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CRIMES IN PALESTINE

Mohammed Barakeh, Member of the Knesset, appealed to the International Court of Justice in a letter posted in Jerusalem on 9 April 2002. Israel's war on the Palestinians of the West Bank was then into its twelfth day.

'In the last ten days the whole world witnessed the state of Israel waging an all-out war against the civilian non-combatant Palestinian population in the West Bank. The Israeli Defence Forces, under orders from Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Prime Minister, General Shaul Mufaz, the Chief of Staff, and Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, the Minister of Defence, have committed atrocities in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, and every town and refugee camp they entered.

Under the pretext of "destroying the infrastructure of terrorism", the Israeli army is wreaking untold damage and sowing death in the towns it is re-occupying. The Israeli army has been arbitrarily shelling refugee camps, using helicopters, fighter jets, tanks and heavy artillery. This has caused the death of hundreds of people. Medical supplies are halted, hospitals raided, medical crews attacked, fired on or even used as human shields. Forms of collective punishment include starving the population, confining them to their homes under curfew, and destroying water pipes and electricity cables. The water supply to Ramallah has been shut off, endangering the lives of 120,000 Palestinians.

Most recently, there are reports that Israeli forces have committed a massacre in Jenin refugee camp. A war crime is being committed in Jenin. Jenin refugee camp has been pounded for the last four days by tanks, heavy artillery and fighter jets. More than one hundred civilians died. It is reported that hospitals have not received any bodies or injured persons. Corpses are left lying on the ground in the alleyways of Jenin, while the injured are bleeding to death. The refugee camp has run out of all supplies – water, food, and medical supplies.

Stop this massacre. The Palestinians being massacred need your help.

These atrocities constitute a war crime. They are a grave violation of international human rights law and humanitarian law. The state of Israel is throwing international law to the wall and crushing every single item of the Fourth Geneva Convention under its tanks.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, should stand before the international community to answer for the war crimes he has ordered. To this end, we call

upon the International Court of Justice to send forthwith a fact-finding mission to the West Bank to document the crimes being committed; to gather evidence; and to hear testimonies and evidence by the Palestinians in the re-occupied towns. If this is impracticable at the moment due to the war launched by the Israeli army, we call upon the Court to send a fact-finding mission to areas from which the Israeli Defence Forces have withdrawn.

The international community should live up to its obligations. The inaction of the international organisations towards such blatant crimes is discrediting the force and essence of international law.'

SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

The Russell Foundation sent a message to the International Conference of Solidarity with the Palestinian People which took place in Nicosia on 5/6 April 2002. It said:

The terrible assault by Israel on the people of Palestine, and the brutal military occupation of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin and other West Bank towns one after another, challenges peace movements everywhere and calls for a sustained and united response. The Israeli recourse to war is only one aspect of a runaway belligerence, with renewed and unrestrained American threats against Iraq, with a calculated rebuff to the peace initiative of the Arab Summit, and with the decision to respond to other humanitarian peace initiatives in the most humiliating, callous and intimidatory way.

In the face of war, and imminent threats of war, the peace movements need to generate powerful new pressures for peace, uniting the largest possible responses, not only in the region, but also throughout Europe and in the United Kingdom.

The just call for independent action by European states is widely supported, but it is being neutralised and blocked by the insistence that all joint state action must also involve the United States of America. But the United States is an active accomplice in the present bloody confrontations, and while all of us are in strong solidarity with American peace movements, and strongly support their protests in Washington on April 20th, we are bound, like many of them, to identify American military policy as the greatest threat to the entire region of the Middle East. In Britain, in particular, we need to call for independent initiatives to oppose all complicity in American military plans, while in the rest of the European Union we should support initiatives to promote peace and independent action alongside the other states in the region.

We welcome the initiative taken by AKEL to encourage joint action in this direction. We are aware of many other initiatives, including the attempts of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights to encourage the Cordoba dialogue between movements in Europe and the Middle East: but while these

initiatives, and those concerned with the specific question of Palestine, will certainly continue, the present crisis is so severe, and its effects are likely to be so traumatising, that immediate action is called for, whatever other longer term steps may be taken later.

