

How Not to Be in Solidarity with Palestinian Refugees in Yarmouk?

By Omar Shaban

Statements of “solidarity” with Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk are emerging one after the other. Albeit very late as it took some groups 200 days to assemble the courage to announce to the world that they are aware of the crisis that has befallen the camp.

However, what is characteristic and outrageous in these statements is the evident lack of any willingness to hold the Assad regime accountable for this inhumane siege and premeditated starvation of the refugees. For example, the [US Palestinian Community Network issued a statement](#) that “expresses great concern regarding the escalating crisis.” Logically, an expression of “great concern” must be accompanied with an examination into why does one “express concern” about a ‘thing’ or an ‘event.’ Something somewhere must have happened to trigger an emotional and intellectual exercise of concern, and this something must be elucidated very clearly.

In the case of the Yarmouk refugee camp, perhaps the reason for this concern must be a feeling that the communities in both North America and the Yarmouk refugee camp (and any other refugee camp for that matter) must share a some sort common camaraderie, a brotherhood, a common history, a collective memory, a shared suffering, and a feeling of belonging to a dispossessed homeland. If this is true, then it follows that it is not enough to simply “express concern” or “solidarity” or issue a statement of a certain political significance. Instead, these expressors of concern must also take into

consideration, with absolutely no equivocation or prevarication, the narrative provided to them by Palestinian activists in the camp (and this narrative is readily available thanks to the internet, social media sites, etc), and find an appropriate location for it in their “expression of concern.”

Evidently, this is not the case in the statement issued by USPCN. The few words that followed their “expression of concern” speak of an “escalating crisis” without paying an attention (intentionally or unintentionally) to the root causes of this crisis – and let me break it to you: it is not Israel.

There is no doubt that the Yarmoukian Palestinians are in Syria because of a historic injustice imposed upon them by a settler-colonial enemy that does not spare any effort to exacerbate their suffering and prolong their exile. However, this indisputable historic occurrence should not blind us from the fact that independent of what Israel has planned to increase Palestinian suffering, the party responsible for the current crisis (and here I must reiterate my emphasis on the word ‘current’) is the brutal and inhuman Syrian regime and its leader Bashar El-Assad.

The Syrian revolution is not an international conspiracy planned and constructed behind closed offices in Tel Aviv and Washington, it is an honorable revolution of a people who suffered from unbearable brutalities exacted upon it by a regime designed specifically to ensure unconditional subservience and zero dissent. This revolution, despite normal and regrettable setbacks that characterize any revolution, should not be castigated as yet another attempt by international conspirators intending to further destabilize the oil rich Arab World. And this revolution should not be used by the Palestinian left to score political points at the expense of the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who, for the past sixty years, provided their brothers and sisters with home and shelter.

Assad and his regime must be held responsible for everything that is happening to the every single person who currently resides in Syria. It must be held responsible for the crisis because it is the direct result of its dictatorial policies in the region. It must be held responsible for its inaction in the face of demands for political and economic reforms. In this particular historical event, it is not Israel that is causing the suffering of the Palestinians and Syrians, it is the Syrian regime. Armed groups would not be able to smuggle weapons and fighters through Syria's porous borders if the regime were competent in anything other than the murder of its own people.

This is not meant to be an attack on USPCN. The statement issued by the said group did, however, provide me with a reason to write. Similar statement that disregard the root causes of the Syrian conflicts are readily available on the internet.

The real motivation for writing this article is to demonstrate that "solidarity" with the refugees in Yarmouk, and similar calls for "return and liberation" mean absolutely nothing without expressly condemning the Syrian regime for its atrocious acts, and demand, alongside their brothers and sisters in Syria, for its removal from power.

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