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**Solidarity beyond words!**

**Building people to people links.**

This is my dream! Let us stand together to make this second tier, an additional level of action in solidarity, real!

Before I expand on the dream, allow me first to make two divergent yet intertwined preliminary remarks that locate me in the South African struggle that brought an end to race-based, Apartheid rule, but not – as yet – equitable and economic justice to the majority of our people.

First. And It gives me no pleasure to say this, but to say it helps to give meaning to solidarity, as someone who sought reclamation from the burden of coming from the perpetrator class. **Dissent within the perpetrator class is always important**; look at the impact of the thousands of heroic Jews who say ‘not in my name; look at the student dissent in the USA at the moment! I was one of those who organized dissent in the White, South African, perpetrator class.

I am South African, born just after WWII in the country now known as Namibia, but that was at that time colonized for the second time. It was first colonized by Germany and after WWI by South Africa. You will have noticed that my name is a give-away that speaks to my German roots and hence inevitably to the genocide committed in Namibia. This first genocide was followed by the German prosecuted holocaust against Jewish and other people. And then, there is yet a third tier: I was born into and educated to become a product of Apartheid in South Africa. My closest family were well-wishers of all three oppressions, though arguably, not executioners in the three worst abuses against people of another ethnicity. I was fortunate to be woken from the racist slumber as a young man. Confronting it left no room for neutrality or looking the other way. My life’s commitment and work has been to be on the side of the exploited, the discriminated against, those denigrated and looked down upon, their dignity trampled on by the class who ruled in three different periods.

Second: I feel shattered at the testimonies of Palestinian witnesses over the past two days. I feel honoured to share this podium with someone who only recently was incarcerated. In solidarity with you goes deep! I too was once a political detainee, held under what Apartheid called Section 6 under the Terrorism Act. I spent three months in solitary confinement, the first days of which in a cell next to the gallows where people were routinely hanged, one person during my first desperate days in Pretoria Central prison. I used to envy the Black prisoners; they were many and could chat and debate and console each other. I was in the white section of the prison and, - all the cells around me were empty. When I shouted, at night, pulling myself up at the bars to the corridor, I was caught and removed to even greater isolation. I was never charged, never appeared in court, and had no access to a lawyer. – Later I had to choose exile; fifteen years before I could return home.

Enough of that. This is what we South Africans can offer – always with an ear open to do it hearing and listening to you!

At this conference our theme is the expression of solidarity with you the Palestinian people and to find ways to bring an end to your suffering. My objective today is help build a movement in which, in our hundreds of thousands, we not just wear our keffiyeh scarf but that we each do something that makes your and my solidarity a real and practical action. Vitally this must foresee a role for each one including the very large numbers of Jews who say ‘not in my name’ AND all those others who commit themselves by defecting from the perpetrator classes they come from. The American student are an example – they have broken from those who perpetrate the evil of oppression!

It is an honour to be standing here before you today. Thank you Rev Frank Chikane and the other organizers for inviting me. From my practical experience I hope and trust that my words will lead to another and additional level of actions.

My address has two components: one is a brief sketch of what the organisation I once headed, the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) stood for and did, and secondly how lessons from it should be adapted to provide more and very specific solidarity with Palestinian detainees, prisoners, their families and with those forced to be refugees.

To start with, what did the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF) do and what did it achieve? Each of my points listed below is a stimulus for adaptation for the Palestine situation.

