UN Gives Palestinians Flags, But No Democracy

September 17, 2015

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<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6503/palestinian-flag-democracy>

Last week, the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of a motion allowing the Palestinian flag to be flown in front of the UN buildings.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership and various "pro-Palestinian" groups have hailed the vote as a "symbolic victory" for the Palestinians. The Palestinian representative to the UN, Riyad Mansour, [said](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34216151) that the vote regarding the flag would be "another step" towards solidifying Palestinian statehood.

The 119 UN member states that voted in favor of the motion are apparently convinced that this is a "big victory" for the Palestinians and their political aspirations. But what these countries do not know is that flying a Palestinian flag outside UN buildings is probably the last thing Palestinians need at this stage.

The vote in favor of hoisting the flag is not going to bring democracy, freedom of expression and transparency to Palestinians. The Palestinians do not need "symbolic victories" such as the one concerning the Palestinian flag.

A Palestinian living in the West Bank or Gaza Strip does not really care if his flag is flown in front of a UN building. For Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, there are more urgent matters that need to be dealt with immediately, such as the harsh economic conditions and the repressive measures of the Hamas regime. For those living in the West Bank, economic development, employment and democracy are more important than any flag raised in front of the UN headquarters.

But the countries that voted in favor of the motion do not really care about the needs and interests of the Palestinians. They do not care if the Palestinian Authority and Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively are functioning as repressive and corrupt regimes that have no respect for human rights or public freedoms.

The vote was mainly directed against Israel. Its main goal was to taunt Israel rather than help the Palestinians move closer towards building an independent state.

The vote at the UN concerning the Palestinian flag came amid increased human rights violations by both the PA and Hamas. But since when does the UN care about human rights violations committed by the PA and Hamas against their own people?

The UN state members that voted in favor of raising the flag pay attention to human rights violations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only when there is a way to lay the blame on Israel.

In recent weeks, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have reported a number of incidents that demonstrate how the Palestinian Authority and Hamas continue to show complete disregard for due process, human rights and freedom of expression. These incidents continued even as the 119 UN members raised their hands in favor of the hoisting of the Palestinian flag.

In the Gaza Strip, for example, Hamas security officers beat and detained a number of local journalists who tried to cover the removal of debris from homes that were destroyed during last year's military confrontation between Hamas and Israel.

One of the journalists, Fadel al-Hamami, was [hit](http://www.alquds.com/#%21/articles/1442164852012502600/) in the face with the butt of a rifle and had to rush to a hospital for treatment.

Hamas does not want journalists to cover any reconstruction work in the Gaza Strip. It wants the world to continue believing that the Palestinians are still unable to rebuild their houses because of Israeli "restrictions" and lack of international funds.

That is why the journalists who tried to cover the removal of the debris were physically assaulted and detained for interrogation.

The UN General Assembly, of course, did not hear about this incident when its members voted in favor of raising the Palestinian flag outside its buildings. Even if the UN does hear about it, it is unlikely that the General Assembly or the Security Council would ever issue a statement condemning the assault on representatives of the media.

Nor is the UN going to condemn Hamas's use of force to disperse Palestinians protesting against power cuts in the southern Gaza Strip. The lack of electricity has triggered widespread protests throughout the Gaza Strip, where many Palestinians hold the Hamas government fully responsible. Eyewitnesses [said](http://www.watania.net/news/54618) Hamas policemen used live ammunition and clubs to disperse the protesters.

Last week, Hamas [arrested](http://www.s-palestine.net/arabic/?Action=Details&ID=33535) 30 Fatah activists in the Gaza Strip as part of its crackdown of supporters of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. The arrests came as Fatah was holding internal elections for its leaders in the southern Gaza Strip. The detainees later went on a hunger strike in the Hamas prison. This incident also coincided with the UN vote concerning the flag. However, none of the UN state members bothered to denounce the Hamas crackdown and obstruction of the Fatah election. Who cares if Hamas arrests Fatah voters and candidates as long as a Palestinian flag is raised in front of UN buildings?

In the past two weeks, Hamas security officers in the Gaza Strip [arrested](http://www.amad.ps/ar/?Action=Details&ID=88006) a journalist and political activist whose only crime was that they dared to criticize Hamas. The journalist, Shadi Shaheen, works for an Arabic Gulf newspaper. Hamas confiscated his computer and camera.

The political activist, Mohamed Abu Mahadi, is known for his outspoken criticism of both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. He was [detained](http://www.elarbya.com/2015/09/03) by Hamas policemen as he was visiting his brother in Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. Abu Mahadi was released after interrogation.

The situation under the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank is not any better with regards to human rights violations. Almost every day, PA security forces [arrest](http://safa.ps/post/163106) several Palestinians and hold them without trial.

Last week, the PA issued a [directive](http://safa.ps/post/163358) banning its security personnel from criticizing the Palestinian leadership on social media.

The ban came as PA security officers [detained](http://www.wattan.tv/ar/news/146998.html) a Palestinian from the West Bank city of Tulkarem who criticized PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah on Facebook. The man was identified as Abdullah Nash'at Sayed.

Sayed is not the first Palestinian to land in prison for posting critical remarks on Facebook against Palestinian leaders. More than 14 Palestinians have been arrested or summoned for interrogation in the West Bank over the past three years for their activities on social media.

Still, the UN and other international organizations are not interested in holding a debate about these assaults on human rights and freedom of expression.

These organizations are more interested in provoking and condemning Israel than helping the Palestinians build democracy and proper transparent institutions. That is why the UN considers raising a Palestinian flag more important than demanding an end to human rights violations by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. With such an attitude at the UN, the Palestinians will eventually get their own flag flown outside those buildings. But they will also end up with a state that has no respect for human rights -- all thanks to the indifference and corruption of the UN and other international bodies.