

Whose Jerusalem?

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DESPITE all the overwhelming events in different places in the Arab world, the plight of the Palestinian people keeps coming over and over again to dominate the news headlines. Major changes in the region such as allowing women to drive in Saudi Arabia was dwarfed by the decision made by the US president Donald Trump to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.



Recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel could not be more timely. It came exactly 100 years after Britain issued the infamous Balfour Declaration in 1917 to create the state of Israel on Palestinian land. This led to the ethnic cleansing of most of the Palestinians and the creation of Israel in 1948 which the Palestinians call the Nakba (catastrophe in Arabic) and commemorate on 15th May of every year.

Trump's recognition was not a surprise as he promised to do that during his election campaign as well as building a wall along the borders with Mexico and preventing citizens of seven Muslim countries from entering the US. The surprise was that someone dared to do it against International Law and the will of the International Community. This is because Jerusalem is an occupied city which was taken by Israel in 1967 war and illegally annexed and declared as its capital. It followed the annexation with discriminatory measures against its Arab Palestinian population aimed at reducing their numbers in the city. At the same time, and against International Law, Israel started confiscating Palestinian land to build Jewish settlements and transfer part of its population to these settlements.

In the immediate aftermath of Trump's decision, dozens of Palestinians were killed in protests against the action. It also encouraged Israel to introduce measures which it might not have taken if it was not encouraged by that decision. These measures include making it legal to confiscate Palestinian land – according to Israeli laws. Israel also passed a bill to extend the authority of the Israeli Higher Education Council over the higher education institutes in the illegal Israeli settlements and in effect considering these settlements as part of Israel. Moreover, the central committee of the Israeli Likud party, which is the main coalition partner in the government, voted for a resolution urging its members in the Israeli parliament to bring legislation to annex the West Bank illegal settlements to Israel.

For the long term, however, while the continually expanding and increasing Israeli settlements finished off any hope for the two sides to live beside each other in peace, Trump's announcement ensured that the two state solution is dead and buried as East Jerusalem was supposed to be the capital of the future Palestinian state.

The decision does not seem to be costly at all for the US. This is largely to do with the unelected dictators in the region who were either brought to or kept in power by different colonial powers. Historically, these dictators always favoured the interests of their colonial masters over the desires of their own people who they see as a threat, especially after the Arab Spring.

This year's Nakba 70th anniversary commemoration started early on 30 March which is the Land Day when the Palestinians mark the killing of six unarmed Palestinians during peaceful protests against the confiscation of Palestinian land by Israel in 1976. Different events take place including poetry reading and traditional dance with mass rallies and demonstration every Friday towards the borders with Israel to affirm the Palestinian refugees right to return to their homes according to the UN General Assembly resolution 194 and International Law. So far Israel responded to peaceful protesters with snipers and lethal force. 15 Palestinians were killed instantly on the first Friday of protests and more died of their wounds later. Ten more Palestinians were killed on the second Friday including a photo journalist who was covering the events and a 16-year-old child.

Like previous American administrations, Trump's government prevented the UN from condemning the killing of Palestinian civilians and supporting their right to a peaceful protest. It also prevented the UN from endorsing the call issued by its Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to investigate the latest killings in Gaza which has been under Israeli siege since the 1990s. This siege has caused a lot of suffering as Israel restricts movement and the entry of basic life necessities including life saving drugs.

The mainstream media is also biased against the Palestinians. For example, the BBC report said that some of the Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers while Israel itself is not disputing that all civilians were killed by its troops. Another BBC newsreader referred to the Israeli army snipers as security forces. Locally, the *Irish News* referred to peaceful protests as clashes.

Clearly there is no prospect for a just peace with Israel acting with full impunity as if it is a state above the law. This is why it is important for ordinary people to stand for justice by boycotting Israel and by urging their MPs and TDs to support a just peace based on the rule of law and UN resolutions. Against such a backdrop of injustice, Dublin City Council should be commended for supporting the BDS movement. □