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State's complicity in corruption: 'We must all work to root out this evil'

By Al-Qalam Reporter

Shocking revelations of organised crime inside the Government have rocked South Africa. These kingpins must be brought to book. No one is above the law, says Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar

Following the exposure of widespread corruption amongst some senior Government officials, there's been widespread calls for transparent investigations against the Minister of Police, the National Police Commissioner, and all senior SAPS generals named in the damning report.

One such call for such an investigation came from prominent Islamic scholar, Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar who pointed out that those mentioned in the damning report "must be compelled to testify under oath before Parliament". He told *Al-Qalam* that "not even those in uniform or political office is above the law" and that they must answer to the people about the serious allegations made against them. "South Africa stands at a perilous

crossroads. The shocking revelations now surfacing around political interference, systemic corruption, and the deliberate sabotage of the SAPS Political Killings Task Team have laid bare not only a crisis of governance, but a profound erosion of moral and ethical leadership within our democratic institutions.

"These disclosures have rightly been described as one of the most serious crises to confront our post-apartheid state. They demand an urgent, coordinated, and morally courageous response from all sectors of society".

He said the allegations, which include the deliberate dismantling of the Political Killings Task Team, obstruction of justice, and the shielding of high-ranking officials allegedly connected to organized criminal networks and political assassinations, suggest a brazen abuse of power at the highest levels of the South African Police Service (SAPS). "These are not mere bureaucratic irregularities. They constitute a deliberate undermining of the rule of

'Our ethical and civic duty, rooted in the Qur'an to promote what is just and life-affirming and resist what is harmful and unjust.'

law, an assault on the very institutions meant to uphold public trust and accountability. If left unchecked, this institutional sabotage will continue to threaten the safety of ordinary citizens, activists, and communities already exposed to chronic violence, particularly in areas like KwaZulu-Natal and the Cape Flats.

"In recent days, the picture has become even more alarming. Senior police officials, including Lieutenant-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, have come forward with public testimonies confirming political interference, internal sabotage, and an entrenched culture of impunity. Their allegations have sparked national outrage and revealed

the urgent need for structural reform. "Since, 6 July 2025, the situation has grown even more alarming. Senior police officials, most notably Mkhwanazi, have publicly made serious allegations pointing to political interference, internal sabotage, and a pervasive culture of impunity within the police service. These claims, though yet to be fully tested, have sparked widespread public alarm and underscored the urgent need for transparent investigation and structural reform".

Imam Omar said, as people of faith and as moral custodians of public life, we cannot remain silent in the face of injustice.

"Our ethical and civic duty, rooted in the Qur'an to promote what is just and life-affirming and resist what is harmful and unjust (al-amr bil-ma'ruf wa-n-nahy 'an al-munkar) compels us to speak the truth, to confront injustice with wisdom, and to advocate for those whose lives are being destroyed by this toxic convergence of organized crime and state complicity. "We therefore call upon the Parliament of

South Africa to exercise its full constitutional authority and urgently establish a parliamentary inquiry into the Mkhwanazi/Sibiya/Mchunu revelations. This inquiry must be independent, transparent, and fully empowered to:

- Subpoena relevant documents and testimony,
- Recommend criminal prosecutions, and
- Demand full accountability from those implicated."

He said the inquiry must be conducted through the appropriate parliamentary mechanisms, including the Portfolio Committee on Police, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA), and other relevant oversight bodies. The Minister of Police, the National Police Commissioner, and all senior SAPS generals named in the allegations must be compelled to testify under oath before Parliament. South Africans deserve to hear the truth, unfiltered and unspun.

In the meantime, he added, the leadership of SAPS must act decisively without delay to restore institutional integrity, and cooperate fully and unequivocally with all legal

and parliamentary proceedings or investigations.

"We must never forget the human cost of systemic failure. In communities like Mitchells Plain, Gugulethu, Nyanga, Westbury, KwaMashu, Zwide and Motherwell, the collapse of justice is measured not in headlines but in funerals."

Imam Omar said this was not merely a policing failure. It is a moral and ethical emergency, a test of our democracy's soul and our collective humanity. "Community Police Forums (CPFs), religious institutions, advocacy groups, and ordinary citizens must rise to meet this moment. In this spirit, let us rise, not in fear or vengeance, but in moral clarity and courageous solidarity. Let us reject the cynicism that says nothing will change. Let us reclaim the ethical heart of our democracy.

As Muslims, we are constantly reminded of the sacredness and sanctity of every human life (Q5:32) And we are charged to stand firmly for justice, even when it is difficult."

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LOCAL NEWS

MYM's Ambassadors for Change: 'I now have courage to stand up against injustice'

By Ayesha Dada

Young voices were ignited with passion and purpose at this year's Ambassadors for Change programme, hosted by the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (MYMSA).

The six-day event, now in its fourth year, was held at the Al-Ansaar Conference Centre in Durban from 30 June to 5 July and brought together youth, predominantly from high schools around the city.

The programme aims to empower young South Africans with the knowledge, tools, and values needed to become socially conscious leaders. This year was an all-girls event, and participants expressed their gratitude for all the skills and knowledge they gathered. Through interactive sessions and group work, participants engaged with key issues, including gender-based violence, human rights, identity, and leadership, all rooted in Islamic values.

The event saw a keynote address by the CEO of Al Baraka Bank, Shabir Chohan, and a powerful address by MYMSA President, Thandile Kona.

For participant Juwayriyah Abdelmegeed, the experience was both personal and transformative. "From the very first session, I felt like I was part of something meaningful. It wasn't just about sitting and listening, it was real, it was challenging, and it pushed me to grow," said Abdelmegeed. She said that one of her greatest lessons was understanding that leadership begins with self-awareness and consistency.

"Before I can try to change anything around me, I need to understand who I am and what I stand for. The programme helped me realise that I don't need to wait to make a difference, I already have what I need to start," said Abdelmegeed.

Fazeela Mazibuko, a student at Regent Business College, described the programme as "life-changing" and praised its open and inclusive environment.

"It opened my eyes to many issues in our communities that we often overlook. I especially appreciated the honest discussions on gender-based violence and human rights. Everyone's voice mattered," said Mazibuko.

