

# Mandela rights group slams Palestine plan

Author:

Thu, 2020-01-30 01:32

LONDON: The Elders, an international human rights NGO founded by the late Nelson Mandela, has slammed US President Donald Trump's "peace plan" to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The plan "cannot provide a workable solution" to the conflict, said the NGO, which is led by former Irish President Mary Robinson.

The Elders added that implementing the plan "would make the two-state solution impossible, entrenching deep inequality along ethnic lines and moving the decades-old conflict into a new phase."

In a statement, the group – previously chaired by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Archbishop Desmond Tutu – urged the international community to "emphasize – urgently – that the acquisition of territory through force is illegal, and would result in countermeasures beyond rhetorical condemnation."

The Elders said: "The proposed annexation of further occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank ... creates a dangerous precedent for the acquisition of territory by force, with implications well beyond the region."

It added: "The unilateral effort to redefine the status of Jerusalem in favor of one side is provocative and dangerous. Moreover, the absence of any credible plan for Gaza means a major element of the conflict is simply unaddressed."

Ban Ki-moon, deputy chair of The Elders and former UN secretary-general, said: "The best, most logical and just solution is to provide two states for the two peoples, based on the internationally recognized 1967 borders."

He added: "Unilateral declarations that exclude and humiliate one party to the conflict are counter-productive."

Another Elder, Lakhdar Brahimi – former UN and Arab League special envoy to Syria, former Algerian foreign minister and a veteran of his country's liberation struggle – said: "This is a conflict rooted in injustice, dispossession and disdain for rights and law. Abandoning negotiations and imposing annexation will only entrench these problems. The international community knows this is a unilateral act of folly."

Trump's plan has faced heavy international scrutiny, with no Palestinian leaders supporting it.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called it a "conspiracy" that "will not pass." Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhr said: "Palestine will prevail, and Trump

and the deal will go to the dustbin of history.”



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## [Thousands flee as fighting rages between Yemen government and Houthis](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-01-30 01:16

AL-MUKALLA: Thousands of Yemenis in Marib province and Nehim district, near Sanaa, have been displaced as fighting rages between government forces and the Iran-backed Houthis, a local human rights organization and aid workers said on Wednesday.

As many as 1,484 families have fled their homes in Majazer district in northern Marib, and 1,870 families have deserted Al-Khaneq camp in Nehim, according to Yemen's National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms

(HOOD).

The displacement began on Jan. 19; all those who fled headed to the city of Marib, and only 60 families managed to find shelter, the organization said in a statement seen by Arab News.

HOOD urged local and international organizations, and authorities in Marib and Sanaa, to provide the displaced with food, shelter, drinking water and medication.

Aid workers who visited displaced people in Marib said they are enduring miserable conditions and are sleeping out in the open amid a harsh winter.

Locals said people carrying belongings in pickup trucks and on foot are still heading to the city.

Abdul Khaliq bin Mousalem, director of Eitilaf Al-Khair's office in Marib, said the aid organization has set up 50 camps and provided blankets to the displaced. It will set up 250 camps when local authorities allocate the necessary land, he added.

Eitilaf Al-Khair is an umbrella group of local charities that provides aid on behalf of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief).

"People are in desperate need of humanitarian aid. The priority should be building shelters," Bin Mousalem told Arab News, adding that Al-Khaneq camp was deserted after it was shelled.

"People escaped to Marib with clothes and valuables, leaving behind less important things. The number of displaced people is big, and all aid organizations should quickly support them."

Due to its stability and location, the city of Marib has been hosting tens of thousands of displaced people since late 2014, when the Houthi militia seized Sanaa.

The displacement from Nehim and Marib province comes as government forces press their offensive, under air cover from Saudi-led coalition warplanes, in an attempt to recapture territories seized by the Houthis in recent days.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said the army traded mortar fire with the Houthis, and coalition warplanes pounded their locations in the mountainous Nehim district.