* IDAF was extra to, and complimentary to, the Anti-Apartheid movements in various countries. It did not duplicate but complimented what AAMs did.
* The IDAF existed for 35 years (from 1956 – 1991) with its head-quarters in London. It was founded by Canon Collins when the infamous SA treason trial, in which Nelson Mandela and 155 other resistance leaders stood trial, many of them sentenced to life imprisonment four years after the trial started.
* IDAF collected funds to ensure that anyone resisting Apartheid, irrespective of their ideology, method of struggle or skin colour had a defence lawyer. To the extent possible and despite the unjust laws, those charged should have defence lawyers, and hence each prisoners story should and could become known to the outside world.
* The basis of providing a defence lawyer extended to everyone detained, imprisoned without a trial, held incommunicado, suffering torture and deprivation. Even if our lawyers were denied access to their client in prison, it was the task of a lawyer to keep making representations to the authorities at juridical but also at political levels – thus ensuring that nobody was left out and more importantly giving those incarcerated the knowledge that even when suffering solitude, deprivation and assault or torture, someone would be arguing their case; even if the lawyer only had the name of the individual arrested. Every South Africa incarcerated prisoner knew from the moment of their arrest that, however difficult, their rights would be fought for!
* IDAF was able to provide defence lawyers in thousands of trials and to tens of thousands of prisoners, between 1956-1991. We have the records to show who acted for whom!
* In 1966 the SA Apartheid Government outlawed our organization. This did not stop us! From abroad our lawyers appointed SA lawyers to act on their behalf and innovative ways were found to pay them for their work!
* At the height of our struggle against oppression in SA (which included the occupied territories of what are today Zimbabwe and Namibia), we secured hundreds of millions of SA Rands – making IDAF, with its 75 staff compliment, one of the largest not-for-profit organisations in the UK. The British Observer reported in 1991 that IDAF had sent GBP 100 million of aid into South Africa during our struggle, most of it via illegal channels.
* Who paid? The country that deserves the largest applause for us succeeding in our task was Sweden, and with them the other Scandinavian countries. But at the United Nations, the committee against Apartheid, operated the UN Trust Fund to which member states provided funds. At one stage 56 member states of the UN contributed either directly or indirectly to IDAF.
* Do not underestimate the pressure this put on SA regime! The politically conscious legal fraternity inside SA and internationally, through this concerted effort became yet another front who fought on our side of the struggle. Apartheid SA struggled to make itself heard at countless international fora.
* There was a second string to the IDAF operation. Through our network we also collected the names and addresses of the families of those held in prisons. We teamed up with thousands of families all over the world in one to one relationships with thousands of families inside SA. They exchanged letters, often for a decade or more. Close friendships developed. After Apartheid they visited each other. The impact of this type of solidarity is incalculable.
* This second tier of family to family work was coordinated in London. We collected copies of each letter sent and each reply received. Close friendships between families developed even if they had never met physically. With on average, six letters to and six replies per annum, you can imagine how over the decades this became one massive archive. When Apartheid finally fell, we sent all the collected letters to the UWC Archives. It took 1.5 ships containers to get the letters to SA. These letters are an exceptional and utterly unique record, not least because the letter writers at both ends tended to be women. It constitutes a unique record of how mostly poor women experienced Apartheid on a daily basis. This is a monumental record not easily matched anywhere in the world.
* Through international Postal Orders the internal families were enabled to travel at least once a year to visit their loved-one, generally at Robben Island prison whilst also paying for the school fees of their children.

That constitutes a briefest of brief pen-sketches of my organisation, the IDAF of Southern Africa. We avoided the lime-light; we were the back-room girls and boys who had to be good at meticulously building an administration whose aim it was to pick up on each and every suffering family of the resistance.

Let me add one factor in all of this that should not be over-looked. For those in the frontline of struggle or who are under attack by the oppressor, we built a very tangible and very personal connection of incalculable solidarity. The objective was for this support to be felt by everyone without exception. That is not all, by involving a large swathe of the legal fraternity and by building thousands of family links across countries our work conscientized and politicized the international community in unique quarters. They became a silent but significant guarantor of democracy, of justice, of equality between people’s.

My dream is that solidarity be exercised by a relevant professional structure, through as many South African lawyers as can be recruited to exert pressure on Israel as possible. Let us work to engage them in this fight for justice – the more who join to act the more solidarity has real meaning. Let us equally recruit SA families who link up, via social media, with Palestinian families.