Mazibuko says she left the programme with a renewed sense of responsibility. For Grade 10 learner Maaida



Gadit, the programme not only broadened her perspective but also brought a sense of joy and connection.

"The vibe and enthusiasm of the facilitators made the experience one of a kind. I made so many new friends and enjoyed the group activities – it taught me the power of working with others," said Gadit. She said the course has given her the courage to stand up against injustice and work towards meaningful change in her community."

Grade 11 learner Hafsa Joosab from Orient Islamic

School, described the programme as nothing short of transformative. "It pushed me out of my comfort zone and connected me with passionate young people from different backgrounds. The sessions were engaging and thought-provoking, and I felt inspired and empowered every single day," Joosab said.

She said the value of collaboration and listening stood out most for her. "Leadership isn't about having a title, it's about taking initiative and empowering others. I also learnt how empathy, teamwork, and prac-

tical tools can help us lead with clarity and purpose," Joosab said.

All four participants expressed their eagerness to take what they've learnt into their communities, whether through hosting workshops, organising support initiatives for vulnerable groups, or simply listening to those in need.

They say the Ambassadors for Change programme has equipped them to lead with compassion and conviction. Programme facilitators, Rashid Chopdat and Arun Naicker, said the highlight

of this year's programme was seeing how participants from previous years were able to lead the programme. "They were brought in to take over. We wanted to create an environment where the previous ambassadors could step in and really take control of running the programme. It was fascinating to see how they pulled it off, and they did an excellent job," said Naicker.

She said a lot of the students came with prior knowledge, were extremely dedicated, and made significant contributions. Chopdat said that with this year's theme

being "Leading from the Front", it was wonderful to see how the participants had done this effortlessly. "We saw a lot of potential. There were young ladies there who stood out as leaders, and we'll be working with them to ensure that they achieve all the things they set out to do to empower and uplift their communities," said Chopdat.

He said that as the programme continues to grow, it remains a beacon of hope for developing grounded, faith-driven leaders committed to service and social justice.

Shock as Durban catering giant Akram Bemath passes on

Akram Bemath, a famous name in the catering business in Durban, has passed on. *Ismail Suder reports.*

Prominent Durban caterer Akram Bemath suddenly passed away last week of a suspected heart attack that left thousands shocked.

Many, including clients and friends, attended his Janaaza at Lodge Grove Cemetery in Overport.

Akram, who was in his early 50s, was the owner of Ismail Bemath Caterers of 86 Donkin Road, Sea Cow Lake, where he operated a massive catering business that cooked a variety of Indian-inspired foods on an industrial scale. His catering company has fed hundreds of thousands of people under his tenure.

Akram hails from the extended Bemath (Manjra) family who are pioneers in specialized mass cooking for the community, especially for weddings and other large

events. From a small catering outfit from his home in Goble Road, Durban, Akram had expanded his catering enterprise into a massive operation following the purchase of a large tract of wetland which was covered in reed.

He cleared out the land and built a massive function hall on it. His dream property that he painstakingly built from scratch also features a restaurant, and a concrete-covered courtyard for mass cooking.

But, apart from his entrepreneurial skills, Akram was a humanitarian. Often, he donated large pots of food to the underprivileged communities, especially during auspicious dates in the Islamic calendar.

His cousin, Hafez Abdullah Bemath, of Abdullah Manjra Caterers, told *Al-Qalam* that Akram's passing was a huge loss to the community he served.

"He had a soft spot for the poor and large pots of food

were often sponsored by his catering business. And for those who ordered, but could not afford the full price, Akram would say 'you can pay me what you have': No doubt the legacy he left behind will continue, said a source in the family.

Hafez Abdullah remembers how decades ago, Akram and his late father, Ismail Bemath, would be the main caterers for hundreds of Hujjaj both in Makkah and Madinah. He said boxes of spices were flown to the Holy Land for the preparation of huge degghs of foods.

Sheep were usually slaughtered at a farm out of town and meat was prepared for the pot each day.

His father passed on about a decade ago.

Akram's catering headquarters is a buzz of activity, especially on weekends when hundreds of families attend all kinds of functions – with catering done by his business. The property has parking for hundreds of cars.



He once said during a casual chat that his fleet of trucks – laden with food – were geared to deliver large food orders in the far-flung corners of the country.

A few months ago, he told *Al-Qalam*: "Catering has been a long-time passion in my extended family – we love doing this," he said.

He mentioned that the business receives catering orders from far flung places in South Africa, and his dedicated team was always ready to serve clients anywhere. His specialty included delicious biryanis, dhall & Rice. Lamb Khalya, and exotic Lahori chicken.

A family source said the business will continue operations as before.

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LOCAL NEWS

Durban schoolgirl (11) publishes book about treasure hunt with Islamic history

By Azra Hoosen

Well-wishers gathered at Baitul Hikmah recently to celebrate something extraordinary — the launch of a children’s book titled *The Secret Amongst the Olives*, written by 11-year-old Maariyah Mathir of Durban.

Maariyah’s book is already drawing attention for its creativity, mystery and subtle threads of Islamic history woven into the storyline. The book is aimed at readers aged 8 to 10 and follows two girls, Salma and Zahra, who set off in search of a missing family treasure. Along the way, readers are introduced to real historical Muslim figures, including Abu Bakr Effendi, a 19th-century scholar who plays a key role in the plot, among others. “This is because of my interest and love for Islamic history,” said Maariyah.

It is not every day that a tween takes the leap from

journaling to publication. Maariyah told *Al-Qalam* how her journey began unexpectedly. “I actually wrote the story for a creative writing competition but just before submitting, I discovered that it was for ages 16 and above. I was really disappointed. My sister then suggested we have it published as a book instead, and that’s how it all began,” she said.

What followed was months of back-and-forth, editing and learning about the publishing process. “The most challenging part was relying on adults to take care of getting it published. Publishers don’t exactly deal with an 11-year-old,” Maariyah joked. The end result was a beautiful paperback with her name on the cover. “The most fun part was getting to hold the printed copy of my book,” she said.