Defense Minister Mohammed Al-Maqdadhi and Abdul Hamid Al-Muzayni, commander of the Saudi-led coalition in Marib, visited the frontlines in Nehim, the ministry's official news site reported.

They met the newly appointed commander of the 7th Military Region, Ahmad Hassan Jebran, and soldiers.

Al-Maqdadhi said the army's military operations in Nehim and elsewhere will continue until the Houthis are defeated.



In the southern city of Taiz, government troops recaptured a number of hilly locations on its western edges.



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## [‘Palestinians have to work and fight together,’ Middle East’s elder statesman Lakhdar Brahimi tells Arab News](#)

Thu, 2020-01-30 00:42

PARIS: Former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi is a member of The Elders, an independent group of global leaders working for peace, justice and human rights. He has also served as UN special envoy to Syria and Lebanon.

A day after US President Donald Trump unveiled the political component of his

long-awaited vision for Israeli-Palestinian peace, Brahimi told Arab News that the proposals amount to an “annexation, domination and apartheid plan.”

Calling for unity among Palestinians, he said they need to be “supported to the best of everyone’s ability.”

**Q: What do you think of the US peace plan?**

**A:** The manner in which the plan has been presented was really a stage for (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu, who’s facing an election very soon ... It has to do with the election in the US, the impeachment (of Trump), with the election in Israel. It’s part of the campaign of both President Trump and Netanyahu. It’s also part of trying to solve their personal problems with justice: Impeachment in one case, a threat of going to jail in the other. It has very little to do with peace in the Middle East.

**Q: What does the future hold for the Palestinians if they reject the plan and this US administration is re-elected?**

**A:** The Palestinians are facing extremely serious problems. They’ve been occupied for 70 years now. They’ve been dispossessed. They will continue to be humiliated and dispossessed in all sorts of ways. This condition is very familiar to people who have lived the colonial experience, whether it’s in Algeria or South Africa. This is a situation we’re familiar with, that people don’t listen to you, don’t care about you.

This “deal of the century” considers the Palestinians as sub-humans, or that they don’t exist at all. Netanyahu is going to start implementing decisions he thinks the US president has taken, in particular the annexation of all the settlements, the bank of the Jordan River on the west side.

What Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said yesterday is correct – 22 percent of historic Palestine is what’s called the West Bank and Gaza. The Israelis are immediately going to take of that about two-thirds, and perhaps they’ll negotiate with the Palestinians on the one-third left. This isn’t a plan of peace but one of annexation and domination. It’s a colonial plan – apartheid at its worst.

**Q: What about Jordan in this plan?**

**A:** Both President Trump and Netanyahu spoke with some respect about Jordan. But to people who have had the chance to read the full text ... it seems that even the holy sites, and in particular Al-Aqsa Mosque, aren’t treated with the respect that they said they will be.

**Q: Do you think the Trump plan will trigger another Palestinian uprising?**

**A:** I think the Palestinians will have to weigh their options, and how they’re going to resist this brutal additional attack on their aspirations, rights and needs. I don’t know how they’ll do it, but I think we have to understand their position and their difficulties.

**Q: Do you think the right of return for Palestinian refugees in other**

**countries is doomed?**

**A:** Let us see what the Arab governments will say in their Arab League meeting. As an Arab, a retired diplomat, I'll say that the Palestinians are going through extremely difficult times. They have rights that are inalienable, no matter what Mr. Netanyahu does or President Trump says. These rights won't go away. It's a long struggle. They (Palestinians) will have to choose the methods of this struggle.

I think the boycott is one of the good things the Palestinians are doing, but they have to make it smart. There are a lot of Israelis who shouldn't be boycotted; there are a lot of Jews supporting them (Palestinians) in the world. They have to take that into consideration. I think they should look at what the South Africans did and do the same.

Perhaps one thing we have the right to tell our Palestinian friends and brothers (is) to have unity. (Palestinians) have to work together and fight together.