We believe that the peace movements should press a united call for: an immediate stop to the Israeli onslaught on the Palestinian people; permanent withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian territories; an end to the siege of President Arafat and protection for his wellbeing; new initiatives to establish a Palestinian state, upholding 'the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and independent statehood', in the words of the final communiqué of the founding conference of the European Network for Peace and Human Rights.

FOR A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The 2002 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs takes place in the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki from 2nd to 9th August. The organisers have issued this call for support. More information is available on their web site (www.twics.com/~antiatom/).

Now, as the achievement of a peaceful 21st century is bearing more and more urgency for peoples across the world, there is a growing call for, and commitment to, the abolition of nuclear weapons. To contribute to developing the call into a truly global demand, and to open a window for a new era without nuclear weapons, we will hold the 2002 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs from August 2nd to 9th in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The theme is, 'Working Together for a Peaceful and Promising World Without Nuclear Weapons'.

We call on all people in Japan and throughout the world who share the desire to build a world free of nuclear weapons to gather with the *Hibakusha* of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and with the victims of nuclear weapons from around the world to share ideas and actions and discuss agendas for a stronger anti-nuclear weapon movement. Last year, the governments of some non-nuclear weapon states which are striving for the abolition of nuclear weapons sent representatives to the Conference. The Conference was thus successful in establishing relations with governments and non-governmental organisations in support of the cause. We call on non-governmental organisations and local and national governments which support the abolition of nuclear weapons to participate in the Conference, either as representatives or individuals, regardless of social position, thought, belief or nationality.

As the voices in support of the abolition of nuclear weapons gained force, in 2000, 187 countries, including the 5 nuclear weapons states, reached agreement on an 'unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear weapons'. This was epoch-making progress.

There has not been, however, any apparent initiative to make good on the undertaking. The largest nuclear weapons state, the United States, has gone so far as to make a policy on the actual use of nuclear weapons. The United States' development of 'usable' mini-nukes, its plan to resume underground nuclear test explosions in violation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, to which it had itself agreed, and its repeated sub-critical nuclear testing have all generated fear and concern across the globe. On the premise that it is fighting a 'war against terrorism', the United States has labelled certain countries as constituting an 'axis of evil' and laid out policies on waging war as it wishes. These actions are the exact opposite of what is required in order to eradicate terrorism and to build a peaceful world order. As a consequence there has been sharp criticism in Europe and Asia of United States 'unilateralism'.

We are also increasingly concerned about the future of our own country. The Japanese government's unquestioning subordination to the menacing, militaristic policies of the United States on issues such as the abolition of nuclear weapons and the nuclear test ban is extraordinary in the world. Given the presence of more than 100 United States military installations in Japan, there is a danger of the possible introduction of nuclear weapons into the country, in the violation of the Three Non-Nuclear Policies. There is even a danger of Japan being fully incorporated into a United States war. It is not military measures such as these, but true contribution to and initiatives for world peace that a majority of the Japanese people expect from their government.

In the 20th century, many people across the world joined forces to build what is now a strong current towards the abolition of nuclear weapons and a peaceful world order based on the United Nations Charter. Let us renew our commitment to the cause and reach out for ever wider co-operation in order to make this current sufficiently robust to overcome the challenges that confront it. We call on you to organise a drive for signatures and other creative actions of your own, and to support and take part in the nation-wide Peace March against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs which will proceed to Hiroshima and Nagasaki from across Japan.

It is our sincere hope that people in Japan and throughout the world will join forces to build a wider and stronger movement, and that they will co-operate to achieve the cause of abolishing nuclear weapons. To this end we request your support and participation in the 2002 World Conference against Atomic & Hydrogen Bombs.

PEACE MOVEMENT GROWS IN UNITED STATES

Protest against the war at home and abroad took place across the United States during the weekend of 19-21 April. The Russell Foundation sent this message of support to the national demonstration in Washington which attracted over one hundred thousand people.

The war on terrorism has already spread into one country after another. The fighting draws in Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, the Philippines, Georgia, and who knows where next? Logically, it is quite impossible to know which countries might qualify as targets from one month to the next. Vast new military bases are spread out all across Central Asia, and the troop deployments that will be needed to staff them will involve whole armies. This is a war in search of enemies, and it will surely find them as its scope becomes more and more irrational.