Maariyah’s mother, Fehmeeda, reflected on the experience with humility and gratitude. “It felt like a long

process, but in retrospect I make shukr to Allah for giving us the means to have this published,” she said. Her gratitude extends to the publishing company, Baitul Hikmah, that brought her daughter’s story to life.

While the achievement might sound overwhelming to many parents, her mom said the key is simple: “love what you do”. “Maariyah is really just a regular 11-year-old who does what she loves and that’s the key. Alhamdulillah, attending an Islamic school helps balance her Salah and academics, which makes after-school sport easier. Her gymnastics is twice a week, and we do fun runs together on weekends—so it’s all spread out. The only activity she does every day is reading,” she explained.

Maariyah’s advice to other kids who want to write is to just start. “Write your thoughts, it won’t be perfect and that’s okay. Also, read a lot of books in different

genres,” she said. Her HOD at Orient Islamic School, Fathima Rajub, echoed the sentiments of pride: “I am in absolute awe of Maariyah’s incredible talents. It comes as no surprise, though. Maariyah has been penning wondrous tales from Grade 1. Her varied interests reflect a beautiful balance of creativity, stamina and intellect. She didn’t just chase her dream, she wrote it! Maariyah is truly an inspiration and I can’t wait to see the many chapters of her life unfold.”

Beyond the book, Maariyah’s story carries a quiet reminder for parents: pay attention to your children’s interests and create opportunities for them to explore. “Allah has blessed every individual with something special. Believe in your child! Be the positive voice in their head. When Maariyah showed interest in writing, I took her to meet two local authors at a book reading. Find people in the field who will inspire them,”



said her mother. Maariyah’s parents hope she continues to grow with kindness. “We hope her passion for writing becomes a way to uplift others and make a positive difference in the world.”

With a cliffhanger ending to her book, Maariyah already has plans to write a second book.

Whether she’s running on

a weekend trail, doing flips in gymnastics, or buried in a new novel, one thing is certain: this young storyteller is just getting started.

The Secret Amongst the Olives is available for purchase for R100 at Al-Ansaar Bookstore and online. Maariyah will be holding a book signing on Saturday, July 12th, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at Al-Ansaar.



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Durban Palestinian student says ‘control’ of Gaza decided by Gazans, not outsiders

By Ismail Suder

As the world holds its breath for a possible Gaza ceasefire within a week or two, a Palestinian student based in Durban says any talk on who will control Gaza must come from the will of its people – not by outsiders. Abdelrahman Shat, a Business Management student, told *Al-Qalam*: “Amid growing reports of a possible ceasefire in Gaza, hope flickers – fragile but alive. Yet for my people, especially those enduring months of destruction, hoping for peace is a luxury wrapped in pain. The bombs may fall silent soon – but the scars left behind are deep, strategic, and brutal.

“The Israeli military’s campaign has gone far beyond traditional warfare. What we are witnessing is not merely a battle of weapons—it is the systematic use of power to erase a people’s livelihood, education, and resilience.

This is engineered suffering. It is engineering poverty, engineering deprivation, and perhaps most devastating of all, engineering ignorance.

Filtering news reports suggest there might be a ceasefire announcement within a week or two. Talks are being held in Doha, Qatar, to trash out sticking points. U.S President Trump has met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House, saying the two were set to discuss “almost exclusively” the situation in Gaza, a sign of the intensifying effort to end the genocide in Gaza.

But Abdelrahman says Gaza has been transformed into a “laboratory of suffering”, where infrastructure is erased, and basic needs are denied as a method of control. “And yet Gaza lives”, he added, “For two consecutive years, thousands of Gaza’s high school students have not been able to sit for their final general exams—a

critical step toward university and a future. Schools lie in ruins. Teachers are gone. Children are traumatized. “This is no accident. It is a calculated assault on the minds of the next generation. It is engineering ignorance, the deliberate denial of knowledge and opportunity. Not by chaos, but by design.

“At the same time, Gaza’s people face engineered poverty. Food and fuel have been cut off. Agricultural land razed. Aid convoys blocked. Hospitals attacked. Businesses bombed into nonexistence. This is not collateral damage—it is a system built to keep Palestinians on the brink of survival without dignity. It is poverty by policy”, he added.

Meanwhile, a human rights group has issued a statement saying Palestinians in Gaza have less space than detainees in the notorious US prison camp in



Guantanamo Bay. “After 21 months of continuous Israeli assault, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are confined to less than 15 percent of the enclave,” the Euro-Med Monitor said in a statement. “Approximately 2.3 million people are crammed into suffocating conditions, each with less space than that allocated to detainees in Guantanamo Bay.” Gaza’s population is trapped under constant bombardment and a blockade, deprived of water, food, shelter and healthcare, and effectively barred from returning to their destroyed or restricted areas of origin, it added. “This is part of a deliberate policy that reflects a genocidal process by Israel to uproot the people and erase their physical and demographic presence through mass killing, forced displacement, starvation, and systematic destruction of life.”