**Q: The Palestinian leadership is criticized by the Palestinian diaspora. Is this not because of the leadership's divisions and corruption? Does it not bear responsibility for the future of the Palestinian people?**

**A:** This isn't perhaps the time to speak of the failings of some of the leaders of the Palestinian liberation movement. The liberation movement in Palestine has always been divided. It has never been one movement like it was with the Algerians. At times, they (Palestinians) have been able to work together; at other times not so much. Lately, their divisions have been a little too much.

There is a lot of unhappiness among the people about the manner in which the leadership has behaved. There is a lot of talk about corruption. Definitely this has to change. The Arab Spring has been a reality. If it has failed here or there, this doesn't mean it was a mistake or it wasn't needed. I don't think it's really over. There are legitimate aspirations, and people won't give up on their aspirations.

**Q: What do you think of the European reaction to Trump's plan?**

**A:** I think an important part of public opinion in Europe is very much aware of what's happening, and it isn't happy with what's happening to the Palestinians. But I'm sure my Palestinian friends won't mind me saying it's the level of the struggle in Palestine that will decide how much support they'll have outside, both in the Arab world and in the West.

If they raise the level of their struggle, organize themselves better, if there's unity again in their liberation movement, they'll have much more support (not only) in the Muslim world and in Europe, but also in the US. In university campuses in the US, and among young Jews in particular, there's more and more sympathy for the Palestinian struggle.

**Q: Do you think we will ever see two states – one Palestine, another Israel?**

**A:** I don't know. What I know is that Palestinians have rights that can be achieved in a two-state solution, or indeed a one-state solution, but not (under) apartheid. The Palestinians are being pushed, funnily enough by the Israelis and President Trump, to a struggle for their rights within one state.



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## [Yemen president dismisses army commander after battlefield setbacks](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-01-29 02:22

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has dismissed an army general following a series of military setbacks in Nehim district, near Houthi-held Sanaa.

The official Saba News agency reported on Monday that Hadi had appointed Maj. Gen. Ahmad Hassan Jebran as the commander of the 7th Military Region,



replacing Maj. Gen. Mohsen Al-Khubi.

Al-Khubi has been commanding government forces in Nehim and neighboring battlefields since August 2018. The Nehim battlefield has endured a military stalemate as government forces could not make major gains.

The dismissal comes amid reports that the Iranian-backed Houthis have seized control of Fardhat Nehim military base, a large swathe of the mountainous district and a strategic road that links Marib city with the northern province of Jawf.

The rebels expanded in Nehim following heavy clashes with government forces, backed by air support from Saudi-led coalition warplanes.

Last week, Yemen's minister of defense said that army troops carried out a "tactical retreat" in Nehim to allow forces to regroup before pushing back into the battlefield. Fighting in Nehim escalated on Jan. 19, a day after a Houthi missile and drone attack killed more than 110 soldiers and civilians at a military base mosque in the city of Marib.

The attack prompted senior government officials to threaten to pull out of the Stockholm Agreement, which largely ended hostilities in the western province of Hodeida. Dozens of Houthis and loyalist forces, including commanders, have been killed since the Marib attack.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**The dismissal comes amid reports that the Houthis have seized control of Fardhat Nehim military base.**

Saba reported on Monday that Hadi telephoned the minister of defense and the governors of Marib, Jawf and Sana'a, hailing "victories" on the battlefields and ordering his forces to escalate military activities until they purged the Houthis from areas under their control.

Fighting also continued in Abyan's Lawder district when the Houthis attacked government forces.

Similar clashes were also reported in Jawf, Marib's Serwah and Taiz. UN envoy to Yemen urges recommitment to Stockholm Agreement

The UN envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, has urged the Houthis and the internationally recognized government to adhere to the Stockholm Agreement and to stop hostilities on the battlefields as the Yemeni government reiterated threats to pull out of the deal.

"The parties in Yemen must de-escalate violence and renew their commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The Yemeni people deserve better than a life of perpetual war," he said on Tuesday, urging both sides to commit to keeping Hodeida safe and releasing detainees.

"More than a year ago in Stockholm, the parties promised the Yemeni people to keep Hodeida safe, to use port revenues to pay salaries and to return detainees to their loved ones. They must fulfill these promises and build a conducive environment for the peace process," he added.