We and other Europeans have for some time been worried about the military idea of full spectrum dominance, which, if it were not so threatening, would betoken megalomania.

Dominance, full spectrum or otherwise, is a guarantee of insecurity. To win security we need full spectrum democracy.

News of your plans for April 20 were brought to us by American friends who helped us found the European Network for Peace and Human Rights at the beginning of February. As a result of that meeting, Europeans have arranged supporting actions for this weekend in Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Greece, Holland and Sweden.

The European Network also agreed as a matter of priority to 'open a dialogue with the many movements in the United States working for peace and seek an exchange of delegations'.

We very much look forward to developing that dialogue and co-operation with yourselves .

US MILITARY WANTS SPACE-BASED BOMBER

Putting weapons in space is outlawed under the Outer Space Treaty. But that may not stop the United States: John Diedrich filed this story in the Gazette, Colorado Springs, in April 2002.

The military is looking into building a spacecraft that could drop bombs from space, fix orbiting satellites and give better pictures of the battlefield, the top space officer said Tuesday.

If a military space plane becomes a reality, it would be the first time the United States has put weapons in space. The Pentagon has military satellites that provide navigation, communication, weather, reconnaissance and missile warning information, all considered key to how the United States fights war. But none of them has weapons.

Gen. Ed Eberhart, head of US Space Command, Air Force Space Command and NORAD – all based in Colorado Springs – says the military needs a space plane. 'A reusable launch vehicle will be the key to operating and conquering the space frontier,' Eberhart said at the 18th annual National Space Symposium at The Broadmoor hotel, an annual exposition of commercial, military and civilian

space issues. About 3,800 people attended.

NASA scrapped plans to build a spacecraft called the X-33 a year ago, in part, because of cost overruns. Eberhart said the military is interested in that spacecraft, but its version would be different. It might be designed to run without humans on board and to land in the oceans, he said.

A military space plane quickly could provide surveillance in areas of the world that become important to the Pentagon, he said. Moving satellites for better surveillance now can take days. It could fix or refuel satellites in orbit, which isn't a current option for the military. The plane also could bomb a target in a matter of hours, instead of the 17 hours it takes for a conventional bomber to travel halfway around the world. '(A space plane) has a lot of possibilities, a lot of applications in every one of our missions,' Eberhart said.

The space plane is only an idea and studying it doesn't mean the United States has decided to put weapons in space, said Army Maj. Barry Venable, spokesman for U.S. Space Command. 'We aren't doing our job if we don't look at things like this and think about it,' he said. Some critics of Space Command have said a space plane that drops bombs would be in violation of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which says 'space will be used for peaceful purposes.' But Venable said 'peaceful purposes' has been interpreted to mean nonaggressive acts. In other words, weapons can be put in space to defend a nation and its assets, he said.

Also Tuesday, Eberhart said information from military satellites may be useful for local police and other first responders in the war on terrorism. 'Over time we can leverage our space assets to support homeland security and law enforcement,' Eberhart said, noting there is no such proposal yet. 'A lot of it hinges on cooperation.' The general didn't give examples, but Venable said later satellite information could help fire departments track the spread of chemical or biological agents released by terrorists, provide police with more accurate city maps or give emergency workers better communications.

HOON 'WILLING TO USE' NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The World Court Project (www.gn.apc.org/wcp), an international citizens' network seeking implementation of the International Court's 1996 judgment on the illegality of nuclear weapons, prepared this briefing.

On 20 March 2002, Geoff Hoon, Secretary of State for Defence, appeared before the House of Commons Defence Select Committee. The subject was missile defence, but the evidence contains disturbing material on Britain's nuclear deterrence posture. The proceedings make it clear that the United Kingdom is prepared to use nuclear weapons against 'rogue' states or 'states of concern' such as Iraq if they use weapons of mass destruction – biological or chemical – not against the British homeland, but against troops in the field. The crucial

disclosures start in paragraph 234 with a discussion about the United Kingdom's general deterrence in relation to a attack on the mainland. However, paragraph 236 moves on to a specific question from Jim Knight MP: *'Do you think such a state [a state of concern] would be deterred by our deterrent from using weapons of mass destruction against our forces in the field?'*

Mr Hoon's answer is *'... the United Kingdom possesses nuclear weapons and has the willingness and ability to use them in appropriate circumstances'*. In para 237 he says that *'... in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons ...'*. The context makes it quite clear that Mr Hoon is referring to a nuclear response by the United Kingdom to an attack using weapons of mass destruction on British troops in the field.