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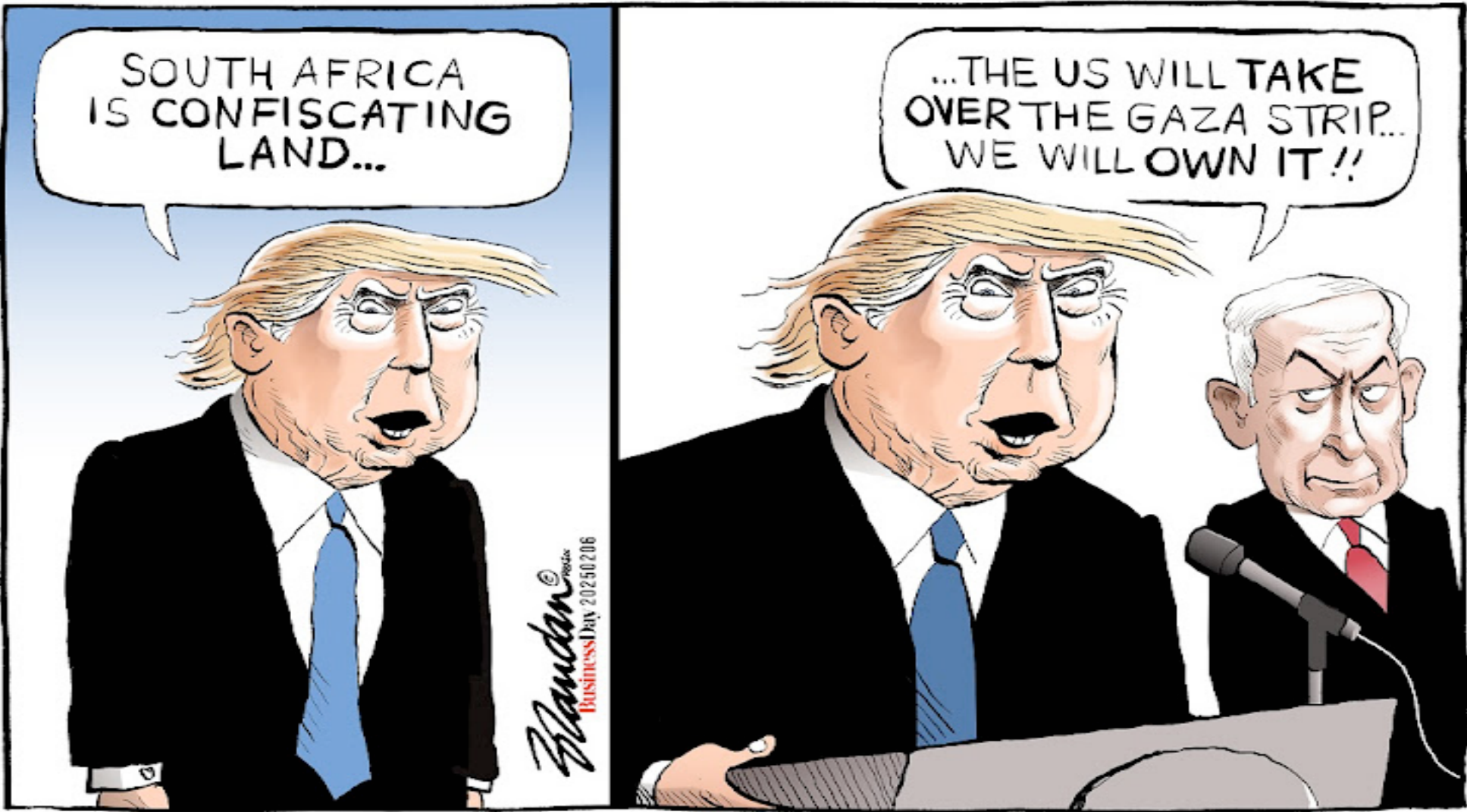
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EDITORIAL



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We would like to thank all our respected readers for sending in your comments, views and opinions to our 'Letters to the Editor' column. We value your thoughts on the various aspects affecting the Muslim community. Keep them rolling in.

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‘I don’t follow their ideology, but Shia Iran and Houthis stood up for Palestine’

A few weeks ago, after Jumu'ah, I was rudely asked 'why do I stand by Iran and Yemen?'

"Why?" he asked, almost in rebuke. This is approximately what I replied: Despite being vilified and demonised, these two nations, slandered and reviled for their Shiite majority, are the only two Muslim nations that stood unwaveringly with Palestine providing succour and support while the rest of the 1,7 billion Muslims in the world remained mostly spectators in Caligula's Roman circus.

Among them are rulers, influencers, institutions, mimbars, and yes — average individuals — who do nothing but cheer on what Israel is doing.

Yes, as Francesca Albanese (the United Nations Special Rapporteur) said, Israel is responsible for one of the 'cruellest genocides in modern history', the silent inaction on the part of

55 of the 57 Muslim countries are like the epitaph that every passerby in the cemetery will read inscribed for eternal shame. Let me say this.

In this Holy Month of Muharram 1447, I declare that it's better to become a martyr than to watch the humiliation and horror and live in shame. We will be subjected to severe injustice worse than what we are experiencing now, I abhor silence in the face of injustice, and the abuse by speakers in Houses of Allah who sow seeds of division instead of the truth for Zionism is what the coronavirus did and is doing.

Whilst a genocide carried on and still done, mimbar after mimbar is distracting the Ummah away from the suffering in Gaza and indulging in sectarianism.

I mentioned Iran and Yemen not because I support their theology, it is because I believe in their ideology of freeing Al Aqsa from the Zionists and because I find



silence an abomination. The same goes for those lame tongued clerics whose lukewarm criticisms achieve nothing for they lack conviction and commitment.

Compared to them, their Shia counterparts hold nothing back.

I pause here to make this disclaimer. That does not make them right in creed, and I will supplement that it does make them morally courageous in action, especially when compared to many of our governments and religious institutions who did nothing.

To acknowledge that is not Shia sympathy. In this 10 Muharram month I repeat that just as Hussayn whose faith and moral conviction was so strong that he preferred martyrdom to succumbing to usurpers and the cunning who sought to dilute the cause of his no-

ble grandfather Muhammad PBUH, I too would rather succumb to martyrdom as those in Gaza have, as those in Iran have than to live in shame....

Saber Ahmed Jazbhay
Constitutional Law
Durban

IRSA: ‘We shield our children too much... they need to see what real life is about’

By Azra Hoosen

There was a spirit of purpose at a recent Change-makers event in Durban where students, parents and professionals gathered with one goal – to make a meaningful impact in the lives of the less fortunate in the community.

For Farhana Malek, Regional fundraising manager for Islamic Relief South Africa (IRSA) in KZN, becoming a changemaker is a deeply human responsibility that anyone, young or old, can fulfill.

Whether it is disaster relief, youth mentorship, elder support, or simply showing up with a helping hand, the message from those working on the ground is clear: building stronger communities starts with ordinary people choosing to care. “People often forget, we do just as much locally as we do internationally. The need here is just as urgent,” said Malek.

Raeesa Sayed, IRSA regional volunteer coordinator, told *Al-Qalam* that there is a significant gap in our communities when it comes to youth involvement. “We need to raise a generation that doesn’t only ask, ‘What can I get?’ but also, ‘What can I give?’” she said.

