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Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights

Concept Note

Muwatin's 29th Annual Conference

“Strategic Thinking in the Time of Monsters and their Wars: The Status of Rights and Prospects of Liberation”

To be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, 29-30 October 2024

The Palestinian people continue to suffer from colonization in its various manifestations, including displacement, settlement, occupation, looting of resources, exploitation, apartheid, and genocide despite the long struggle, remarkable heroism, and epic steadfastness they have shown. Much of this is accompanied by the reduction of liberation to symbols and secondary structures instead of people's emancipation, a splintered bio-politic, a hazy national project, and the absence of a unified resistance/national front. The reduction of liberation includes replacing the struggle for a homeland with one for a state and fragmenting that state whilst it is still nascent. These repercussions resulted in absenting liberation prospects, and a growing scepticism concerning national project, which was recently seen as a given postulate. Even in light of the growing unmasking of Zionist racism internationally, the transformation of Israel into a burden on its allies, the impressive global popular solidarity with the Palestinian people, and the shift to new thresholds of condemnation of the Israeli occupation and its practices within the instruments of international law, the Palestinian political structures are still unable to achieve any breakthrough towards emancipation and the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people.

The most recent wave of criminal onslaught is carried out while we, along with the rest of the world, witness symptoms of transformation in the world order. While there are still more questions than answers about this new global order, we have already witnessed some signs of struggle over its nature and its forces. Amongst these signs are, inter alia, the polarization of powers between and within countries, and the struggle of imperialist powers to maintain their status. However, on the other front, we also witness new transformations coupling the Palestinian emancipatory project with the new world order. This is evident in the wide support for the Palestinian people's rights, which is expressed by the vision of those who stand in solidarity of the unity of the global struggle against the common source of economic, social, political, and environmental challenges facing humanity. These are embodied in the spread of poverty, unemployment, violent conflicts, multifaceted oppression, widening social and class gaps, the erosion of education and health systems, and the destruction of the environment. Thus, there is a need to reshape the Palestinian national project in a manner that strengthens its emancipatory component, enabling it to serve as an aspiration to broad popular segments around the world, and in a way that terminates any illusions of a possibility of achieving freedom in alliance and coordination with its enemies

The reality of the national project and the new world order share being part of a phase that Gramsci designates as “the time of monsters”; it is the time when the old is dying, and the new is struggling to be born. The monsters in this context are the forces of the old world order, which aggressively seek to maintain their threatened hegemony and survive while diminishing. The essence of the conflict does not lie in the creation, building, and consolidation – the birth of the new reality, but rather in the nature of the new-born – what it represents. The dying old is struggling to maintain the status quo with all its might. It uses force, wealth, power, and

sway. It distracts efforts, expands wars and conflicts, destruction, and entrenches and reproduces racism, fragments identities in conjunction with local prejudice, exclusion, oppression, and disinformation. These forces are working hard to suppress the newborn, attempting to buy its loyalty in advance, lower its expectations, and keep it preoccupied in preserving its own survival that is threatened by hunger, thirst, violence, and terrorism. The alliance between the imperialist powers (who initiated the “war on terrorism”) and terrorists themselves is an indicator of how despicable these monsters are.

The danger posed by the “monsters” increases if it remains unchecked. It grows and ends with self-destruction and destruction of the world with it - this is exactly what precedes world wars. Imperialist forces increasingly resort to threats, posturing, military interventions, and proxy wars are expressions of this danger, which today reached the threshold of threatening to use nuclear weapons. Those promoting nuclear weapons are not from besieged North Korea, but rather NATO members, Russia, and, recently, the Israeli Prime Minister in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly. Suggesting, brazenly, the use of nuclear arms to deter Iran - a crowning of the Israeli monster’s trek. Even if the expression betrayed him - as Israeli speakers pointed out - this is the Freudian slip par excellence. Regardless to the tools, the drive for killing, destruction, ethnic cleansing, pushing the ongoing Nakba to new levels, and the genocide in Gaza is what defines the Israeli role at this stage. The brutal imperialist nature of Israel’s supporter states also surfaced and became clear, bypassing their traditional silence on Israeli crimes and declaring their readiness and desire to contribute to the war of extermination against the Palestinians.

There is another side to the story, the heroes who are actively confronting the monsters. Over the last two decades a counter front has emerged; wrought by progressive movements aspiring to change, justice, equality, freedom, and human dignity. Naturally, these forces have not emerged out of thin air; born out the forces the old regime suppressed and exploited, they were formed, and shaped by the cumulative transformations of previous experiences. The forces’ efforts to create change have taken various forms, used soft and hard methods, acted from within the system and from outside it, by trying to join it and by trying to stand against it, but these techniques have yet to mature. To contribute to maturing these techniques, in addition to monitoring the manifestations of the crisis of the failing (neoliberal) world order, we need to analyse it, and identify the essential features that must be changed and ensure the targeting of root-causes and not merely their manifestations. We need to demarcate the actual forces that must be confronted (and not suffice confronting their proxies), and identify and create organizational forms and structures that enable progressive forces to confront these monsters.

The central question that this conference seeks to address lies in understanding the radical transformations of what constitutes the confrontation, its elements, context and tools. Confrontation between emancipatory and hegemonic forces is not new, but the future context of the confrontation is. Hence, its understanding is a condition for the success of the struggle for emancipation. The “monsters” introduce new details, tools and limits to the confrontation daily. They utilise the many tools in their possession to change the rules of the game continually, and constantly create secondary theatres in an attempt to distract the efforts of the forces that challenge their hegemony. What is happening at the level of the instruments of different branches of international law, such as the two international courts at the Hague, points to the struggle of forces to contain these instruments.

