

Give Peace a Chance

On 23rd September 2013, the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD) in collaboration with the Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF), International Educational Development, Inc. (IED) and EuroMid Observer for Human Rights, organized the side event "Give Peace a Chance," which was held during the 24th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.



The panel explored the on-going case of conflict in the Middle East and North Africa and the role of the citizens in acting and demanding their right to peace. The panelists included Ms. Tomader Gohar, Representative of Citizens for Peace Building, Ms. Hanine Hassan, Researcher with EuroMid Observer for Human Right, Dr. Karen Parker, Attorney in Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and UN Representative of International Educational Development. The side event was moderated by Ms. Yanet Bahena, from GICJ. Mr. Mazin Kahel, the Chairman of the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza, was given the chance to update the audiences with new developments about the campaign to end the siege on Gaza and the West Bank.

Ms. Tomader Gohar - Citizens for Peace Building

The Case of Egypt

Ms. Gohar spoke about Egypt and the role of citizens in the unfolding series of revolutions. The first wave of revolution in January 2011 had been seen positively by the Western countries and it was labeled as 'Arab Spring'. However the second wave of revolution, June 2013, although had the same characteristics as the first wave of revolution in Egypt, was met with suspicion in the Western world.

The citizens of Egypt played a significant role in these revolutions and demanded for a political and social change. Both, Mubarak and Morsi administrations had subjected the population to various forms of violence, which increased under the Morsi rule to the point that fear and dread rose inside the society to an extent that gave birth to what was called "the second revolution."

Ms. Gohar concluded that the future of Egypt must have effective transition mechanisms, constitutional guarantee of rights and a democratic channel of changing powers. Furthermore there must be accountability, transparency as well as citizens channels of voicing their concerns and active participation in governing the country. The Declaration of Human Rights is universal but its application is specific. The international community needs to provide technical assistance to the Middle East to help with the transition that is occurring.

Ms. Hanine Hassan - EuroMid Observer for Human Right

The Case of Palestine

Ms Hassan spoke about the siege on Gaza as well as the restriction of movements and human rights violations in Palestine. She described the disastrous situation of the by now over 6 million Palestinian refugees. The tragic consequences for the Palestinian people have been documented in literally hundreds of official reports issued by international, regional and national agencies, NGOs and governments, yet there has not been enough action. Ms Hassan discussed the increased demolitions and settlements as well as the systematic discrimination and abuse in the Occupied Palestine.

In a next step Ms Hassan explained the humanitarian suffering resulting from the situation. Approximately 5,500 Palestinian children in East Jerusalem do not attend school because they cannot be legally registered. Around 57% of Gaza households are food insecure and about 80% aid recipients. Tightened restrictions let Palestinian exports to Israel plummet by 24% between 2008 and 2011. It is essential to reduce Palestinians' economic dependence on Israel and to facilitate their integration into Arab and other regional economies. The humanitarian emergency in East Jerusalem is increasingly tangible. If the current trend continues, it will increasingly be closed off and choked by settlement activity, expropriation of buildings and re-allocation of land from living space to parks, historical sites and tram terminals.

Ms. Hassan concluded that there have been countless reports in regards to the human rights violations in Palestine. These reports highlight all facets of Israeli control of Palestinian land and people, each now stretched to a breaking point that cannot be sustained any longer.

Dr. Karen Parker - UN Representative of International Educational Development

The Case of Iraq

Dr. Parker discussed the impact of military intervention and invasion of Iraq, including the misinformation provided about the presence of weapons of mass destruction. The invasion shattered inner harmony in Iraq and the international harmony on issues relating to armed conflict. The United States has committed several violations, including the so called 'shock and awe' effect, which has had a severe psychological impact that should be considered an act of terrorism. Dr. Parker gave her personal experience to illustrate the damaging effect of the 'shock and awe' tactic.

Dr. Parker discussed the role of United Nations in the US led invasion of Iraq. United States used weapons such as depleted uranium during the invasion against international law. Iraq is still suffering from the use of uranium and it will take generations to recover. US committed various war crimes in Iraq including torture such as the case of 'Abu Ghraib' prison. Furthermore, US trivialized the concept of 'torture' as demonstrated in the lawsuit of Abu Ghraib torture victims against US Military. It undermined the well established international concept that torture is not tolerated even in war times when the United States court ruled that the torture committed was outside US jurisdiction thus the victims had no ground to sue. Even a greater injustice was inflicted when the court ordered the victims to provide monetary compensation to the Military Advisors. This is against international law and an American precedent since 1980s. Ms. Parker concluded that Iraq has been subjected to so much destruction that has left the country without direction and in chaos. Iraq is one of the biggest tragedies of the 21st Century.

Mr. Mazin Kahel - Chairman of the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza

Mr. Kahel spoke about the campaign to end the siege on Gaza and the West Bank. The siege on Gaza is affecting 1.7 million people in every aspect including housing, access to water, health, movement, education and daily life. The effect of the siege is significant and is in violation of international humanitarian law. Israeli authorities must comply with international law.

For the past seven years Gaza has been under siege and their human rights are violated by the Israeli Occupying Forces. Tunnels are shut which is denying them access to the basic necessities of life. Since the Israeli attack in 2008, schools and hospitals are still destroyed without reconstructing those buildings. One third of Palestinians in Gaza are without jobs, 300,000 people are not able to find work which is creating instability in the community.

The European campaign is mandated to end the siege on Gaza and hold Israel accountable. The international community is obliged to pressure Israel to remove the siege on Gaza and hold Israel accountable for targeting Palestinians, limiting the circulation of goods and movements. Mr. Kahel concluded with calling on the international community to address the human rights violations and to impose economic sanctions on Israel till they respect the human rights of Palestinians.

Following the presentations, there was a chance for the audience to ask questions. The Panelists provided answers and further explanations.