State of Israel was founded on the ethnic cleansing of two thirds of the indigenous Palestinian people between 1947 and 1949. This fact has been well documented by Palestinian and Israeli historians and researchers. Palestinians commemorate this period as the Nakba ('catastrophe' in Arabic) that marks the beginning of the process of planned dispossession and expulsion of the majority of the Palestinian people.

More than 500 towns and villages were systematically destroyed and depopulated by massacre and mass expulsion. As a result more than 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly exiled and became refugees. Many of those refugees and their descendants still languish in impoverished refugee camps, denied their inherent and UN-stipulated right of return after 75 years. This dispossession process, what Palestinians call the "ongoing Nakba" has never ended. It continues today, as Israel continues to occupy and annex Palestinian land, steal resources, demolish homes, schools and hospitals, and arbitrarily arrest, injure and kill Palestinians, including women and children.

By omitting facts and by blindly adopting the narrative of Israel, you erase the history, memory and rich culture of the Indigenous Palestinian people, with their diversity, who have inhabited Palestine for centuries. By endorsing the narrative that "Israel made the desert bloom" you replace history with myth, employing a colonial trope that attempts to 'greenwash' Israel's settler colonial and apartheid regime over the Indigenous Palestinian people. Such ignorance is not expected from the president of the European Commission.

Since the beginning of 2023, the world has again witnessed an increase in Israeli attacks on Palestinians, including military raids carried out by the Israeli military in the West Bank cities of Jenin, Jericho and Nablus. These preceded the pogrom in Huwara and its neighbouring villages and the violent raid on worshippers in the Al Aqsa mosque during the month of Ramadan just three weeks before your statement. Is this the country you praise for its "dynamism" and shared "culture and values"?

It is painful to hear you praise "the 75 years of dynamism, ingenuity, and ground-breaking innovations" of a state that imposes a repressive, racist, and brutally violent settler-colonial policy on a population that it subjugates and controls. Israel's regime of control over the Palestinian people is increasingly recognised as constituting apartheid by major human rights organisations, including Israeli human rights organisations. True, Israel has developed "a dynamic, ingenious and ground-breaking" technology in the field of military, cyber warfare,

spyware, disinformation and election rigging by using the captive Palestinians under its control as test objects. Israel is one of the world's leading exporters of these destructive high-tech products, with its military and "security" exports enabling dictatorships and authoritarian regimes worldwide to perpetrate grave human rights violations.

Your racist statement not only betrays historical facts and reality on the ground, but also directly contradicts internationally accepted principles and norms and the very values on which the EU is based. By ignoring the existence of the Palestinian people who have lived under decades of Israeli oppression or enforced exile, you ignore their right to self-determination, an inalienable right enshrined in the UN charter.

In December 2022 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to commemorate the Palestinian Nakba. This historic resolution, although shamefully only supported by *two* EU member states, acknowledges the 75 years of injustice inflicted upon Palestinian people. As the president of the European Commission, an institution that claims to uphold international law and the authority of the UN, you cannot sideline the decisions of the UN General Assembly.

On May 9th the EU will celebrate Europe Day, which Palestinians are boycotting this year because of your statement. We sincerely hope that this celebration may be in the spirit of recognising, and repenting for, the past racist and colonial history of EU countries, and that Europe Day will celebrate the UN charter which ensued from this history. That would obviously imply that the EU would stop paying service in words and in deeds to the values and policies of Israel, which itself rejects in words and in deeds the common UN charter.

Palestinian civil society organisations, as well as the Palestinian Authority, have vehemently denounced your statement. Amnesty International has also criticised the statement, and urged you to recognise that Israel is committing the crime against humanity of apartheid. We, in the European civil society, wholeheartedly echo them.

We demand that you retract your statement, and issue an apology to the Palestinian people for publicly erasing their culture, history and civilisation, as well as turning a blind eye to the violations currently being committed against their inalienable rights.

We demand that the EU publicly recognises that Israel is committing the Crime of Apartheid, and that EU institutions act to immediately end all complicity in the commission of this crime.

We also kindly request that you answer this letter.

**European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine**