The Palestine one-state solution: report on the conference held in Boston, Massachusetts, March 2009

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This is a report on a conference held at the University of Massachusetts in Boston about the ‘One-State Solution for Palestine’. The latter is a response and an alternative to the ‘Two-State Solution’ favoured by the United States and the international community. Such a solution is losing credibility in terms of its possible implementation by most Arab Palestinians and the vast majority of Arabs. The two-day conference hosted academicians and activists from Palestine, the United States, and Europe defending the ‘One-State Solution’. (For further information, see http://www.onestateforpalestineisrael.com/.)

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A two-day conference sponsored by the Trans Arab Research Institute (TARI) and the William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences was held 28–29 March 2009 at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and a declaration signed by participants was issued (see Appendix 1). The theme was ‘One-State for Palestine/Israel: A Country for All Its Citizens?’ where the question mark at the end reflected the doubts that many had on their mind about the ‘Two-State Solution’ as championed by the current Barack Obama administration and much of the international community.

Noticeable was the large attendance (significantly over-subscribed weeks before it was held) to this conference that drew over 500 participants. Nearly one-third of the 29 speakers were American and/or Israeli Jews. It was indeed the third major public conference on how to achieve a single democratic state for Palestinians and Israelis; the first having been held in Madrid, the second in London in November 2008, and the fourth in Toronto in June 2009. Added to these meetings were other smaller conferences held in Israel and Palestine creating a snowball effect and underlying the growing interest in the one-state solution. A short introduction of the programme of the Conference revealed clearly what was at stake:

In recent years, with facts on the ground changing, many scholars and commentators have questioned the feasibility of a truly just and enduring two-state solution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Increased discrimination against Palestinians in Israel, continued growth in the expansion of settlements in the 1967-occupied territories and the erection of the separation wall are just a few of the factors making the current two-state solution option seem untenable. Over the past year, support for the two-state solution has been growing. Still, this alternative is left firmly off the official agendas.
A report published by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in July 2007 revealed that the pace and extent of Israeli colonization activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has reached a point where the creation of a genuinely independent Palestinian state has become a geophysical impossibility. Forty-percent of the West Bank is now taken up with Israeli infrastructure to which Palestinians are denied access. The remaining sixty-percent is broken up into enclaves of land disconnected from each other and the outside world by Israeli-controlled roads, walls, ditches or borders.

Gaza, which Israel now considers ‘hostile’ rather than occupied territory, provides the prototype of what the Israeli Government may have in mind for Palestinian ‘independence’. Confronted with this scenario and with a settlement that would require Palestinians and their leaders to give up title to significant parts of the West Bank, how do Israelis and Palestinians who seek peace and justice go forward? That is the question this conference will seek to answer with an exploration of the one state solution as an emergent and increasingly important option for all.

This introduction has been quoted in extenso because it captures the spirit of the presentations and discussions of the one-state solution. The 27 presentations made at the Conference were spread over seven panel discussions. This report cannot do justice to the thoughtful and provocative presentations made. It is to the credit of the organizers, and especially the Co-chairman Dr Hani Faris (TARI and University of British Columbia), that such an assembly of talented and dedicated academics and activists did meet to expose original and practical ideas. The conclusion one gets is that the one-state solution will not go away and is here to stay. (Readers are invited to view the video recordings of the panels at: http://www.arabichour.org/.) One cannot but be impressed at the quality and depth of the discussions held. Eventually, most presenters will submit detailed papers of their presentations to TARI for publication in a forthcoming book sometime in 2010. This issue of *Contemporary Arab Affairs* includes four such papers.

Panel I

The first panel addressed the question whether a two-state settlement was still viable, and four participants made the case that it was no longer feasible. Interestingly enough, in the first presentation, Meron Benvenisti, former Mayor of Jerusalem, came to indict Zionism and not to praise it. He indicated that land confiscation by the Israeli government of Palestinian lands made the two-state solution difficult if not outright impossible to implement. Indeed, he said that: ‘As a Zionist, I wanted a Jewish state but that option is abrogated. The “one-state” is already here, the only question is what kind of state it will be.’ However, as of this date, Benvenisti upon his return to Israel has recanted his contribution and denounced the Conference as anti-Semitic and an attack on Israel.

