

before being taken to prison. The roofs of buildings have been turned into Israeli observation posts where the soldiers urinate into barrels placed there to gather water, and the people are forced to drink this spoiled water because they are under 24-hour curfew. Furthermore, four patriarchs were prevented by the Israeli authorities from visiting the town...Why is Moscow's patriarch silent about such practices? If he lacks information, we must provide this...

In Jerusalem, a prison has been built on property which belonged to the Orthodox Church before 1967, and was then sold to the Israeli authorities at a very low price. Today, horrible things are going on in this prison. While people pray in the nearby church, they can hear the cries of prisoners being tortured. In the square opposite, mothers of detainees gather in hopes of catching a glimpse of their sons as they are moved to other prisons. Soviet religious leaders should have a clear-cut stand on these matters.

We must continue to demand the withdrawal of the Israeli troops, and the recognition of Palestinian rights. In addition, we must ask for urgent measures to stop the practices of the armed Zionist settler gangs who are far worse than Israeli soldiers. Unfortunately, we find some Jews of Soviet origin among these criminals. We call on the UN and other international organizations to demand the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli troops, at least from the Palestinian population centers. We must also demand an end to deportations. So far, sixty Palestinians have been expelled, including activists and educators such as Professor Taysir Arouri, a graduate of Moscow University, who was handcuffed and kicked onto an Air France plane in a manner that led the pilots to protest strongly. Why doesn't the dean of Moscow University invite Professor Arouri to Moscow?

As a journalist, I call for ending oppression against my Palestinian colleagues, like closing newspapers, expelling journalists, such as Akram

Haniyeh, and the closure of the press center directed by Faisal Husseini who has been frequently arrested. Moreover, some western journalists have been subjected to ill treatment by the Israelis. I propose that the Soviet television send a team to the occupied territories, but they should not conduct their work under the auspices of the Israeli military. On the contrary, they should ask the assistance of the legitimate, local Arab (Palestinian) organizations. Some Soviet reportage of the intifada has been unbalanced, though I cannot say it was completely aligned to Israel. Filming the intifada through the opening of Israeli armored vehicles should not be the preferred job of Soviet journalists.

In my opinion, when the Middle East question is discussed by the Soviet public, the Palestinian cause should not be mixed with the Soviet Union's internal and external affairs. It is no secret that the problem of the nationalities has intensified in the Soviet Union. There is debate in various publications and among the public, including (a revival of) the old «western Russianism» and other tendencies, and this is an unhealthy atmosphere. It is not correct, in this debate, to mix the Palestinian issue with the Jewish question and Jewish culture in the Soviet Union. Of course, the latter issues should be discussed but not necessarily parallel to the Palestinian cause.

I am very happy to hear that the idea of forming an Arab front to support the intifada is now being discussed in the Arab world. Such a front would refute the pretexts given by some Soviet citizens, like: «Why all this fuss about the Palestinians - don't we have enough problems of our own? Why should we support the Palestinians more than the Arabs themselves do?» When the Arab community forms a unified front to support the intifada, this would pressure the Arab governments and, in turn, the United States. In this case, there would be more reason for increasing the activities of those who defend the Palestinian cause in the Soviet Union.

Concerning relations with Israel

Most Soviets I have spoken with share my view about resuming full diplomatic relations with Israel at this time. They consider this premature and unjustified while the heroic Palestinian intifada is escalating, and the Israeli authorities are increasing their crimes against unarmed civilians, as well as their raids and other terrorist acts against Lebanon. Resuming relations in this situation cannot be justified in the Arab world or by millions of Soviet citizens. At the very least, it must be preceded by a halt to the criminal Israeli practices in the occupied territories and specific measures towards the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or repositioning them. In this regard, it would be positive if negotiations were to begin between the Israelis and the Palestinians who have relations with the PLO, and who defend the Palestinian people's interests and national rights.

Some Soviets argue that the absence of relations with Israel is unnatural, but we should not forget that it was not Moscow's fault that these relations were severed. It was the Israeli policies that led to a situation whereby normalizing Soviet-Israeli relations became impossible in the absence of a settlement for the Middle East problem. Moreover, Shamir's government continues to sabotage the peace efforts...

I want to stress the importance of the Arabs and the Palestinians developing «popular diplomacy» which would proceed alongside the efforts of the Arabs' faithful friends in the Soviet Union, in order to make a positive impact on public opinion and obliterate previous mistaken views about the reality of the Middle East. In this respect, I cannot but agree with the words of the Soviet Supreme Council in welcoming PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat: «Today we are very confident that the intifada has become a highly influential element in the region and internationally. It has led to increasing the wave of sympathy and support for the Palestinian people the world over.»