Sayed believes this responsibility does not rest



solely on the shoulders of the youth; it is intergenerational. “Many volunteers have different personality traits and experiences that come in handy. When we have a diverse team, we work better and come up with more innovative ways of helping,” she said.

A significant shift Malek wants to see is how people view charity itself, not as a one-sided act of giving, but as a shared human experience. “We need to change our mindset that we are giving charity and we are

helping others. They’re helping us, because those are our steps to Jannah (paradise),” she said.

Sayed stressed that the spirit of giving does not only take the form of money. “People can contribute with time, skills and presence. For those who say they don’t have time or anything to offer? You can give back in different capacities, on weekends, during holidays, even from home,” she added. For one young volunteer, humanitarian work began as

a way to fill a gap year after high school. But it quickly became something deeper, a window into the world beyond her own.

“We don’t realise how much we have until we see how little others live with. You go to a shelter and see people fighting over a peanut butter sandwich. That stays with you.

It makes you want to do more,” she said. Through her journey, she has come to see charity not as an occasional act, but as a way

of life that can and should start at a young age. “If you make time for others early on, it becomes part of who you are. We need more people who are compassionate and selfless in this world,” she said. Malek encourages parents to lead by example, to involve their children in outreach efforts and use service as a teaching tool.

“You have to be what you want your children to be. I take my children with me when we’re giving out hampers or mattresses,

and when there are natural disasters. We shield our children too much. They need to see what real life is about,” she said.

Those on the frontlines urge the community to start small: “Even if all you can give is a loaf of bread or a kind word, that’s enough. You just need to start.”

“When I am in the field and I see a smile on someone’s face, I know we’ve made a difference. That’s what keeps me going,” said Sayed.



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Ibn Umar (r.a.) narrates the Nabi (SAW) said: “The place of prayer (salah) in religion is like the place of the head in the body.”
Tabarani

LOCAL NEWS

Palestine : The Global South Fights Back in Bogotá



By Imraan Buccus

The decision by the United States to sanction Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, is a direct attack on international law and multilateralism. The world is in a perilous place. The ongoing genocide in Gaza, as well as recent unlawful military strikes on Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, are a profound threat to peace, justice, and the integrity of international law. In this context, some of those who have taken a stand for international law have, like Albanese, faced intense pressure.

But the tide is now clearly turning. The mass mobili-

sation of people against the genocide in the West has been critically important. So too has South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice. It was met with widespread international acclaim by progressive forces across the world and many governments in the Global South—but also considerable hostility from the United States. After months of threatening talk, punitive tariffs have now been imposed on South Africa by the US government. At home, South Africa's position at the ICJ has won wide support from within society, including popular organisations outside of the ANC like NUMSA, Abahlali baseMjondolo, and SAFTU, as well as the ANC-aligned trade union federation COSATU. The ANC's support is in steep decline at the polls, but its principled position on Palestine places it in tune with the sentiments of the vast majority of South Africans.

However, Israel and the United States have received vociferous support from a small but strident white-dominated pro-Western lobby at home. That lobby



has attempted to isolate and smear those who have stood up for justice. There have been character assassinations of a number of decent people, and considerable peddling of conspiracy theories, such as the entirely unevicenced claim that Iran bribed the ANC to take Israel to the ICJ.

With growing pressure

abroad and an aggressive pro-West lobby at home, South Africa needed a smart and effective diplomatic strategy to ensure that it could hold the line on its principles without being isolated. In January, South Africa convened the first meeting of what is now called the Hague Group—a new bloc of states committed to the defence of inter-

national law. That meeting brought together nine countries from across the Global South, including Asia, Africa, and Latin America, that share a deep concern about what is now widely termed the genocide in Gaza.

One of the most important immediate consequences of South Africa's ICJ action has been the widespread up-

take of the term "genocide" to describe what is happening in Gaza. For months, this word was taboo in diplomatic settings. Now, it is shaping how states and publics frame the conflict. That linguistic shift marks an increasingly effective challenge to the Western domination of the moral and legal narrative.

Continued on page 9

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Continued from page 8

Now, Colombia and South Africa are co-convening the next high-level meeting of the Hague Group in Bogotá on 15–16 July. This is a major diplomatic coup for both countries. Colombia, under the leadership of Gustavo Petro, is home to one of the most progressive governments in the world. Together, these two countries are building a new axis of international cooperation, rooted in justice, legality, and human rights.

The countries that have already confirmed participation in the meeting in Bogotá include: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Oman, Portugal, Qatar, Serbia, Spain, Türkiye, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Uruguay, and Palestine. More countries are currently discussing participation. The Hague Group is not simply reacting to the crisis in Gaza. It is attempting to build the institutional foundations for an enduring Global South capacity to intervene in multilateral processes. It is the crowning achievement of what has been an extraordinarily successful diplomatic strat-

egy by South Africa. While our country is confronting serious domestic challenges—unemployment, mass impoverishment, crime, and out-of-control corruption—its stance in the international sphere has shown that a principled foreign policy, rooted in the traditions of the anti-apartheid struggle, still has the power to resonate globally and to win global support.

As Ronnie Kasrils recently argued, the Hague Group carries the spirit of Bandung into the 21st century. In 1955, leaders of newly independent Asian and African nations gathered in Indonesia to affirm their commitment to sovereignty, non-alignment, and cooperation outside the Cold War binary. That historic conference laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement. From the 1960s onwards, newly independent states sought to use the UN system to push for economic redistribution, anti-colonial enforcement, and disarmament. That effort was eventually thwarted by Western powers. But the memory of that unfinished project remains—and informs this new moment.

Since the end of the Cold War, the moral and legal authority of the international

system set up after World War II has been held hostage by a small group of powerful states. The Hague Group insists that international law must apply consistently—to all countries, regardless of their power. It is this insistence that rattles Washington and its allies. The same international legal system that was brazenly ignored by the West during the invasions of Iraq, Libya and the bombing of Yugoslavia is now being invoked by the Global South to demand accountability and justice.