On 8 July 1996, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) confirmed that to threaten, let alone use, nuclear weapons would be generally contrary to International Humanitarian Law. The judges were unable to pronounce on whether they could be lawful *'in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a state would be at stake'*. Even then, any such threat or use should never violate the law. A typical letter from the Ministry of Defence to the World Court Project UK dated 15 December 1999 states that *'the United Kingdom would only consider using nuclear weapons in self-defence and in extreme circumstances, and subject to the rules of international law, and humanitarian law, applicable in armed conflict'*. This reflects faithfully the language of the ICJ. Many other letters and statements in Parliament are couched in similar terms.

Mr Hoon's evidence to the Select Committee flies directly in the face of such undertakings. A chemical or biological attack in the field could, by no stretch of the imagination, qualify as a threat to the survival of the British state. Whether such a response could ever be 'subject to the rules of international law, and humanitarian law, applicable in armed conflict' is also at issue in Mr Hoon's evidence. He says: *'we cannot rule out the possibility that such states [Iraq for example] would be willing to sacrifice their own people in order to make that kind of gesture [willingness to use Weapons of Mass Destruction]'*. If 'such states' were to 'sacrifice their own people', the agents of the sacrifice would be nuclear warheads launched by British Trident submarines. Saddam Hussein might be complicit in the sacrifice of innocent civilians; but it would be we who would be inflicting the sacrifice directly. This would almost certainly violate the need for the discriminate use of weapons demanded by International Humanitarian Law.

When the Committee next meets the Minister it should also ask him how a nuclear response by the United Kingdom on Iraq:

- could possibly be proportionate and discriminate,
- qualify as defending 'the very survival' of the British state,
- comply with the negative security assurances the United Kingdom has given all non-nuclear states,
- could avoid constituting a war crime.

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On 29 April 2002, these issues were again pursued with Mr Hoon in the House of Commons in the following terms.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Do the Secretary of State's recent comments concerning the possible use of nuclear weapons against Iraq signal a change of Government policy, whereby Britain is reneging on assurances given to non-nuclear weapons states under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty? Indeed, are the Government abandoning the policy of successive British Governments of regarding nuclear weapons as a deterrent of last resort?

Mr. Hoon: There has been no change in the British Government's policy – the use of nuclear weapons is still a deterrent of last resort. However, for that to be a deterrent, a British Government must be able to express their view that, ultimately and in conditions of extreme self-defence, nuclear weapons would have to be used.

PENNY ON TAX TO PAY FOR WAR ON AFGHANISTAN

Henry McCubbin comments on the Budget statement in Britain.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, presented his Budget in April 2002. Much play was made of putting up tax to pay for more spending on the National Health Service. National Insurance contributions on almost all incomes are to rise by one per cent from April 2003. At the same time, personal allowances for tax-free pay are to be frozen, instead of up-rated with inflation, as is usual. This will mean all income taxpayers will pay more, and some low paid people will be taxed for the first time. The public justification for these tax and national insurance increases was writ large in the end of the Chancellor's speech. It was to improve the health of the nation. In fact, another £1 billion is to be found for the National Health Service this year.

Was that all that had to be paid for? Not at all. Tucked away between 'keeping to our fiscal rules' and 'an extra £125 million for foreign aid' was another large item of expenditure. A extra £1 billion had to be found this year for spending on defence which had already been incurred. The Chancellor said:

'Since September 11th we have made provision of 50 million pounds for our domestic security responsibilities and, over the last year, 950 million pounds for defence. We will continue to meet our responsibilities internationally and to our armed forces'.

Out of a total of 9,131 words in his speech, Gordon Brown devoted 2,221 to the NHS and just 39 to the extra billion pounds for military spending. That's what I call spin.