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The Ayalon - Nusseibeh "Peoples' Voice" - a critical reading

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The renewed public interest and recent efforts of lobbying for the Ayalon-Nusseibeh project known as "the Peoples' Voice" call for a critical reading of the 'Statement of Principles' on which it is based and of what it says in and 'between the lines'.

This project is an attempt to amass public support in both societies for a negotiated Peace settlement, based on mutually accepted principles. The project was launched in a most difficult time, when large sectors of both societies lost hope in the feasibility of a negotiated Peace and the diplomatic efforts that can put an end to the present tragic situation and the ongoing bloody struggle between the parties. It is intended to "give Hope a chance" and mobilize positive energies on both sides in the service of a rejuvenated Peace campaign. However, despite of the good intentions the initiators of this project might have had, the statement of principles on which it is based is a most problematic and even dangerous document. It is once again misleading, spreading false hopes and impossible expectations regarding the parameters of Peace between the two peoples. Consequently, it is another recipe for a guaranteed failure, more disappointment and just another set-back. After the Oslo disaster, this "false prophecy" can inflict another lethal blow on the already wounded "Peace Process", giving the Peace efforts a "Kiss of Death". Indeed, the Statement of principles contains the more or less agreed upon body of mutually accepted parameters for the two State Solution, concerning mainly the more technical matters based on the Clinton proposal and the Taba talks. On the other hand, it evades once again or addresses insufficiently and even dishonestly some of the most crucial key issues that remained in dispute. Moreover, in certain key clauses this document contradicts crucial assumptions that are understood by many honest people as constituting the absolute fundamentals of a much needed break through in the severely disrupted relations between the two peoples.

I will point out two of them:

1. There can be no Peace and no reconciliation between the two peoples without Israeli recognition of the evil and the absolute and categorical injustice and wrong it has inflicted upon the Palestinians in 48' and ever since. We cannot get out of the present dangerous impasse and build bridges for Peace without dealing with the Nakbah of 48' and the continuous Nakbah that has been going on through the Retribution Acts (Peulot Hatagmul) of the 50's, the 67' Transfer and ever since in the oppressive and dehumanizing occupation, culminating in our present days - day after day.

2. We cannot have Peace based on a fair compromise, without assuming responsibility for our acts in the past and present and act upon it, as well

as acknowledge the fact that the conflict didn't start with the 67' occupation. Putting an end to this occupation and the ongoing oppression that leads to an actual de facto ethnic cleansing bit by bit, by terrorizing civilians, massive killings, uprooting agricultural land, starvation and humiliation etc. is of course a necessary precondition for Peace, but it is not enough.

I will try to point out just a few crucial issues that contradict the above mentioned principles and thus jeopardize other sincere efforts to promote a settlement that lies on a more sound basis.

1. " 1. Two states for two people" - What "Two peoples" does this Statement specify within the "Two States Solution" framework? The 'Jewish' and the 'Palestinian'. Had it stated that the two peoples are the Palestinian and Israeli peoples- I could have accepted it with less unease. I could have convinced myself that when we are talking about "Israelis" we mean all Israeli Nationals and Citizens - both Jewish and Arab. Of course, in the whole of Palestine there are two national groups - Jewish and Palestinian - and I have no problem with it at all. On the contrary, I could be very happy with a bi-national framework, which to my mind is the ultimate and best solution for a democratic life in Israel-Palestine. However, within the "Two States framework", which in the present seems to be the favorite political solution supported by the majority in both societies, to speak of 'Israel' as the State of the "Jewish People" is rather problematic. It is problematic for all the Israelis - Jewish and Arab - who wish to live in a truly democratic state. This point needs some clarification:

What do Ayalon and Nusseibeh really mean when they state that "Israel is the only state of the Jewish People"?? Can a state belong to a "people" which is not a political entity, and it is not because "THE Jewish people" are not the citizens of this State. "The Jewish People" is a virtual and not a political entity. Many members of this 'entity' are citizens and nationals of other countries. Moreover - where does this definition leave the Arab Palestinian Citizens of Israel? Is this not their State too? Can a Modern Democratic Nation State BY DEFINITION not belong first of all to all its CITIZENS? Can we accept a definition that does not state clearly that Israel is first of all the State of all its Citizens? For me the answer is certainly NO.

2. The Right of Return a.: The document is addressing the suffering of the Palestinians without recognizing our responsibility for creating this suffering. On the contrary, it is deliberately evading it in a tricky and not even very sophisticated manner.

Quote: " Recognizing the suffering and the plight of the Palestinian refugees, the international community, Israel, and the Palestinian State will initiate and contribute to an international fund to compensate them." Who is exactly recognizing what? " The international community, Israel

and the Palestinian State??? This is really so unbelievably impudent and nonsensical that it is hard to describe my reaction to it in a civilized manner. What about the necessity to recognize that WE Israelis committed War Crimes, large scale ethnic cleansing, thus inflicting a terrible catastrophe on an entire people? How can we not admit these facts and assume our share of direct responsibility without any foreign partners?