Colombia’s role in this process should not be underestimated. Once a key ally of US regional strategy in Latin America, Colombia has undergone a dramatic realignment under President Gustavo Petro. As I wrote in the Mail & Guardian earlier this year, Petro’s government, which brought together students, workers, environmentalists, and Indigenous communities, is one of the most progressive in the world today. It has been outspoken in its support for Palestinian rights, regional peace, and climate justice. By co-convening the Bogotá meeting, Colombia is placing itself firmly in the camp of internationalist, law-based diplomacy. This marks a departure not only from past governments, but

from the cynical realism that still defines so much of geopolitics.

The Hague Group’s credibility also rests on the fact that it is not just the product of elite diplomacy. In South Africa, Colombia, and many other countries that are participating in the meeting in Bogotá, there is tremendous popular support for Palestine. This alignment between state policy and popular movements is rare—and it gives the group an authenticity that cannot be dismissed as political posturing.

Moreover, the Hague Group has been warmly received by many Palestinian organisations, who see it as a rare and concrete gesture of solidarity in an era of global abandonment. Inevitably, the Arab states that have ‘normalised’ ties with Israel have been conspicuously silent, but others—like Iraq, Lebanon, and Qatar—have chosen to engage.

Taking this stance is not without risk. Countries that challenge the West’s narrative have faced the threat of aid withdrawal, diplomatic isolation, and investment flight. South Africa, Colombia, and many other countries that are taking a stand in support of international



law and justice have pro-West blocs at home that do all they can to escalate the sense that standing up for principle is risky. Yet despite these risks, more states are choosing to act—suggesting that the calculus of international politics may be changing in favour of principle over quiet submission.

What comes out of the Bogotá meeting will be crucial. Concrete proposals for enforcement mechanisms, monitoring systems, and coordinated legal strategies are reportedly on the agenda. These steps could strengthen the legal infrastructure of

the Global South and build pressure for accountability on the international stage. If the power and influence of the Hague Group continues to grow, it will make a major contribution to defending Palestinian rights and also to laying the groundwork for a transformed global order—rooted in law, justice, and solidarity.

South Africa has many serious problems at home, but on the international stage we are providing global leadership in a time of deep crisis.

Dr Buccus is editor of Al-Qalam



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LOCAL NEWS

Nearly a decade has passed but no one in Kashmir has forgotten his name

More than a decade ago, a young Kashmiri fighter named Burhan Wani captured the imagination of Kashmiris. SA born journalist Azad Essa reports

In the summer of 2016, 22-year-old Burhan Muzaffar Wani and his band of rebels quietly entered the apple orchards of south Kashmir's Bemdora Kokernag when Indian armed forces cordoned off the area. A social media phenomenon, young, he represented and symbolised a new era of armed resistance against Indian rule. His killing in July 2016 at the hands of Indian troops sparked an uprising across the region. Almost 10 years after his death, his memory still hovers over Kashmir.

A gunfight soon erupted between Burhan and Indian armed forces. Burhan, then the top rebel commander of armed outfit Hizbul Mujahideen was killed first.

He was followed by his two companions, Sartaj Ahmad Sheikh and Pervaiz Ahmad Lashkari. News of his martyrdom enveloped Kashmir in grief, and unfathomable rage. Shops were closed. Streets were desolate. This desolation was only broken with the chants of Azaadi and the stone pelting of armed forces by young men. The valley, known to be "paradise" on earth, was on fire that day.

Over the next several months, Kashmir became an open air prison. An indefinite curfew was imposed over large swathes of the Kashmir valley. For Indians, Burhan was simply a terrorist.

But for hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris who defied the Indian-military imposed curfew to attend his funeral in south Kashmir's Tral district, Burhan was a symbol of a stirring defiance against Indian rule. Many Kashmiris said that they had never seen such a larger rally in all their life.

Why Kashmir loves Burhan

When Burhan was 15, he was, along with his brother, arbitrarily picked up and mercilessly beaten and tortured by Indian forces. The experience motivated him to join the armed resistance against Indian rule. Kashmiris understood it all too

well. His humiliation was theirs. But when Burhan refused to hide behind a mask as he announced his fight against Indian rule, his courage lent a certain esteem to the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination. Each photo posted on social media in which he was seen dressed in fatigues and holding a weapon was an act of defiance against one of the world's largest armies. In his videos – which are close to impossible to locate on the internet today – he would address the injustice faced by Kashmiris and urge them to join the fight against India.

Burhan was a rebel of the digital age. He became the face of Kashmiri resistance, shattering India's narrative that armed rebels were from Pakistan or when they were from Kashmir, they were poor and uneducated and were being manipulated or paid into picking up arms against Delhi.

Burhan was born into a highly educated upper-class Kashmiri family.

