



A BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN ON ISRAEL AND APARTHEID

KENNETH MESHOE

There is widespread allegation -- really a slander -- that Israel is an apartheid state.

That notion is simply wrong.

It is inaccurate and it is malicious.

And it will not help to promote peace and harmony in the Middle East. Its only purpose is to demonize Israel, and to isolate her in an attempt to de-legitimize Israel's existence.

And because it is so inaccurate, it betrays the memory of those who suffered through a real apartheid.

As a black South African, who was born under apartheid, in the administrative capital of South Africa, Pretoria, I know what apartheid is. I've experienced it. My parents experienced it.

But having been to Israel on a number of occasions, I know that nothing is happening in that country -- that I have either seen or read -- that can be compared to apartheid in South Africa.

Let's remember the major reason Nelson Mandela went to prison -- why he was involved with the armed struggle. He was fighting for the right to vote, for the right to choose the leaders who one believes in, for the right to move and travel freely, to live wherever one wants, to be educated, and to be admitted to the hospital or medical facility of your choice.

All these things Mandela fought for because black people never enjoyed any of them in their very own country. For example, when I had to see a white doctor -- a white doctor who was prepared to have black patients -- I would have to go to a back room, a specially segregated room where black patients of white doctors went who could never enter through the same door that was used by white people.

Now compare that to Israel. Three years ago, a black pastor friend of mine went to Israel where he had an accident and had to be hospitalized. When he came back to South Africa, he said to as many people as he could, that the people who are talking about apartheid in Israel are talking nonsense.

"When I was in that hospital in Israel," he tells people, "on my right was sleeping a Jew and on my left was a Palestinian Muslim and in between that Palestinian Muslim and that Jew was this black South African."

In private, the Palestinians he was with in the hospital said to him, “This ‘Israel-is-an-apartheid-state’ thing is what politicians are saying. It is not what we are experiencing on the ground.”

We all need to recognize that those who say that what is happening in Israel is like apartheid South Africa are minimizing the suffering that black South Africans endured. They are taking the sting out of the pain that we suffered in South Africa. If South African apartheid was what people are seeing in Israel, there would never have been any need for an armed struggle. There would never have been any need for a Nelson Mandela to go to prison because he would have all the rights Arabs in Israel have.

There are judges in the Israel courts who are not Jewish. In apartheid South Africa, you could never have had something like that. You have teachers who are not Jewish who are teaching Jewish children. These non-Jews in Israel have everything that we non-whites in apartheid South Africa never shared with white South Africans.

Most South Africans know this. They know that to call Israel an apartheid state is false; that what we suffered in South Africa is not being suffered by anybody in Israel.

But to those South Africans who believe these falsehoods about Israel we say, “Go to Israel, go and see for yourself. Tell us where you see Palestinians having to endure what we endured during Apartheid.”

As a member of the South African parliament, and in the name of millions of my fellow black citizens of that country – we know what apartheid really was – and I therefore ask those in United States, Europe and anywhere else in the world who charge Israel with practicing apartheid to please stop doing so. You are damaging the truth, you are damaging any chance for peace in the Middle East, and most of all, you are destroying the memory of the real apartheid.

The charge that Israel is an apartheid state is a lie about the real Israel and it is a lie about the real apartheid.

I am Kenneth Meshoe, member of the South African parliament for Prager University.