



THE RUSSELL TRIBUNAL ON PALESTINE

SECOND INTERNATIONAL SESSION

ON

CORPORATE COMPLICITY IN ISRAEL'S VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW, INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine (RToP) was launched in Brussels on 4 March 2009. The project is a citizen initiative, supported by many prominent people, in the tradition of Russell Tribunals which have been held since that on war crimes in Vietnam. It seeks to promote the recognition that the basis on which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is solved must be that of international law. Further, it aims to raise awareness that the international community is in part responsible for the on-going denial to the Palestinian people of their rights. It aspires to inform - and spur into action - individuals, governments, international institutions and NGOs to demand Palestinian self-determination and human rights.

In pursuit of this goal 'People's Tribunals' are being held in major cities during 2010 and 2011. The aim of the Tribunals is to reach opinions carrying the weight of authority; opinions that can then be used to legitimize campaigns waged in support of the struggle of the Palestinian people for justice.

Held in Barcelona in March 2010, the first session of the RToP considered the complicity of the European Union and its member states in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and Israel's violation, with impunity, of international law. The Tribunal was a resounding success as measured by the impact it made on the audience present and the media attention it received, and also as judged by the forthright published opinions which were reached. The London session, which will concern corporate complicity in Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, will be held in late November 2010. It is envisaged that further sessions will be held in South Africa and in the USA in 2011.

THE RAISON D'ÊTRE FOR A TRIBUNAL ON PALESTINE

The timing of the Tribunal is apposite. In the wake of the Israeli attack on Gaza in December 2008 there has been a massive increase in popular support for the Palestinians. On that occasion 100,000 people demonstrated in London, while - in what was the largest wave of student protest in the UK for 30 years - occupations took place in 17 universities. The publishing of the Goldstone Report in September 2009 marked a further watershed in public interest and concern. Meanwhile the 'Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions' (BDS) movement against Israel has been growing, exemplified by the TUC (representing 6.5

million workers) passing a motion in support at its 2009 Congress. Most recently the wholly unjustified and deadly attack on activists taking humanitarian aid to Gaza has alerted the whole world to the nature of the Israeli regime and to the plight of Gazans.

However, as the failure to carry through effectively on the Goldstone Report has shown, efforts to take action in response to clear breaches of international law are thwarted through political interests engaging in gamesmanship. Despite there being overwhelming evidence, such that a convincing case could be brought to the international judiciary system, it proves well-nigh impossible to do this. In the light of this it is our belief that, if a realistic solution to the conflict based on international law is to be brought about, public opinion must be mobilized. Even if the action is in the first instance but symbolic and educational, a 'people's tribunal' held in the full glare of publicity will serve to fill an apparent void in the international legal system.

In this context it may be pertinent to note that the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam appears to have had considerable impact on public opinion, contributing substantially to an ending of that war. Held in 1966 -1967, when support for the war was still high in the USA and little as yet was known of US war crimes, the Tribunal's findings contributed to a radical change in public opinion, resulting in massive opposition to the war on campuses and among intellectuals. We believe that a Tribunal on Palestine could achieve the same result. The RToP aims to galvanise and to direct public concern into an effective citizen movement which will exert sufficient pressure to ensure that conformity to international law eventually prevails.

LONDON SESSION OF THE RUSSELL TRIBUNAL ON PALESTINE

The London Session of the Tribunal will address the complicity of international corporations in the illegal occupation of Palestinian land by Israel which has now endured for over forty years. It will *inter alia* consider Israeli control, and exploitation, of natural resources and of crops, domination of trade and of the infrastructure. The aim is to educate and equip individuals and groups with the tools they need to take action against such companies; further to encourage activism in relation to human rights abuses committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. The companies and corporations enabling, or participating in, this illegality will be identified: their country base; what kind of legal action against them is possible and on whose behalf it should be taken; and which are the most favourable jurisdictions in which to launch such actions. There will furthermore be an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms and structures which make possible such illegal actions and such connivance in Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people.

The Tribunal will take the form of a court case, held over two days. The companies concerned will be 'put on trial' before a People's Jury made up of prominent persons. Prior to the conference, the conduct of these companies will have been researched and assessed by experts. High profile witnesses will give evidence against the companies, serving to highlight different aspects of the occupation. The proceedings will be open to the public, will be filmed and transcribed. That media coverage may be maximised, a media partner or partners will be sought. A documentary will be made which, it is to be hoped, will have a wide impact. The intention is that through the publicity which this Tribunal will generate those already involved in the fight for justice for the Palestinians will be empowered while many more will recognise the injustice of the present situation such that a groundswell of opinion in favour of change will become irresistible. It will be important to indicate explicit and concrete ways of acting, whether in taking direct action or through utilizing legal and political channels.

The effectiveness of the conference will be monitored and its impact evaluated employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures: feedback from attendees and from NGOs on the ground, the number of participants, of website hits, and the level of media attention achieved.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MOVEMENT

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Responsibility for the organisation of the RToP lies with the International Organising Committee (IOC) composed of the following persons: Ken Coates, Pierre Galand, Stéphane Hessel, Marcel-Francis Kahn, Robert Kissous, François Maspero, Paulette Pierson-Mathy, Bernard Ravenel, Brahim Senouci, Maria Lherm. Further persons of other nationalities will be invited to join the committee. There is a secretariat in Brussels.

NATIONAL SUPPORT COMMITTEES

There are National Support Committees in: Belgium, France, Germany, The Republic of Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. The **UK National Support Committee** is composed of representatives of NGOs and other organisations (among them 'War on Want', 'Media and Activism', and 'Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights Legal Research') and of individuals (experts in the field of human rights and persons knowledgeable about Palestine). The committee is chaired by Dr. Ghada Karimi.

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE LONDON TRIBUNAL will be undertaken by a **Co-ordinating Team** of three persons, two in Brussels and one in London, plus a **Project Manager** recruited for the task. This team will be responsible for overall logistics, for organising research and for co-ordinating the organisation of the Tribunal. Support will also be given by organisations represented on, and members of, the UK National Support Committee, as well as by other national support committees. A team of volunteers will help with the session.

The official languages of the Tribunal are English and French. There is simultaneous translation between relevant languages at Tribunals.

SUMMARY OF AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The **aim** of the project is to hold a People's Tribunal on Palestine, exposing corporate complicity in Israel's violation of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and war crimes.

The **specific objectives**, in pursuit of this aim, are:

- (1) To co-ordinate existing research and undertake new research on corporate complicity with the continuing Israeli occupation and exploitation of Palestinian territory.
- (2) To bring pressure to bear on governments and international institutions to act in conformity with international law.
- (3) To encourage and empower the many groups, NGOs and individuals who are already committed to ending the occupation.
- (4) To harness the wider concern evident among the public for the fate of the Palestinians that a critical turning point may be reached which will make radical change inevitable.

The intention is to **meet these objectives** by:

- (1) Holding a public Tribunal, in the form of a Court of Law, to bring a charge against the companies concerned and so expose the illegality of what at present pertains.
- (2) Drawing on the expertise of high-profile witnesses and befitting from the service of well-known public persons of legal and political standing on the jury to maximise impact.
- (3) Developing a strong media strategy (print, broadcasting and online) to bring public attention to a collusion and complicity, normally unremarked, in which all are implicated.
- (4) Identifying how formal legal processes may be brought to bear, and individuals and organisations may effectively challenge both companies and governments.

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