South Africa's Chief Rabbi Speaks Up for Israel

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Shalom members of the University Network of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. In light of the ongoing efforts of Israel's enemies to demonize Israel, I thought it would be important for you to read this open letter from the Chief Rabbi of South Africa, Rabbi Warren Goldstein, which he wrote to Archbishop Tutu. Please feel free to share this letter with fellow students and family members. Best wishes.

Open Letter to Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Dear Archbishop Desmond Tutu,

I write to you with a heavy heart. You are a revered leader in South Africa, and, recently, have added your iconic voice to the campaign for sanctions against Israel.

Archbishop, I feel compelled to write because I believe that you are making a terrible mistake.
Without truth there can be no justice, and without justice there can be no peace. The Talmud says, "The world stands on three things: justice, truth and peace." These three values are inseparable.
Archbishop, I am convinced that the sanctions campaign against Israel is morally repugnant because it is based on horrific and grotesquely false accusations against the Jewish people.
The truth, Archbishop, is that Israel is not an apartheid state.
In the State of Israel all citizens - Jew and Arab - are equal before the law.
Israel has no Population Registration Act, no Group Areas Act, no Mixed Marriages and Immorality Act, no Separate Representation of Voters Act, no Separate Amenities Act, no pass laws, or any of the myriad apartheid laws.
Israel is a vibrant liberal democracy with a free press and independent judiciary, and accords full political, religious and other human rights to all its peoples, including its 1 million-plus Arab citizens, many of whom hold positions of authority

including that of cabinet minister, member of parliament, and judge at every level of the judiciary, including that of the Supreme Court of Israel.
All citizens vote on the same roll in regular, multi-party elections; there are Arab parties and Arab members of other parties in Israel's parliament. Arabs and Jews share all public facilities, including hospitals, and also malls, buses, cinemas and parks, and, Archbishop, that includes universities and opera houses.

The other untruth is the accusation of the illegal occupation of Arab land.
Like the apartheid libel, this is outrageously false.
There is no nation on earth that has a longer, deeper and more profound connection to their country than the Jewish people have to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.
Archbishop, you and I as religious leaders always turn to the Bible as a source of truth. What does it mean that Israel is the "promised land"?
It means, as we both know, that it was promised by G-d to the Jewish people as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This promise was delivered upon by G-d, more than 3300 years ago when Joshua led the Jewish people into the land of Israel.
Since then there has been an unbroken Jewish presence in the land of Israel, albeit small during the exile. All the books of the Hebrew Bible - Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah etc - describe the deep connection between Jews and the land of Israel, including the West Bank, whose biblical names are Judea and Samaria, the area that contained the great cities of the two previous Jewish commonwealths, such as Jericho, Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood for hundreds of years, Bet El, where Jacob had his vision of the ladder, and Hebron, where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are buried together with their wives Sarah, Rebecca and Leah.

Three thousand years ago great capitals of today did not exist. There was no London or Paris, no Washington or Moscow, no Pretoria or Cape Town but there was a Jerusalem, a Jewish city, capital of a Jewish state.
"If I forget thee O Jerusalem let my right hand forget its cunning . if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy."
Those words from Psalms are recited by Jews at every wedding; at every funeral the statement of comfort to the mourners refers to Zion and Jerusalem. Jews pray for Jerusalem three times a day and also in the grace after meals.

Archbishop, the Arab/Israeli conflict is not about a struggle against apartheid or occupation. It is a century-long war against the very existence of Jews and of a Jewish state in Israel.

There have already been seven major Arab/Israeli wars since the birth of the modern state of Israel. Today the war front includes an alliance between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, the latter now with 40 000 rockets aimed at Israeli cities. Iranian officers train Hezbollah forces, while Iran pursues nuclear weapons and openly declares its aim of wiping out Israel. Hamas, the Palestinian government in Gaza, sides with Iran and Hezbollah in rearming with the declared aim of destroying Israel.
Since 1967, one aspect of this century-long conflict has been the demand for a Palestinian state. In spite of the deep historical and religious roots of Jews in all of Israel, generations of Jewish leaders have been prepared for the sake of peace to give up ancestral and covenantal land to establish a Palestinian state.

So why has there not been peace?

The ANC taught us that you can't make peace on your own. No matter how much the ANC was committed to a peaceful resolution of the South African conflict, until the National Party was prepared to accept that Black South Africans had a place in their own country, there could be no peace.

And so too until the Arab/Muslim world accepts that Jews have a right to a state of their own on their ancestral land of Israel, there will be no peace.

Jews accepted the United Nations Resolution establishing a Jewish state and a Palestinian state in 1948 but the Arab world rejected it and 5 countries invaded Israel to destroy it. After that, the West Bank and Gaza were in Arab hands until 1967. There was an opportunity then - every day for almost twenty years - to establish a Palestinian state.

It never happened. And since then there have been numerous opportunities - each rejected by Arab leaders.

Why?

Because this war has been more about the destruction of the Jewish state than about the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Even today so-called moderate Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas denies Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.

In 2000, the Palestinian leadership launched a massive war of suicide bombers

into Israel, leading to more than 1300 Israeli civilian deaths and 10 000 injuries. Proportionately such carnage in South Africa would mean more than 10 000 killed and more than 80 000 injured.

Israel erected a security fence with checkpoints to shield it from the attacks launched from the disputed territories.

Archbishop, you compare these checkpoints to apartheid South Africa. But they are not about pass laws, which don't exist in Israeli law. They are on the border between sovereign Israeli territory and the disputed territories of the West Bank and Gaza in order to protect civilians from being murdered, and have been very successful in doing so.

These checkpoints - like those which are found at all airports, where people undergo careful security scrutiny, and often invasive searches - are there to prevent suicide bombers from blowing up innocent people.

Archbishop, do not bestow respectability on the immoral sanctions campaign - an affront to truth and justice, which prevents peace and prolongs the terrible suffering of people on both sides of this painful conflict.

Archbishop, let us pray for an end to all this agony, and for the fulfillment of the verse in the Book of Isaiah, "And the L-rd G-d will wipe away the tears from all faces."

Yours sincerely,

Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

University Network Newsletter