



Red Flag Alert for Genocide

Israel

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On December 28th, 2022 Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted that “the Jewish people have an exclusive and unquestionable right to all areas of the Land of Israel. The government will promote and develop settlement in all parts of the Land of Israel — in the Galilee, the Negev, the Golan, Judea and Samaria,” making its new government priority an explicit and total Jewish supremacy over historical Palestine at the expense of any Palestinian land claims. Erasing land claims, and especially replacing one group’s claims with another’s, is frequently a precursor to the erasure of people, as hundreds of years of genocide has taught us. In light of Netanyahu’s profoundly disturbing statement, as well as the recent provocations by Israeli political leaders in an increasingly extremist political context, the Lemkin Institute for the Prevention of Genocide is issuing a genocide red flag alert for Israel.

We are particularly concerned about the return to power of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 29 December 2022 and the inauguration of the most religiously conservative and right-wing government in the country’s history. On 1 November 2022, Netanyahu’s party, the Likud, won the legislative elections with the support of the far right and ultra-Orthodox parties. The Israeli parliament now has a majority of religious and right-wing lawmakers who all hold hardline views against the Palestinians. This government seems dead-set on dismantling Israel’s democratic institutions, which are perhaps the last bulwark against the speeding up of what has been a slow genocide against Palestinians since 1948.

The new government coalition is composed of parties led by several controversial and ultra-nationalist figures such as Bezalel Smotrich (head of "Religious Zionism"), Itamar Ben Gvir (head of "Jewish Force"), and Avi Maoz (head of the far-right religious Zionist “Noam” party). These leaders are of major concern because of their anti-democratic, anti-Palestinian, racist, and openly anti-LGBTQIA+ positions, and because of their favorable stance towards the annexation of part of the West Bank. Members of the new government wasted no time in showing their extremist political intentions and hostility towards the Palestinians. In a provocative move on January 3rd, Itamar Ben Gvir, an Israeli far-right figure and the new Minister of National Security, visited the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, a holy site at the heart of tensions in East Jerusalem, raising fears of greater provocations to come.

Several human rights organizations have warned that the Israeli regime now in place creates a climate conducive to mass atrocities because of the impunity granted to the Israeli government, especially by its most powerful backer, the United States. The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention believes that the risk of genocide against Palestinians is now more pressing than it has been in many decades. Human rights groups almost across the board have considered 2022 to be the most brutal year for Palestinians since 2006, even before the ascension of this new far right government. Palestinian deaths at the hands of Israelis have risen, Palestinian children have become increasingly targeted by security forces, Palestinian homes have been demolished in rapid succession, restrictions on movement for Palestinians have grown, Jewish settlements have rapidly expanded, settler violence against Palestinians is on the rise, and genocidal hate speech against Palestinians is expressed with complete impunity and perhaps even with widespread support. The Israeli state and much of its society seem primed to get rid of the Palestinians once and for all.

In such a situation, the Palestinians risk losing what's left of a rapidly shrinking political space necessary for them to sustain themselves as a coherent and cohesive identity group, especially in the context of an "intractable conflict characterized by the disproportionate use of force by the powerful Israeli state and its occupation forces," as underscored in our statement from 30 September 2022.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention urges the international community to take strong and concrete measures to resist the radicalization of conflict that the new government appears to threaten. This resistance must include condemnation of Israel's discriminatory legal system, its illegal occupation of Palestinian land, its leaders' genocidal speech and policies, and all further violence against Palestinians, including evictions, demolition of property, and land dispossession. We wish to remind Israel's strong backers that several human rights organizations have called Israeli policies toward Palestinians "apartheid," which is defined as a crime against humanity by the Rome Statute of International Criminal Court and which can result in a genocidal outcome. While we recognize some important differences between apartheid in Israel and apartheid in pre-1994 South Africa, we agree that Israel has created a system of discrimination, oppression, and domination against Palestinians under its control. What has happened to Palestinians during and since 1948 constitutes atrocity crimes, is often genocidal in nature, and has created a system of moral justifications for atrocity that is deeply intertwined with Israeli national identity and statecraft, leaving Palestinians in a position of perpetual insecurity and threat.

Ultimately what would be most beneficial would be a peace process with transformative goals that would offer justice for all the victims of terrorism and dispossession and would create a new social order based on a worldview that does not criminalize Palestinians and their desire for justice and access to ancestral lands or rest on the logic of a permanent national security threat to

Israel. Like other societies founded on genocidal settler colony dynamics, such as the USA, Canada, and Australia, Israel is now facing the difficult truths of a democratic nation forged through forced displacement, land alienation, brutal, legalized exclusion, occupation, and genocide. The very same technologies of domination used against Palestinians are now threatening the democratic order that was created for Jewish citizens of Israel as well. The road towards reconciliation in such contexts requires a large-scale reworking of national identity that heals the explosive binaries that were forged through colonialism as well as the destructive institutions that were created from them. This is a difficult process, and requires adept and inspirational leadership, but the alternative currently appears to be large-scale mass atrocity against Palestinians undertaken by the State of Israel in the name not only of Israel but also of the Jewish people worldwide.

In the absence of a genuine peace process, which the present government seems unlikely to undertake, we demand that the Israeli state stop feeding Israelis with dehumanizing language and cease immersing them in a genocidal ideological environment that undermines the legitimacy of the existence of Palestinians. That Palestinians have fought and still fight to save their ancestral lands should not be a surprise. Israeli leaders threaten the security of Israel and of all Israelis with these endless cycles of mass atrocity and increasingly flimsy justifications, which are alienating more and more people within and outside of Israeli society.

The Lemkin Institute is well aware of and deeply concerned about the threat of antisemitism around the world, and especially the growth of fascist antisemitism in the USA, a country that offered a safe haven to so many survivors of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pogroms in Europe as well as of the Holocaust. We believe the Holocaust is a permanent wound on the body of humanity and that the whole world must ensure that the Jewish people are protected and valued. We therefore recognize that antisemitism constitutes a permanent and global genocidal threat to Jews. We support the right of Jews to safety and security in their Jewish identity. We are therefore concerned that the new government in Israel could worsen the spread and viciousness of antisemitism. We call on all states around the world to take proactive measures against antisemitism, initiating coordinated public education programs organized at the international and national levels. It is critical that we all fight back against antisemitism in a unified and coherent way, resisting those states and political forces that are intensifying the reach and allure of genocidal antisemitism across the globe.

We finally call on powerful states to place the security of Palestinian life and identity at the center of their diplomatic relations with Israel, declaring that no financial, military, or diplomatic support will be given to the country as long as it continues to pursue such discriminatory and genocidal policies and to reject efforts to establish a realistic peace agenda. There is no more time to waste in creating a comprehensive peace and justice mechanism for Israel-Palestine.