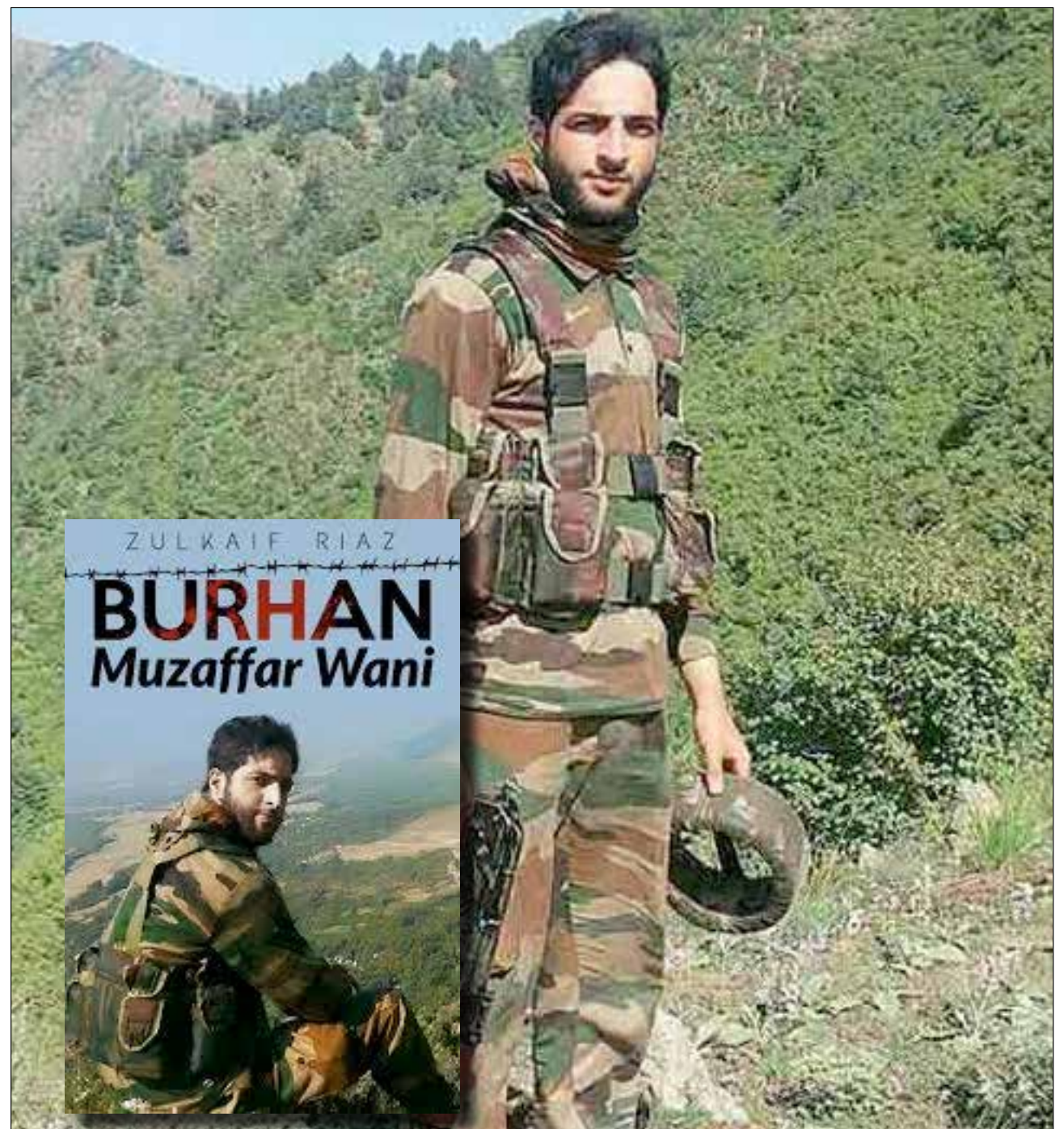
His father, Muzaffar Wani, was the principal of a government school and his mother, Maimoona Muzaffar, holds a post-graduate degree in science. The family was quite well-off financially. After his killing, protests broke out across the valley.

Thousands of armed forces were seen patrolling the streets, barricading the areas with barbed wire and warning people to stay indoors.

Despite all the measures taken to control the situation, angry Kashmiris took to the streets across many parts for days and pelted stones at the Indian armed forces, who responded with live fire, tear gas, and pump action shotguns that shot lead-plated pellets. Dozens were killed and hundreds of others injured.

Many Kashmiris, including teenagers under 15, were shot with pellets in the eyes, and left blind; some died from their pellet wounds.

When the unrest didn't dissipate – despite the heavy military presence in the region – hundred of more troops were sent to Kashmir to restore order. The violence was the worst seen in the valley for years. Knowing that his killing could lead to a massive



uprising, they suspended the annual Amarnath pilgrimage.

Phone services were shut down in south Kashmir, while mobile internet was blocked across the region to prevent any sort of mobilization of anti-India protests. Business establishments, government offices, educational institutions, train services, and shops—everything came to a halt due to curfew and hartal calls by the pro-freedom leaders.

Burhan had warned local police of the "consequences" if they continued to resist the freedom movement.

He was seen as a big threat by the Indian government, which is why they declared his killing as "the biggest success against militants" at the time. He was young, relatable, charismatic, and a popular rebel who connected with the youth like no one before by using his social media effectively. In doing so, he attracted

many young boys towards the cause of freedom.

With his death, a large number of youth, especially in south Kashmir, followed his path.

In the following years, hundreds of young men were killed in counterinsurgency operations and dozens of civilians, many of whom accused of providing rebels aid or an escape during gunfights, were shot dead.

And even when the protests subsided, the Indian government continued to impose restrictions on 8 July; including a strict curfew in Tral, Burhan's hometown. The 2016 uprising didn't end in weeks; it continued for more than half a year.

Delhi abrogated Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019, which ended Jammu and Kashmir's special status.

Now there is a deafening silence in the valley where

journalists are jailed and harassed for writing; human rights activists are accused of terrorism and held without charge; and thousands of young people and political leaders are picked up in midnight raids and linger in different jails.

The Indian government introduced several new laws aimed at changing land ownership and residency rights in the region.

These laws allowed non-residents to buy land and apply for domicile status, which was earlier restricted to permanent residents. The government stated that these changes were made to promote development and integration with the rest of India.

However, Kashmiris fear that the laws could lead to demographic changes by encouraging settlement from outside the region.

Today, there are hardly any protests held. No anti-India sentiment is tolerated. If anyone dared,

they would end up behind bars. Kashmir has always been known as the world's largest open-air prison. Rightly so. After 2019, the Indian government thrived on many narratives. One of these stories cultivated by the Indian government was that the resistance was dead. But every other week, there would be gunfights in different parts of Kashmir, which later moved to Jammu.

The defiance lives.

To this day, Kashmiris quietly remember Burhan and his resistance. Whether they express it openly or bury it in silence, the spirit of defiance lives on.

**Azad Essa is a senior reporter for Middle East Eye based in New York City. He worked for Al Jazeera English between 2010-2018 covering southern and central Africa for the network. He is the author of: 'The Moslems are Coming' (Harper Collins India) and 'Zuma's Bastard' (Two Dogs Books).*

Another boat has set sail for Gaza to end the Zionist blockade

By Al-Qalam Reporter

The Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) has announced that another civilian aid boat, the Handala, has set sail from Italy to Gaza to challenge "Israel's illegal, deadly blockade of the Palestinian people".

The boat carries life-saving humanitarian aid and a message of solidarity from people around the world who are refusing to stay silent as Gaza is starved, bombed, and buried under rubble.

