‘Nelson Mandela Would Not Approve’: South Africans Denounce UN Report on Palestinians

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A group of pro-Israel South Africans has invoked the figure of the late Nelson Mandela, the iconic leader of their country’s anti-apartheid struggle, in a forthright condemnation of the recent UN Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry (COI) report that blamed Israel’s “perpetual occupation” for the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians.

In a statement issued this week by the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), a collection of church and community leaders argued that Mandela — South Africa’s first post-apartheid president — would have rejected the report’s findings.

‘We sincerely doubt that our first democratically elected president, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, would approve of a situation where the antisemitism of Hamas was put on the same moral standing as the righteous fight of black people against the white supremacy of apartheid,” the statement declared.

Signatories to the statement included Nosipho Dladla of the God’s Throne of Grace church, Klaas Mokgmole of the Africans for Peace advocacy group and Mosala Nyawusa of the [Clive Mashishi](https://www.algemeiner.com/list/the-top-100-people-positively-influencing-jewish-life-2021/clive-mashishi/) Foundation.

The statement pointed out that “Mandela never sought to eliminate white people from the land of South Africa. Rather, he preached reconciliation, which earned him the love and respect of even his jailer on Robben Island. We ask this UN COI to consider the harm that allowing the apartheid label to be applied to Israel does to the legacy of anti-apartheid stalwarts like Madiba [Mandela’s honorific name], who wanted all South Africans to live in peace.”

Mandela made his feelings on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict clear during a 1993 speech. “As a movement we recognize the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism just as we recognize the legitimacy of Zionism as a Jewish nationalism. We insist on the right of the state of Israel to exist within secure borders but with equal vigor support the Palestinian right to national self-determination,” [Mandela said](http://www.mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1993/930821_jewish.htm) at the time, expressing sentiments at odds with many of his colleagues in the ruling African National Congress (ANC) who endorsed the analogy between Israel and the apartheid regime.

Last year, a [billboard campaign](https://www.algemeiner.com/2021/10/27/in-pushback-against-south-african-anti-zionists-local-israel-advocates-launch-billboard-campaign-citing-nelson-mandela/) sponsored by SAFI in Johannesburg featured a photo of Mandela alongside his quote, “We insist on the right of the State of Israel to exist.”

The statement additionally attacked the comparison between Israel and the white minority regime. “As South Africans, we know what apartheid is, we lived through it and its legacy continues to blight our society to this day,” it said. “Through this evil regime, black people were denied equal access to government services; citizenship rights; property ownership, equal rights and participation in the democratic process. To claim that this is the current status of Arab Israelis is to deliberately distort reality. The truth is that Arabs in Israel hold positions of power in the judiciary, parliament, and military and are even members of the governing coalition.”

The UN report, which the letter was in response to, was led by Navi Pillay, formerly a South African judge and United Nations human rights chief. It claimed that “what has become a situation of perpetual occupation was cited by Palestinian and Israeli stakeholders to the Commission as the one common issue that constitutes the underlying root cause of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict in both the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.”

The Israeli government issued a full-scale rejection of the report, dismissing it as a “biased and one-sided report tainted with hatred for the State of Israel and based on a long series of previous one-sided and biased reports, [which] disregards years of murderous terrorism by Palestinian terrorist organizations against Israeli citizens, as well as the Palestinians’ long-standing obstinacy and the vicious and antisemitic incitement carried out by the Palestinian Authority and its networks.”