

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/17/opinion/17iht-edbarghouthi.html?_r=4

The New York Times

December 17, 2009

When Will It Be Our Time?

It is with deepening concern that I recognize the Obama administration is not yet capable of standing up to Israel and the pro-Israel lobby. Our dream of freedom is being crushed under the weight of immovable and constantly expanding Israeli settlements.

By MUSTAFA BARGHOUTHİ RAMALLAH, WEST BANK — I have lived my entire adult life under occupation, with Israelis holding ultimate control over my movement and daily life. When young Israeli police officers force me to sit on the cold ground and soldiers beat me during a peaceful protest, I smolder. No human being should be compelled to sit on the ground while exercising rights taken for granted throughout the West. It is with deepening concern that I recognize the Obama administration is not yet capable of standing up to Israel and the pro-Israel lobby. Our dream of freedom is being crushed under the weight of immovable and constantly expanding Israeli settlements. Days ago, the State Department spokesman, Ian Kelly, managed only to term such illegal building “dismaying.” The Israeli foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, stands up and walks out on the U.S. envoy, George Mitchell, every time the American envoy mentions East Jerusalem. And Javier Solana, just prior to completing his stint as European Union foreign policy chief, claimed Palestinian moves toward statehood “have to be done with time, with calm, in an appropriate moment.” He adds: “I don’t think today is the moment to

talk about that.” When, precisely, is a good time for Palestinian freedom? I call on Mr. Solana’s replacement, Catherine Ashton, to take concrete actions to press for Palestinian freedom rather than postpone it. If Israel insists on hewing to antiquated notions of determining the date of another people’s freedom then it is incumbent on Palestinians to organize ourselves and highlight the moral repugnance of such an outlook. Through decades of occupation and dispossession, 90 percent of the Palestinian struggle has been nonviolent, with the vast majority of Palestinians supporting this method of struggle. Today, growing numbers of Palestinians are participating in organized nonviolent resistance. In the face of European and American inaction, it is crucial that we continue to revive our culture of collective activism by vigorously and nonviolently resisting Israel’s domination over us. These are actions that every man, woman and child can take. The nonviolent movement is being built in the villages of Jayyous, Bilin and Naalin where Israel’s segregation wall threatens to erase productive village life. President Obama, perhaps unwittingly, encouraged this effort when he called for Palestinian nonviolence in his Cairo speech. “Palestinians,” he said, “must abandon violence. ... For centuries, black people in America suffered...the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights. It was a peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America’s founding.” Yet without public American complaint, the Israeli military has killed and injured many nonviolent Palestinians during Obama’s 10 months in office, most notably Bassem Abu Rahme who was killed in April by an Israeli high-velocity teargas canister. American citizen Tristan Anderson was critically injured by the Israeli Army in March by a similar projectile and remains in a deep coma. Both men were protesting illegal Israeli land seizures and Israel’s wall. Hundreds more are unknown to the outside world. A new generation of Palestinian leaders is attempting to speak to the world in the language of a nonviolent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions, precisely as Martin Luther King Jr. and thousands of African-Americans did with the Montgomery bus boycott in the mid-1950s. We are equally right to use the tactic to advance our rights. The same world that rejects all use of Palestinian violence, even clear self-defense, surely ought not begrudge us the nonviolence employed by men such as King and Gandhi. Western lethargy means the clock may run out on the two-state solution. If so, the fault will rest with the failure to halt Israeli settlement activity. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s declaration that settlement construction will continue in East Jerusalem, with government buildings in the West Bank and on thousands of West Bank housing units already under development makes a mockery of the term “freeze.” We Palestinians are completely accustomed to — and unwilling to accept — such caveats from Mr.

Netanyahu. The demise of the two-state solution will only lead to a new struggle for equal rights, within one state. Israel, which tragically favors supremacy rather than integration with its Palestinian neighbors, will have brought the new struggle on itself by relentlessly pushing the settlement enterprise. No one can say it was not warned. Eventually, we will be free in our own country, either within the two-state solution or in a new integrated state. There comes a time when people cannot take injustice any more, and this time has come to Palestine.

Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi is secretary general of the Palestinian National Initiative and a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.