3. "The right of Return b.: Quote: " Palestinian refugees will return (sic.) only to the State of Palestine; Jews will return only to the State of Israel." Who gives these people the right to write off the individual rights of Palestinians? Nobody has the right to do so. I think that if only given a chance, many progressive, humanist and pro-peace Israelis can understand that a fair compromise must entail first of all our recognition of the Palestinian rights. This is a basic and fundamental issue in re-instituting the Palestinians as EQUAL partners, Lawful and indigenous children of this Land, who are here by right and that we are not doing them any favors. This is what the Palestinians demand after 55 years of continuous Nakbah and it is as important to the majority of Palestinians as the borders of a viable Palestinian State in the 67' borders. This simple truth has to be said and reiterated again and again, and I believe that if told so - people can understand the logic, the humanity and the morality of such claims. Then, in the framework of a compromise, be it the "Two States solution", Israel can negotiate an agreed upon and realistic implementation of the Right of return. Indeed, in the framework of the two States Solution, it is neither logical nor possible to bring in millions of Palestinians and they do not demand it either - at least not the majority of Palestinians - according to what I know, nor their present Leadership. However, one cannot rule out that 200,000 - 250,000 Palestinian Refugees, mainly the ones suffering in the Camps in Lebanon could be repatriated, especially if we stop bringing here as much as possible Gentile 'Zionist' from Russia, and Ethiopia and elsewhere. To be sharp: moral principles are not less important than border arrangements and such principles must be established first. It means that Israel has to recognize the Palestinian historical RIGHTS in this country and our responsibility for the wrongs we did to them. Afterwards, and only afterwards will it be possible to agree about a compromise regarding the limited actual implementation of the ROR based on many moral and pragmatic considerations such as: scarcity of land and water, not uprooting Israelis and causing new wrongs and new misery.

4. Compensation: " The international community will offer to compensate toward bettering the lot of those refugees willing to remain on their present countries..." Not only do we evade assuming responsibility but we also intend to duck the compensations, thrusting the duty upon the shoulders of the International community... This is just another trick to evade admitting that the Nakbah and its results - the suffering of the refugees is our doing, our fault and it is our responsibility to make it right. Instead of evading our duties, Israel must say clearly that we are going to pay compensations, even if it means that we will need some support to be able to do so. This is a moral obligation on behalf of a people like ours

who knew all along how to take compensations from those who wronged us. How can we evade the same duty vis a vis our victims?

5. Demilitarization: "The Palestinian State will be demilitarized and the international community will guarantee its security and independence." This is really just another symbolic issue and an epitome of our self-righteousness. Why should only the Palestinian State be demilitarized? After all Israel is the mighty military power, the one that has inflicted such great losses on the other side in the past 100 years. I know it sounds petty but I think of it the following way: This clause is just another epitome of the total lack of equality between the parties and of Israel's capacity to enforce its unreserved hegemony ... So why should not both parties be demilitarized and protected by International powers? Because Israel is always so special. This is once again the "eternal righteous victim" syndrome.

This document, despite of very reasonable clauses in the practical realm (borders, settlements, 1:1 land exchange, Jerusalem and Holy Places) is after all just another trap, just another tempting but deceitful document for two main reasons:

1. It does not set the real parameters for a just, feasible and lasting Peace, based on the required moral foundations, thus capable of generating good will, a sense of decency, equality and reconciliation.
2. It does not have any real backing or substantial support among Palestinian grassroots and Leadership - not that I know of. I don't know any Palestinian grassroots activists, intellectuals, political activists or individual friends who subscribe to the principles as formulated in the Ayalon- Nusseibeh document. I daresay so inspite of the recently publicized Ramallah event (Haaretz, Arnon Raguler) in which allegedly many Fatah activists subscribed to this project. I did not find any publication in any Palestinian daylies reporting this event. I do not know any Palestinian who does not insist on the moral principles stated above i.e. mainly Israel's recognition of their rights, and assuming responsibility for those wrongs done to them.

The Ayalon-Nusseibeh "Declaration of Principles" violates the very core of the above assumptions, one by one. Unfortunately , it seems to be another product of the same mentality - the Zionist one, the same mentality that bred the Oslo fallacy which lead to its catastrophical demise. It happend so because of the continuous and obstinate Israeli denial of what really lies at the bottom of this conflict, and if adopted it will once again breed nothing but another abortive process. It only breeds more illusions and impossible expectations. Moreover, it blocks the way in front of honest people who to try to remove the Taboo over the Nakbah and put an end to its long going denial and the evasion of Israeli responsibility, in order to open the way for real Peace and the

much needed reconciliation.