The second presentation was a compelling exposé by Professor Saree Makdisi of UCLA about the judaization of Jerusalem (see the full paper in this issue). Makdisi’s contention is that:

the idea that Israel has any interest in sharing (however unequally) the land of historic Palestine with the Palestinians founders on what is happening in Jerusalem, which serves in effect as a kind of microcosm of the larger arena of the conflict. Not only does the city offer a microcosm – in that the spatial struggles that occur throughout the West Bank occur here on a smaller and more intensive scale – but for a two-state solu-
tion to even have a chance of success, Jerusalem would have to be shared between the two peoples.

He then goes on to describe how various Israeli governments went on to grab and annex land to Jerusalem where the process that has been unfolding in Jerusalem has deliberately made such a sharing impossible.

The third two-part presentation was a most interesting one by Karma Nabulsi (Oxford University) who addressed the issue of the fragmentation of the Palestinian body politic with first segment in this panel and the second in the fourth panel. In essence, Nabulsi indicated that the Palestinians in the diaspora and especially those in refugee camps have as much right to decide the fate of the future Palestinian state as those in Ramallah in the Palestinian Authority. The numbers of such Palestinians in the diaspora are at least as large if not larger than those of Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and what is now known as Israel. She called for the reorganization of the Palestinian Liberation Organization where all groups of Palestinian society at home and in exile are represented.

The fourth presentation was made by a Palestinian activist and co-founder of ‘electronic intifada’, Ali Abunimah, who had already authored a book on the one-state solution. His presentation was much of a rebuttal of the possibility of a two-state solution, and he was quite articulate in defending the one-state solution since implementation of the two-state solution has become impossible.

In the fifth and last presentation of the first panel, Naseer Aruri, Emeritus Professor at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, provided an assessment of the present situation and questioned whether a two-state settlement had ever been possible and/or viable anytime at all. He enumerated the various factors that dealt a severe blow to the formula. As long as the termination of the Israeli occupation is not on the active Israeli agenda, and as long as the political forces in Israel are united in their rejection of a contiguous, viable and practicable Palestinian state, then the longest occupation in history will continue unabated. The only two choices the Israeli political system has generated for the Palestinians are apartheid or ethnic cleansing. Apartheid is the Labor Party’s programme, while the other pole is ‘advocating slow suffocation of the Palestinians, until the eventual “transfer” (mass expulsion) can be accomplished’. However, the Palestinian people since 1948 refuse to wither away, to forget their land or to give up their rights – including the right to establish a sovereign, contiguous, and independent state. Israeli response was and is to use overwhelming military force on the pretext that the Palestinians’ democratically elected representatives are terrorists.

**Panel II**

The second panel produced four presentations around the theme of the Jewish and Palestinian ethos. It was an interesting panel where, on the Israeli/Jewish side, Professor Marc Ellis (Baylor University) and law philosopher Oren Ben Dor (Southampton University) submitted two thoughtful presentations showing how Zionism had subverted the values of Judaism. The latter spoke about the sense of justice and how world Jewry would consider the one-state solution. His presentation was based on a rather lengthy paper (67 pages) in which he attempted to address various questions. It is difficult to give Oren’s presentation its due in this brief review of the Conference; however, one should note that Oren’s concern revolves around justice as connoting ‘giving back one’s dues’ where the main question is then *what* is the primordial due
to be given back in Palestine, as well as with who is being owed such there. Among
the various answers he provides to the questions related to the primary ones mentioned
above is that ‘justice will be neared only when the Jewish question is properly asked
in relation to Zionism’. Jews on the right and the left are united either through
existential denial, or dialectical engagement, or finally through the deepest type of
denial that characterizes passivity and waiting. Hence, he believes that:

