

Israel and UNSCR 1325

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On the night between May 30 and 31, 2010, Israeli commandos attacked the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship that was part of a flotilla making its way toward Gaza to break the naval blockade. Nine people died on the ship during the military takeover, which led to international outrage as Israel became a target for political attacks and condemnations from all over the world and from within as well.

The government of Israel established a commission of inquiry in order to allay political pressure amidst the controversy. I refer to this because, believe it or not, this committee may serve as a milestone in women's struggle for equality in Israel. It should not come as a surprise that none of the five appointed members was female. Rather, these honorable men were mostly ex-army generals. A number of feminist organizations wrote a letter to the committee's chair, pointing out the fact that under Israeli law, state-appointed commissions and decision-making bodies are required to include adequate representation of women from diverse groups.

This law was passed five years ago, following a long process led by feminist organizations and several members of the Israeli parliament, and was a direct consequence of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which was passed in October 2000. The fact that the Israeli law required representation from diverse groups of women was even a unique improvement on the original formulation of the UN resolution.

Historic Supreme Court Ruling

Israel was the first UN member to integrate this resolution into the law of the land. But, unfortunately, Israel has consistently refused to adhere to its own law since that moment of success. This commission of inquiry is

only one example. Our demand to include women in the commission was initially ignored, and we were forced to file a petition with the Supreme Court, in which we demanded a place at the table. The court ruling was clear: It ordered the government to search for suitable women to be part of the commission. The government made a very small effort in response to that ruling — it offered a place to five women, all of whom refused to join the committee. The case was closed.

It is important to remember that when Israelis and Palestinians briefly celebrated yet another ceremonial opening of direct talks in Washington in 2010, once again, no woman was nominated to the Israeli negotiating team. But unlike the situation in the past, after receiving a letter from women's organizations, the prime minister announced that he intended to appoint a woman to the small advisory team to the negotiations with the Palestinians. This did not happen (and meanwhile there are no negotiations, either).

These milestones point to dilemmas that we — women's organizations, feminists and peace activists — face when we try to make ourselves heard and have an impact on the political process.

The Criteria for Selection

The first dilemma concerns the criteria for selection and emanates from the fact that women form groups of different types. While the desire to promote women and their agenda is a common goal, it is natural that women's organizations are of varied political colors. What, then, constitutes a "suitable" female candidate for commissions or negotiating teams such as those mentioned previously? Can we define, let alone agree upon, selection criteria? How does our struggle promote women from diverse groups? How do we make sure that our struggle will not end in promoting and strengthening the women who are already strong?

What Is the Feminist Voice?

The second dilemma is *political*: Who are the women that can bring the feminist voice and perspectives to the table? What is the feminist voice? And more directly: The struggle is not to integrate women as women, but rather to integrate our worldview and political views. And we hope that "our view" as feminists sets us apart from men in meaningful ways. Yet we continue to wonder if this is true. We want a seat at the negotiating table in order to integrate a political vision that would enhance the peace process in ways that we believe men cannot. UNSC Resolution 1325 — which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year — has enabled local and international decision-makers to focus on us, women in conflict areas.

The Joint Israeli-Palestinian Women's Commission

In 2005 a group of women from Israel, Palestine and the international community, established the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Peace, supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). We worked together as a group that spoke with one voice. It was not easy to maintain a working relationship based on common views, especially during times of national stress and violence. It was extremely difficult during the extended period of rocket shelling of the southern Israeli city of Sderot by Hamas, and even more so during the Israeli military attack on Gaza in January 2009. Yet for a number of years we managed to overcome these difficult times and continued to work together, sharing the same political vision. We all shared the idea that peace between our peoples is possible, and it must be based on the achievement of a two-state solution based on the borders of June 4, 1967, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

Unfortunately, the tensions generated by the ongoing conflict, particularly after the Israeli attack on Gaza, led to an end to the joint activity of the International Women's Commission.

A Space for Women — Painful Conclusions

While it was still active, the International Women's Commission conducted a series of public hearings with Israeli women all over the country. We opened a space for women — from all avenues of society — to speak about their personal relationship with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to speak about peace. There are two very strong conclusions that came out of these hearings:

The first was the painful realization that many Israeli women do not have a vision of peace. They could not articulate what peace means to them. They could not dream. Their major concern was security.

The other very interesting point that came out of the hearings was that Israeli women, in general, did not have different views than men. The only women who had different views and could present a different discourse were those who were already active in peace movements, had made an effort to meet with Palestinian women, were able to have a first-hand encounter with the occupation and who had seen the people on the other side. Unfortunately, all the other women could only recite the mainstream militaristic discourse and did not present a different view from the average Israeli man.

This is why it is extremely important that when we have women sitting at the negotiating table and active in the national decision-making

processes, they should have gone through this process. They should have been educated in women's issues and have had a chance to develop their own worldview based on their own life experiences, separate from the mainstream discourse that is very often dictated by men.

Israel's Militaristic Discourse

There is a third dilemma, which relates to the fact that Israel is consistently flooded with an alpha-male, militaristic discourse. The main political players are almost invariably ex-generals; the main decision-making forums are completely male. In such an environment, a single representative of the female gender wouldn't really stand a chance. So, do we want to fight for a mere token female representation and thereby help the male powers that be to pay lip service to the requirements of the law? Or do we, rather, choose to stay outside the process, thereby perpetuating the present dismal situation?

The Most Right-Wing Government Ever

Israel's current leadership is the most right-wing government ever in its history. This government has joined with anti-democratic forces in Israel, and together they have orchestrated a planned, carefully designed and very sophisticated multi-angled campaign against human rights activists and peace activists and organizations. There was a wave of attacks targeting the universities in Israel that dared present courses with critical views on the state. Subsequently, there was an attack on theater actors who declared they would refuse to come and play in a theater in Ariel, one of the largest settlements in the occupied West Bank. This was followed by the "boycott bill," which makes one liable to be sued if he or she advocates a boycott on products produced in the settlements, and the attempt to establish a parliamentary commission of inquiry about the funding sources of human rights and peace groups.

It is clear that in Israel today a human rights advocate or activist equals a leftist, and a leftist equals a traitor. So here I am, a believer in peace and an activist, and I am considered a traitor in my own country because I still believe in an end to the occupation and in a just and sustainable peace with the Palestinian people, based on a two-state solution.

The fact that we are women and feminists only compounds the challenges that we face.

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