**Now, with the time left to me, let me imagine, how the Monument to solidarity beyond words might be imagined for the Palestinian people.**

My dream is for the creation of a SA-Palestine Solidarity in Action I’ll call it SAPSA for the sake of brevity. Please note that this is for illustrative purposes only.

**Firstly, the Legal aspect:**

1. To build a dedicated office with administrative capacity under the guidance of the follow-up of this Anti-Apartheid conference, solely dedicated to the objective of the practical solidarity that I outlined above. [I place emphasis on the need for capable administrators as opposed to those in the trenches of the political campaigns.]
2. That this SAPSA, or whatever name it might be given, builds a register of all detainees, political prisoners and those killed through torture by Israel, irrespective of their ideology or national identity. This register serves to then link a SA lawyer or law firm take up a case or cases. If the incarcerated person previously had a lawyer, to link up with them and indicate that they wish to monitor and support the local legal instance in the pursuit of whatever justice was or is denied them.
3. As is implicit from the above, for SAPSA to identify willing lawyers or law firms, to ask if they will take on the task of representing one or more of those held under ‘administrative detention’ as well as those sentenced under unjust laws. The request would be to engage the Israeli authorities, in the first instance through written communication.
4. Their obligation is to communicate with any defence representative of those in prisons and find out what supplementary role they might be able to play as lawyers concerned for those whose rights are at stake in a different jurisdiction.
5. Beyond this to engage the Israeli Judiciary, relevant Ministries or diplomatic channels to seek information about the well-being of specified individuals, including their rights under International Conventions.
6. That SAPSA work to expand this to the widest network of human rights lawyers throughout our land.

1. That every lawyer or law firm report back to the SAPSA coordinators in an effort to pursue a wider objective where collective action may be envisaged.
2. The IDAF had vast funds to pay for legal representation in the Apartheid courts. Funds are not at the disposal of an envisaged SAPSA initially, but the matter of funds may be entertained as a supplementary objective of SAPSA.
3. That additionally, SAPSA reach out to legal fraternities in other countries to replicate this work and in so doing to further increase the pressure on Israel.

Secondly, person-to-person solidarity:

1. Every Palestinian in Gaza, the West Bank or refugee to be allocated one family in SA via a social media platform. There are to be as many South African family friends as there are Palestinians – linking one SA family to one Palestine family in as many linkages as possible.

1. That the SA family obligate themselves to send a solidarity message at least once every week to their befriended Palestinian family
2. That the SA family remain linked with SAPSA to aim at maximum coverage. The linkage via social media affords a means that enables anyone to partake, irrespective of their economic standing.
3. For the SA family to log all or notable communications with SAPSA, to-and-fro in an effort to build the greatest record ever of the feelings, experiences, story’s of loss, pain, resilience and moments of joy.
4. That SAPSA serves as the monitor that counters any hate speech, notably antisemitism.
5. For SAPSA to encourage other countries to build similar solidarity networks.
6. SAPSA is not a platform to organize political movements. SAPSA is solely there to let every ordinary Palestinian feel South African solidarity from the widest base possible. This act affords ordinary South Africans a chance to make their solidarity manifest itself through a simple human action that is repeated, again and again.
7. The friendships that will be built are to last for the duration that the people of Palestine are oppressed and denied justice. These friendships may become lasting connections into a next generation. May they visit one another one day and celebrate our common humanity!
8. Gifts between the one-to-one relationships may be exchanged. When requests are beyond the means of one family they are encouraged to escalate the need to SAPSA without SAPSA promising automatically meet each need.

My dream, is that thousands of ordinary South Africans partake in linkages that build increased awareness amongst our people at levels not presently open to them.

The fact that we South Africans were beneficiaries of so much international solidarity, channeled through IDAF, obligates us as South Africans to show our solidarity practically in actions beyond words.

I fervently wish for this dream to become realized! I thank you for your attention.

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