



Middle East without Wars and Oppressions. Bilbao Working Team - Coordination

**GERRARIK ETA ZAPALKUNTZA BARIK EKIALDE
HURBILAREN ALDE. BILBOKO LAN TALDEA**

We, the networks, organizations, research and academic centers, movements and social actors, have decided to call for a forum entitled "The Bilbao Initiative: Towards a Just Peace in Palestine". Doing so, we positively respond to the initiative of the MEWANDO Network and other social networks, organizations and actors in the Basque Country, the Spanish State, the Middle East and Europe, following the Palestinian-Israeli-European forum and the Palestinian-Israeli meeting organized in Bilbao on October 17 to October 19, 2003. A just peace can only be achieved with an organized civil society and on the basis of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the right to self determination. With this Reference Document, we call for a genuine mobilization of international civil society in favor of justice and sustainable peace in Palestine.

The Bilbao Initiative: Towards a Just Peace in Palestine

Reference Document

October 2008

During the past years, war, occupation and foreign domination have been spreading across the Middle East, resulting in atrocities, destruction, war crimes and grave violations of the fundamental rights of people. This scenario is particularly acute in the Israeli-Palestinian colonial conflict, where Israel -- with active political, diplomatic and economic support from world powers, particularly the US and the EU -- has for sixty years sought to control as much of historic Palestine with as few of its indigenous Palestinian people as possible.

The Oslo process and the Road Map which stemmed from the Madrid Middle East peace conference in 1991 ignored the basic requirements for justice and therefore failed in establishing enduring peace, security or prosperity in Palestine and the region. Most recently, the Annapolis Conference, initiated to serve the narrow interests of the US administration in the region, entirely ignored not only the tenets of international law but also the main requisites for a just resolution of the conflict. In fact, all these governmental initiatives were viewed by a majority in the region as attempts to cover up, if not collude with, an ongoing process of colonization of the Palestinian territory, of social and economic destabilization, and of progressive deterioration of living conditions in the region.

The three basic requirements for justice and lasting, comprehensive peace are:

1. An end to the Israeli occupation and colonization of the occupied Arab and Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem;
2. The recognition and implementation of the rights of Palestinian refugees, including their right to return to their lands and properties, in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III); and
3. Ending the Israeli system of racial discrimination against and delegitimization of the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Since the year 2000, Israel's colonial and racist policies against the Palestinian people have continued to worsen, manifesting themselves in repeated use of collective punishment; massive colonization of and the construction of the Apartheid Wall on occupied land; plundering of Palestinian natural resources; fragmentation of Palestinian society; demolition of homes; denial of basic freedoms through siege and military closures; incarceration of thousands of political prisoners; hindering access to education and health services; indiscriminate killings of civilians, a third of whom were children; systematic destruction of Palestinian civil and social infrastructures; and the substantial devastation of Palestinian farm lands and the environment.



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In 2006, following the exercise of their democratic right to freely elect their representatives, the Palestinians were subjected to what started as a severe economic and financial blockade imposed by Israel, the US and the EU and later developed into a full-fledged siege of 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, described by ranking UN officials and human rights organizations as war crimes. The latest EU policy aimed at upgrading the EU-Israel Association Agreement despite Israel's grave and persistent violation of the Agreement's own human rights clause is widely viewed by Palestinian civil society and its international supporters as insistence on complicity with Israel's occupation and human rights violations.

The actual situation in the region, 60 years after the establishment of the State of Israel through the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, or the *Nakba*, after 41 years of continuous Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms, 5 years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, is reaching a boiling point. This and the intensifying US-Israeli threats of war against Iran -- and earlier, Syria -- confirm the need for effective and urgent solidarity, as well as a regional, multilateral approach that conforms to international law and universal principles of human rights.

In light of the above, we believe that creative and effective support for the Palestinian civil society's unified Call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with its obligations under international law is the most morally and politically sound instrument of solidarity in the struggle for freedom, equality and a just peace.

Today, representatives of Basque, Spanish and European civil society are inviting their counterparts from the region to establish a civil agenda for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and to collectively and effectively organize to pressure governments as well as local and international institutions to contribute to justice and peace in Palestine and the region. Above everything else, this civil full respects and promotes the inalienable right of all the people in the region to live in peace, freedom, equality and dignity, in compliance with international law and universal human rights.

For this reason, "The Bilbao Initiative: Towards a Just Peace in Palestine" convenes this special meeting, sharing the deep concerns and the demands expressed in the successive reports by the UN's former special rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, John Dugard, to promote the urgent and multilateral search for a just and lasting peace based on international law, the pertinent UN resolutions and the consultative opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which condemned the illegality of the Israeli Wall and settlements established on occupied Palestinian and Arab land.

By launching this initiative, the Bilbao Initiative builds successive declarations issued by the European Coordinating Committee on the question of Palestine (ECCP) on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the occupation of the Palestinian territories (West Bank, Gaza strip, East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights), the resolution by the Spanish Congress of Deputies and the joint declaration by the parliamentary Intergroup for Palestine and the Solidarity network against the occupation of Palestine, dated 26 April 2007.

Giving voice to civil society, which has fought for years to promote justice and peace in Palestine and the region, is a duty of all those organizations and citizens who believe a better world is possible and are working towards it. Our joint struggle must be solidly based on:

- Acceptance of international law;
- Agreement on the equality of all humans -- regardless of religious, ethnic, gender or other identity -- and, therefore, on the equal entitlement of all to human rights;
- Commitment to ending colonial, racist and social oppression.