

issued a memorandum chronicling Israeli human rights violations. They reiterated the validity of the PLO peace initiative and reaffirmed the demand of the intifada «for the occupied territories to be placed under neutral international supervision to prevent any change in its demographic and geographic status» and «for an end to the extreme suffering of the unarmed Palestinian civilians» until a comprehensive solution is achieved.

Five days later, hours after the Rishon Letzion massacre, *Al Haq* urgently demanded: «the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli military forces from all major population centers, especially from the Gaza Strip...» and «prompt action by the international community, in line with its duties under international law, to provide effective, on-the-ground protection for the Palestinian civilian population.»

Also on May 20th, a group of prominent Palestinians began a hunger strike at the ICRC office in Jerusalem, protesting the massacre, demanding the convening of the Security Council and an independent investigation into the massacre and Israeli practices in the occupied territories. The number of hunger strikers grew to 50 and they received many expressions of solidarity. The most meaningful was perhaps the decision of Archbishop Capucci, once imprisoned in Israel for his support to the Palestinians, to join in the hunger strike from Rome where he has lived since being expelled from occupied Palestine.

In Baghdad, the Arab summit backed up the call for an emergency Security Council meeting, and the PLO stressed the need for a peacekeeping force to be sent to the territories. Thus began the battle at the UN. The PLO achieved a new diplomatic victory when the Security Council convened at the UN headquarters in Geneva on May 25th, for the first time in 18 years, specifically so there would be no problems for PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat to address the session - also a first for the council. Arafat emphasized the importance of dispatching a UN emergency force and deciding sanctions against Israel for its murderous policies. The overwhelming sentiment at the council session was condemnation of Israeli human rights violations but, due to the US position, the PLO was unable to obtain concrete protection for the

Palestinian masses. The other 14 members of the Security Council favored at the minimum to send an investigative team to the occupied territories. However, the US, after a series of contradictory statements, settled down to its historical position of only backing what is acceptable to Israel. This prevented the will of the majority from producing any concrete results.

The Israeli position was clearly articulated from the start: No to any Security Council team or UN presence which was branded as interference in internal Israeli affairs. This clearly expresses the Shamir government's position that the 1967 occupied territories are Israel's whether officially annexed or not. This is what the US administration *de facto* supports, despite its officially formulated policy that the West Bank and Gaza Strip are occupied territories, subject to negotiations.

How to deal with the US, in view of its crucial role in the Middle East conflict, has long been a subject of debate in the PLO and the Arab arena generally. While the United National Leadership has consistently upheld a lucid view of the US' role and responsibility for the occupation, some Palestinian figures have been willing to gamble on the possibility of the US exerting pressure on Israel. However, with this new evidence of the US position, there is little room for debate on the subject. Palestinians of all tendencies closed ranks in the face of this new US attack on Palestinians' most minimal rights - to life and safety.

On June 1st, the Jerusalem hunger strike ended after a number of the strikers had been hospitalized. Fifty Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem called for sanctions against the US as well as Israel, including use of the Arab oil weapon; they declared that they would boycott all contacts with US officials.

Two days previously, the Palestinian revolution had staged its biggest attack in several years against Israel. Naval units of the Palestine Liberation Front besieged the Israeli coast from Ashqelon, south of Tel Aviv, to Herzliyya, north of the city. A ranged battle ensued with the Zionist state employing ships, aircraft and ground forces before overcoming the commandos. The operation intended to attack Israeli military installations in the area. The Israeli disinforma-

tion now being spread about the intent to kill civilians is belied by the simple fact that the commandos, who did manage to land on the beach, fired not one shot at the many sun-bathers there.

The US, which thwarted even a mild attempt to check Israeli violence against the masses under occupation, announced that its dialogue with the PLO hung in the balance due to the operation. The US ambassador in Tunis called the PLO delegation to four meetings in a week, trying to illicit condemnation of the PLF attack or expulsion of its leader, Abu Abbas, from the PLO. After a year of the US dragging its feet about this dialogue, this confirms the impression that the Bush Administration only talks to the PLO in hopes that it will put a lid on the liberation struggle.

Meeting in Baghdad, the PLO Executive Committee on June 6th, termed the US threats to end the dialogue «blackmail,» and a number of PLO spokesman confirmed the Palestinians' right to continue all forms of struggle until obtaining their rights.

Israeli officials responded to the attack by trying to persuade the US to cut the dialogue with the PLO. But the more significant part of the Israeli response was the stress put on Libyan responsibility for supporting the operation. A former head of Israeli military intelligence, Yehoshua Saguy, proposed outright that Libya be attacked. Such aggression cannot be ruled out, especially in view of the Israeli crisis caused by the intifada. Such attacks have been used before to close Israeli ranks and try to scare the Arabs from rendering support to the Palestinian revolution. The stress on Libya, moreover, fits into the Israeli efforts to refocus on the «Arab threat» in an attempt to divert from the intifada and the roots of the whole conflict, i.e., the justice of the Palestinian cause.

The greatest obstacle to this new Israeli attempt at diversion is seen in the continuation of the intifada - undaunted by the tightening repression and massacres. The spontaneous, united reaction by Palestinians in all places to the May 20th massacre is another evidence that the intifada has wrought irreversible changes, cementing determination and militancy that will eventually enforce justice in the Middle East and a new, democratic life for the people of Palestine. ●