

What Does "Pro-Palestinian" Really Mean?

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In recent years there has been a significant rise in the number of non-Palestinians who describe themselves as "pro-Palestinian" activists. These people can be found mostly on university campuses in North America and Europe.

What is striking is that many of these "pro-Palestinian" activists have never been to the Middle East, let alone the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. In most cases, they are not even Arabs or Muslims.

What makes them "pro-Palestinian"?

In their view, inciting against Israel on a university campus or publishing "anti-Zionist" material on the Internet is sufficient to earn them the title of "pro-Palestinian." But what these folks have not realized is that their actions and words often do little to advance the interests of the Palestinians. In some instances, these actions and words are even counterproductive.

It is hard to see how organizing events such as "Israel Apartheid Week" on a university campus could help the cause of the Palestinians. Isn't there already enough anti-Israel incitement that is being spewed out of Arab and Islamic media outlets?

If anyone is entitled to be called "pro-Palestinian," it is those who are publicly campaigning against financial corruption and abuse of human rights by Fatah and Hamas. Those who are trying to change the system from within belong to the real "pro-Palestinian" camp.

These are the brave people who are standing up to both Fatah and Hamas and calling on them to stop killing each other and start doing something that would improve the living conditions of their constituents.

Instead of investing money and efforts in organizing Israel Apartheid Week, for example, the self-described "pro-Palestinians" could dispatch a delegation of teachers to Palestinian villages and refugee camps to teach young Palestinians English. Or they could send another delegation to the Gaza Strip to monitor human rights violations by the Hamas authorities and help Palestinian women confront Muslim fundamentalists who are trying to limit their role to cooking, raising children and looking after the needs of their husbands.

Here is an idea: Let's substitute Israel Apartheid Week with Palestine Democracy Week, where Palestinians would be urged and encouraged to demand an end to financial corruption and bad government.

The "pro-Palestinian" activists in the West clearly do not care about reforms and good government in the Palestinian territories. As far as these activists are concerned, delegitimizing Israel and inciting against "Zionists" are much more important than pushing for an end to financial corruption and violence in Palestinian society.

Telling the world how bad and evil Israel and the Jews are does not help the Palestinians as much as demanding good government and encouraging the emergence of young and "clean" leadership in the Palestinian territories.

If the "pro-Palestinian" camp in the West were investing a similar amount of its anti-Israel efforts in promoting moderation and civil society among Palestinians, it would be doing them a great service.

Shouting anti-Israel slogans or organizing Israel Apartheid Week in the US and Canada does not necessarily make a person "pro-Palestinian."

But promoting good government and reform in the Palestinian territories does make one "pro-Palestinian."

Being anti-Israel does not necessarily turn one into "pro-Palestinian." On the other hand, promoting coexistence, peace and good government would be more beneficial to the Palestinians.

The Palestinians do not need students and professors on university campuses to tell them that Israel is bad. They have already had enough of this incitement from Hamas, Fatah and other Arab media outlets and leaders.

It is time for the "pro-Palestinian" camp in the West to reconsider its policies and tactics. It is time for this camp to listen to the authentic voices of the Palestinians – those that are shouting day and night that the Palestinians want good leaders and an end to lawlessness, anarchy and financial corruption.

Khaled Abu Toameh, an Arab Muslim, is a veteran award-winning journalist who has been covering Palestinian affairs for nearly three decades. His articles have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, US News & World Report, The Sunday Times of London, and elsewhere. He is currently the Palestinian affairs correspondent for The Jerusalem Post and a producer and consultant for NBC News.