**Time to hold Israel to account**

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Natftali Bennett is yet another Israeli prime minister that will not afford relief to the Palestinians. In fact, on the eve of the new Tel Aviv coalition being sworn-in, Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri tweeted: “We aren’t counting on any change in the occupation governments, since they are united in the policy of killing and confiscating Palestinian rights.” The Palestinian Foreign ministry went further, cautioning that the new political set-up might be even worse than what had come before. Indeed, PM Bennett has been in power for just one week and already there have been airstrikes on Gaza.

Aside from Pakistan spearheading the recent condemnation against Israeli atrocities, for the most part, the Muslim world has remained noticeably silent. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) boasts a membership extending to 57 nations. That is, a combined population of 1.85 billion or 24 percent of the world’s population. And still it is unable to combat the systematic oppression meted out by the State of Israel which is home to just 9.2 million people or less than 1 percent of the global population.

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The Palestinians might have expected that the OIC, the Arab League (AL) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) would be mobilised but nothing of the sort has happened. The message is therefore clear: the Muslim world remains effectively speechless when it comes to the Palestinian cause. Yet how can any of us forget the devastating image of three-year-old Alan Kurdi? The Syrian refugee whose lifeless body was found lying face down on a beach near the Turkish border as he and his family attempted to flee civil war in their country. That tragedy ought to have served as a reminder of what people are willing to risk in the search of a safe and better life for their children. Yet Palestine continues to be bathed in blood. Its people carrying the burden of tiny coffins. But the Muslim world is only united on the economic front; when it can prosper and profit.

Of course, the Palestine question is not a religious one. Rather, it is about humanity.

The EU is one of the biggest aid donors to the Palestinians but holds little influence over Hamas or, even, Israel; despite concluding trade agreements with the latter. Last month’s escalation of violence raised concerns of a humanitarian crisis. Thousands of Palestinians have been displaced while Gaza’s healthcare system is struggling to cope. Doctors Without Borders (MSF),which was providing treatment for burns and trauma, was hit by Israeli air strikes.

When Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi met the President of the UN General Assembly during an emergency meeting back in May — he did not mince words. Winning the hearts of Muslims the World over, he stressed Islamabad was outraged at Israel’s use of indiscriminate and disproportionate force against the Palestinians. Meanwhile the Biden administration approved a $735-million arms deal for Tel Aviv. Since the negotiated ceasefire — Israel has twice violated it.

It’s about time, then, that some serious measures are taken to hold Tel Aviv accountable for the gross violation of Palestinian rights while holding it to the same international standard as the rest of the world. Indeed, Israel needs to recall the follow UN resolutions: 242 (1967); 252 (1968); 338 (1973); 465, 476, 478 (1980); 1073 (1996), and 2334 (2016). This is not to overlook the conferences of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and its additional protocols, on applicability of the provisions of the Convention to the land of the State of Palestine and the protection of civilians in times of war. It is time to mandate the UN Secretary General to contact the President of the European Commission, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other representatives of relevant international organisations and multilateral forums and demand that Israel renounce violence. In addition, an urgent appeal should be made for international legal action through the platform of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to compel Israel to pay compensation to the Palestinians for loss of private property and damage to infrastructure. Loss of life can never be compensated.

The OIC needs to send a strong and clear message to the new Israeli leadership. One that says, enough. No more mass killings of innocent Palestinians. This needs to be done now. Or is Palestinian suffering supposed to continue forever?

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