

Sari Nusseibeh:

'Those Throwing  
Stones At Siniora  
Should Look  
At Themselves'

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Many consider Bir Zeit University, Philosophy Professor **Sari Nusseibeh**, the spiritual father of the idea presented by **Hanna Siniora**, which calls for Arab participation in the Jerusalem elections. Nusseibeh, however, has not given Siniora the kind of backing many thought he should have given. Nusseibeh explains to Al-Fajr's **Daoud Kuttab** what he thought about Siniora's proposal and answers the comments of his critics:

**Al-Fajr: Why didn't you give full backing to Siniora's proposal?**

**Nusseibeh:** Because I disagree with it. However, I believe that any realistic vision of a future equitable settlement has to include shared sovereign Israeli-Palestinian rule over the whole of Jerusalem. Such a settlement can either be a two-state solution or a binational solution. Therefore, any equitable proposal concerning Jerusalem only runs the risk of being an obstacle to reaching such a final solution. A comprehensive proposal concerning such a strategy must have first been fully discussed, analyzed and approved by the PLO. Siniora's announcement, in my view, violated these conditions.

**Al-Fajr: Many believe that you did not back Siniora after you noticed the negative response from the Arab side.**

**Nusseibeh:** My opinions are a function of my analysis and are not determined by negative criticisms. In any case I advised Siniora not to make the suggestion and I stated very quickly and publicly my criticisms of it. His major mistake is that he was prepared to initiate a practical policy which he should have first proposed for discussion and analysis in Palestinian circles. No idea that doesn't get a democratic endorsement by the PLO should be implemented.

**Al-Fajr: How would you have made the suggestion?**

**Nusseibeh:** I would have made it as a forecast of what people in the occupied territories would do if a peaceful settlement based on partition is not negotiated soon and if the PLO therefore develops the strategy of once again calling for the establishment of a binational state. Such a strategy might well be based on the three rights: the right to return, the right to stay; and the right to equality.

**Al-Fajr: How does your idea differ from Mr. Siniora's?**



we shall witness a development of behavior in the occupied territories that runs parallel with the development of behavior as it unfolded over the past 40 years among Palestinians living in Israel. Essentially we must not forget that both Palestinians presently in the Knesset and in the Lebanese refugee camps belong to one people.

**Al-Fajr: Should the Palestinian public have been surprised by the suggestion calling for Arab participation in the Jerusalem elections?**

**Nusseibeh:** Anyone who was surprised must have been blind to the developments that have taken place in the past 20 years. These developments have been a normalization of the occupation. Ninety-nine percent of this normalization process is volitional on our part, strictly speaking, starting from carrying Israeli ID cards, accepting social security payments and building permits, as well as all the economic, political and social arrangements. A realistic look at the entire picture makes Siniora's initiative seem part of this development. I am sure that this direction will intensify in the coming years unless there is a solution based on partition.

**Al-Fajr: The campaign directed against Siniora has become very nasty with many non-nationalists participating...**

**Nusseibeh:** While we can argue that Siniora erred and that some of the criticism was legitimate, this doesn't mean that he deserves the type of cheap, unscientific and arbitrary attack that have been directed against him. Many of those throwing stones at Hanna should look at themselves. Many of them are like political vultures feeding off a dead political corpse.

**Al-Fajr: How does your idea differ from Mr. Siniora's?**

**Nusseibeh:** Mine is not an idea but a theoretic analysis. It is a descriptive analysis in the context of which one can understand Siniora's initiative. It is not necessarily a prescriptive analysis. I observe how things have developed over the last 20 years or even the last 40 years. I see how Palestinians have behaved vis a vis the Israeli system over those years, whether within the 'green line' or outside it.

Looking ahead I see that, in the absence of a solution based on partition,

should look at themselves. Many of them are like political vultures feeding off a dead political corpse.

**Al-Fajr: Can you see any positive things coming from the whole debate?**

**Nusseibeh:** I think that Siniora's idea had a positive effect as far as Israeli society is concerned insofar as it was an eye-opener for what will happen if a partition settlement through an international conference is not reached soon. Israel must face up to the demographic danger of its fabric. Israel must realize that Palestinians will refuse to live another 20 years in political limbo.