Yemeni government officials argue that the Houthis exploited a cessation of fighting in Hodeida to strengthen their forces in Nehim and Taiz.





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## [Turkey's democratic credentials under the spotlight](#)

Wed, 2020-01-29 02:17

JEDDAH: The fifth hearing of the Gezi Park protests trial resumed on Tuesday, on the same day as the third Universal Periodic Review of Turkey began before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Analysts called on international organizations to highlight the crackdown on human rights and press freedom in the country.

On Tuesday, 16 critical voices from Turkish civil society, including businessman-philanthropist Osman Kavala, faced life in prison for "attempting to overthrow the government or partially or wholly prevent its functions" as they were accused of playing a role in Gezi Park protests.

In 2013, around 3.6 million people attended the protests in 80 cities across Turkey, according to official statistics.

The trial is seen as part of systematic moves by the Turkish government to restrict civil society and human rights defenders in the country by continuously accusing them of links to terror groups. Before the trial, Amnesty International's Turkey campaigner, Milena Buyum, said: "This prosecution is a shameful attempt to silence independent civil society, and part of a wider ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders. Osman Kavala should not have spent a single minute behind bars let alone more than two years in pre-trial detention." However, the court refused to release Kavala. The hearing was delayed until Feb. 18. A request for a recusal was also rejected. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had ruled that Kavala and Selahattin Demirtas – the former leader of pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) and a staunch opponent of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – should be immediately released as they had already faced prolonged and arbitrary detention in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The ECHR ruled: "Any continuation of (Osman Kavala's) pre-trial detention in the present case will entail a prolongation of the violation of Article 5/1 and of Article 18." The judicial campaign against the 16 defendants has mostly been justified through anti-terror laws, laws against associations, public order legislation or defamatory accusations on the grounds of "propagandizing for a terror organization" or "insulting the president." During the Universal Periodic Review in Geneva, that will continue until Jan 30, an official from the Turkish delegation claimed "everyone has a right to hold demonstrations" in Turkey. However, evidence suggests this is not the case. For instance, according to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, since November 2016, all demonstrations have been banned in Turkey's eastern city of Van. The 2016 failed coup attempt also provided a pretext for the government to increase its repressive measures against dissidents. In the post-coup period, many opposition journalists, politicians and activists were detained and prosecuted on vague charges and in defiance of international human rights conventions that the country is obliged to abide by.

## **FASTFACT**

**The 2016 failed coup attempt provided a pretext for the government to increase its repressive measures against dissidents.**

EuroMed Rights, a human rights network, gave an exclusive interview to Arab News, saying that since the Gezi Park protests, an erosion of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms had been observed in Turkey. "Today, the judiciary clearly aims to rewrite the events of 2013 as a conspiracy against the government. The hearing against Osman Kavala is an example among others," an official from EuroMed Rights said. According to EuroMed Rights, civil society in Turkey today is under constant pressure, and the space available for civic engagement is shrinking, as associations are now compelled to report information about their members – ID

numbers, names, occupations – to the Ministry of Interior.

“The two-year-long state of emergency and law no. 7145 (July 2018) intended, among others, to ban protests, public assemblies and restrict movement are in total contradiction with articles 19, 23 and 34 of the Turkish constitution. Such decisions seek to isolate organizations and human rights defenders by criminalizing engagement with independent associations,” the official said. He added: “A strong and independent civil society is the sign of a healthy democracy where citizens can engage with society through independent organizations. A government that weakens civil society willingly decides to remove a diversity of voices from the democratic debate.”

The official from EuroMed Rights also said that, by denying citizens the right to associate, the authorities threatened civil society, which cannot hold the government accountable for decisions and cannot act as an intermediary between the citizens and their representatives.

Experts called on the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN to put pressure on the Turkish government to bring the country back towards international standards.

“This is the only way to ensure the people in Turkey do not see their rights abused,” the EuroMed Rights official added.



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