On board are volunteer medics, lawyers, social justice activists, journalists, and community organizers. "We are not governments. We are people, taking action where institutions have failed," The Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) said in a press statement.

This mission comes just weeks after Israel's ille-

gal attack on the Madleen, another Freedom Flotilla boat, which was violently seized in international waters. Twelve unarmed civilians, including a Member of the European Parliament, a doctor, journalists, and human rights defenders, were abducted by Israeli commandos and taken against their will to Israel, where they were interrogated, abused, then deported. Their "crime"? Attempting to bring food, medicine, and solidarity to Palestinians under siege.

The press statement made it clear: "We are not backing down".

"Handala sails in the shadow of ongoing mass atrocities. Since March 18, 2025, when Israel broke the ceasefire and resumed attacks on Gaza, at least 6,572 Palestinians have been killed and over 23,000 injured, according to Gaza's Health Minister".

Among them, over 700

were gunned down as they waited for food at distribution points controlled by the U.S. and Israel-backed "Gaza Humanitarian Foundation" (GHF), a death trap masquerading as an aid scheme, a structure of control and cruelty serving Israel's genocide. Handala is part of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, a grassroots international network that has been sailing against the blockade since 2010.

Named after the Palestinian cartoon figure Handala, a barefoot refugee child who turned his back on injustice and vowed not to turn around until Palestine is free, this boat carries his spirit and that of every child in Gaza who has been denied safety, dignity, and joy.

In 2023 and 2024, Handala sailed to ports around Europe and the UK, breaking through the media blockade, engaging the public, and building solidarity through press events, art installa-



tions, and political education in every port it visited.

"The children of Gaza, who make up over half the population, have been living

under a brutal blockade and siege for their entire lives. Since October 2023, over 50,000 have been killed or injured, tens of thousands orphaned, and nearly a mil-

lion forcibly displaced and homeless. All now face famine, disease, and trauma few of us can imagine. This mission is for them", the Coalition said.

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OPINION

The corporate giants fueling Israel’s war machine



By Dr Ramzy Baroud

Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in occupied Palestine, stands as a testament to the notion of speaking truth to power. This “power” is not solely embodied by Israel or even the US, but by an international community whose collective relevance has tragically failed to stem the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Her latest report, “From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide,” submitted to the UN Human Rights Council last week, marks a seismic intervention. It unflinchingly names and implicates companies that have not only allowed Israel to sustain its war and genocide against Palestinians, but also con-

fronts those who have remained silent in the face of this unfolding horror.

Albanese’s “Economy of Genocide” is far more than an academic exercise or a mere moral statement in a world whose collective conscience is being brutally tested in Gaza. The report is significant for multiple interlocking reasons. Crucially, it offers practical pathways to accountability that transcend diplomatic and legal rhetoric. It also presents a novel approach to international law, positioning it not as a delicate political balancing act, but as a potent tool to confront complicity in war crimes and expose the profound failures of the existing international mechanisms in Gaza.

There is vital context that is necessary to understand the significance of this report, which is considered a searing indictment of direct corporate involvement, not only in the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza but Israel’s overall settler-colonial project.

In February 2020, following years of delay, the UN Human Rights Council re-

leased a database that listed 112 companies involved in business activities within illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. The database exposed several corporate giants for helping Israel maintain its military occupation and apartheid.

This was particularly earth-shattering considering the UN’s consistent failure to rein in Israel or hold accountable those who sustain its war crimes in Palestine. The publication of the database was an important step that allowed civil societies to mobilize around a specific set of priorities, thus pressuring corporations and individual governments to take morally guided positions. The effectiveness of that strategy was clearly detected through the exaggerated and angry reactions of the US and Israel. The US said it was an attempt by “the discredited” council “to fuel economic retaliation,” while Israel called it a “shameful capitulation” to pressure.

The Israeli war on Gaza, starting on Oct. 7, 2023, however, serves as a stark reminder of the utter failure of all existing UN mechanisms to achieve even the

most modest expectations of feeding a starving population during a time of genocide. Tellingly, this was the same conclusion offered by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who, in September 2024, stated that the world had “failed the people of Gaza.”

The Israeli war on Gaza serves as a stark reminder of the utter failure of all existing UN mechanisms.

This failure continued for many more months and was highlighted by the UN’s inability to even manage aid distribution in the Strip, with Israel and the US instead entrusting the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a violent, mercenary-run apparatus that has killed and wounded thousands of Palestinians. Albanese herself, of course, had already reached a similar conclusion when, in November 2023, she confronted the international community for “epically failing” to stop the war.

Albanese’s new report goes a step further, this time appealing to the whole of humanity to take a moral stance and confront those that have made the genocide

possible. “Commercial endeavors enabling and profiting from the obliteration of innocent people’s lives must cease,” the report declares, pointedly demanding that “corporate entities must refuse to be complicit in human rights violations and international crimes or be held to account.”

In the report, the categories of complicity in the genocide are divided into arms manufacturers, tech firms, building and construction companies, extractive and service industries, banks, pension funds, insurers, universities, and charities.

Their collective technological know-how, machinery and data collection has allowed Israel to kill, to date, more than 57,000 and wound 134,000 in Gaza, while also maintaining its apartheid regime in the West Bank.

What Albanese’s report tries to do is not merely name and shame Israel’s genocide partners, but to tell us, as civil society, that we now have a comprehensive frame of reference that allows us to make responsible decisions and pressure and hold accountable these

corporate giants. “The ongoing genocide has been a profitable venture,” Albanese writes, citing Israel’s massive surge in military spending, estimated at 65 percent from 2023 to 2024 — reaching \$46.5 billion.

Israel’s seemingly infinite military budget is a strange loop of money, originally provided by the US government, then recycled back through American corporations, thus spreading the wealth between governments, politicians, corporations and numerous contractors. As bank accounts swell, more Palestinian bodies are piled up in morgues and mass graves or are scattered in the streets of Jabaliya and Khan Younis.

This madness needs to stop and, since the UN is incapable of stopping it, then individual governments, civil society organizations and ordinary people must do the job, because the lives of Palestinians should be of far greater value than corporate profits and greed.

**Dr. Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and the Editor of The Palestine Chronicle.*

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