Among multiple things can be pointed out, in addition to the demising neoliberal era of the capitalist system, is that neoliberalism has destroyed elements, which are central to modernity, like liberalism, the nation-state, and the centrality of territory (place). All these elements are foundational for the concept of national liberation, including the contemporary understanding

of self-determination, the prevailing mode of political organization (parties), and the “glue” that forms a people. All these aspects are gradually diminishing. Therefore, it is likely that these features will not belong to the new world order, unless they acquire new forms, and significance that result from the reproduction of modernity’s features in post-modern formats. For the national liberation project, this means that adhering to the old understanding of national liberation without connecting it to global emancipatory agendas will serve the colonial project by suppressing and dwarfing national liberation (along with other emancipatory projects).

Such transformations will impact the Palestinian national project in direct and essential ways. Although the core of the project (emancipation) will stay the same, achieving it is dependent on the changing context. This implies the necessity of reshaping the project to apposite the new context. These transformations will have drastic implications on the place of democracy, which can keep diminishing until it becomes ineffective in the event of a shift towards oligarchic political systems. Otherwise, it will become more critical and central in the event of the success of emancipatory projects, and will enable moving beyond the liberal system; which limited democracy to its procedures, and beyond the neoliberal system, which limited procedures to processes of control and compliance.

Regarding human rights and its system, it will, in all cases, have a place on the agenda of the new world, unlike the Palestinian national project, which the reactionary camp seeks to abolish, and unlike democracy that was removed from the forefront of the global political scene. Despite the fact that the international human rights regime clearly failed to liberate people, or even to guarantee a minimum level of human dignity, human rights discourse will likely be adopted by both camps (conservative and progressive). It will probably continue to take an intermittent pattern among the conservative camp, and a discourse that often goes beyond it among the progressive camp, and, however, the struggle to gain legitimacy by both camps will force them to maintain a human rights discourse. Just as the status of human rights took a turn with the emergence of the neoliberal era, it is expected to transform again with its end. The nature of human rights and their system will become the concern of emancipatory forces: will the system include an emancipatory effect rather than playing the role of neutralizing conflicts and turning them into demands or pacifying tools that make promises and place hopes for a better future without confronting the obstacles to achieving just solutions, or even confronting the obstacles to a future altogether.

These questions take the Palestinian national project to a more complex space for two incompatible sets of causes that have similar consequences. The first set relates to the distortions and hardships that are characteristic to the demise of neoliberalism, which left its fingerprints on the Palestinian national movement. These include the transformations that led to the fragmentation of this movement and its division into two groups (national forces and Islamic forces), coinciding with neoliberalism’s fruition of identities (ethnic, sectarian, regional, and other) which contributed to the fading and disappearance of nationalist and class tendencies from the political scene. The second set relates to the occupation that belonged to the colonial era that preceded the era of national liberation (the third quarter of the last century), and today it belongs to the stage of decay of the neoliberal era. At this stage, neoliberalism resorts to utilising tools that it borrows from previous eras, because it cannot suffice with neocolonial tools. This need for old colonial tools made Israel a leading functional model of rotting neoliberalism. This is why threatened regimes overcome their reluctance to cooperate with the state that poses a clear threat to global security, since this state can provide a lifeline for expired regimes.

The above implies that researchers who study the Palestinian national project should pay attention to the handicap of limiting the analysis of the struggle against occupation by

perceptions of classical colonialism (regardless to its settler colonial nature). Such a limitation, produces the risk of limiting national liberation to the national framework of striving for a state, and results in losing the ability to diagnose the transformations that have occurred in the Zionist project with its neoliberal transformations, and the subsequent transformations towards fascism that we witness today. Such framing will lead to defects in the process of directing the libertarian compass.

Rubrics

Muwatin's 29th Annual Conference will discuss the above-mentioned issues in an ambit that looks at the Palestinian question in its broader regional and global context. In this ambit, the Israeli occupation is seen as a part of a global colonial system that has its proxies, who play different roles in multiple domains. These will be discussed under three main rubrics:

First Rubric: Diagnosing the crisis of the world order and its impact on the Palestinian national project. This rubric discusses the crisis of the existing world order, and the prospects of its survival or demise. It also discusses manifestations of the cracks that indicate its inability to reproduce itself, and the tools and options of conservative forces to get out of their crisis. Additionally, it seeks to examine possible effects on the Palestinian national project in light of the transformations taking place at the global level, which include the diminishing impact of international law at the backdrop of global transformations, and the failure of the international legal system in stopping the genocide in Gaza (as it failed to stop other manifestations of colonialism).

Second Rubric: Mechanisms that can impact world order transformations. This rubric aims to discuss the nature of the powers that are able to contribute to change, and the potential of the Palestinian national project's involvement in the birth of a new world order. It also seeks to discuss the nature, tools, prospects, and place of emerging progressive and emancipatory forces, and their potential contribution to current transformations, as well as their relation to the Palestinian national project. In addition, this rubric seeks to examine the status of democracy in light of existing transformations and the agendas of the progressive forces. Moreover, it aims to discuss the prospects of human rights and their ability to form an emancipatory tool in the new world order, and ways to influence the international legal system to facilitate the achievement of these goals.

Third Rubric: Features of the Palestinian National Project in the future context. This rubric focuses on the requirements for the transformation, stability and success of the Palestinian national project in light of the existing international turmoil, and the internal transformations needed to absorb and influence them. It aims to examine what is required by Palestinians to avoid possible negative consequences of the world order transformations. It will also look into the scope of what Palestinians can do in order to maintain freedom and human rights in the centre of the Palestinian national project - a component of new alliances and engagement with global progressive forces – in parallel with confronting the ongoing colonial acts in creating “facts on the ground” such as displacement, land expropriation, and genocide.