Professor Marc Ellis’s presentation was a generic essay about ‘the interplay of
ethnic particularism and universal values in the context of any nation, people or reli-
gious community’. Acknowledging the difficulty of such a task, Ellis underlined the
impossibility of speaking about Israel, Jews and Judaism: in the United States ‘such a
subject is almost forbidden’. Yet, he proposes to offer a ‘contrarian position on the one
state/two state debate’. He acknowledges that the Jewish establishment or what he
calls Constantinian Judaism has advocated Jewish particularity as a clarion call with
the expected result of a new and sustained Jewish militarism that is focused in the
Middle East but is also global in reach:

In Constantinian Judaism, Jewish identity is fashioned around this anti-Semitism, the
Holocaust and the state of Israel. Even the rituals of Judaism are harnessed to these sensi-
bilities, events and the state. That the militarization of Jewish life hides a colonial and
imperial reality in fact is only possible because the factual nature of Jewish colonialism
and imperialism are themselves hidden from sight. The colonial and imperial aspects of
contemporary Jewish life are so well disguised that the promoters of Constantinian
Judaism – as well as the consumers attached to empire Constantinian Judaism as a way
of life – are largely ignorant of what they affirm, promote, and enable. This is why
Constantinian Jews are livid at the portrayal of their own power as colonial and imperial.

These thoughtful and powerful words are essential to comprehending the problem-
atic of understanding the current behaviour of contemporary Jews where the question
of ethnic particularism and universal values is more complicated because of a
crossover between myth and reality. The reader is invited to read the full paper on
publication by TARI for it does provide a key to understanding the psychological
impediments of a meaningful dialogue between Arabs and Palestinian Arabs, on the
one hand, and Jews and Israeli Jews, on the other.

The third presentation was made by Professor Susan Akram of Boston University
who spoke about the focal point of the Palestinian right of return in the context of the
one- and two-state solutions. Her presentation was a well-articulated analysis of intern-
ternational law and the right of return, and her forthcoming paper, in the estimation of
this reviewer, is likely to become a seminal contribution to the debate from a legal
perspective that cannot be disconnected from reality and its human dimension.

Panel III
The third panel focused on the possibility of one country and one state. Four presen-
tations were made, the first being that of Salman Abou Sitta. The speaker, a well-
known Palestinian specialist and researcher of the human geography of Palestine, explained that occupied Palestine of 1948 (now Israel) can today absorb all Palestinians in the diaspora. He documented his thesis by making an exhaustive inventory of all Palestinian villages destroyed by Israel, and he also documented where the Jewish population is concentrated. His compelling presentation shows that the argument made by Israelis that the land of 1948 cannot absorb both Jewish and Arab populations is spurious, a manufactured myth. In fact, the real argument against the return of Palestinians to their villages – existing or destroyed – is the demographic factor where Israeli Jews will no longer be the majority and the proposition of a Jewish state for Jews only cannot take place with the Arab Palestinian presence.

The second presentation was made by Canadian Professor of Law Michael Lynk (University of Western Ontario). The main thrust of his argument was assessing what kind of state should the proposed solution for Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews be. Noting that the partition of Palestine was essentially anti-Arab, a federal state should not be viewed as anti-Jewish. He does make the case for a federal government conceding that it would be a reasonable compromise between a unitary government and the diversity of its people. He acknowledges that a federal government will not resolve all the tensions but that it would provide a mechanism for dealing with them.

The third presentation was made by the historian Gabriel Piterberg (UCLA) whose concern is the construction of a narrative that mixes the identities of both Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews. In order to achieve that he puts forth the conceptual framework in which the Palestinian Israeli conflict should be understood where the best way to achieve that is what he calls ‘comparative colonialism’. In this case, the hegemonic settler narrative of Zionist settlers is based upon three fundamentals: the ‘uniqueness’ of the settler nation, i.e. the ‘Jewish nation in its relentless search for sovereignty in the biblically-endowed homeland’; the exclusive primacy accorded to the settlers’ subjectivity; and the denial of the fact that the presence of the colonized has been the single-most significant factor in determining the structure of settler society. However, an alternative narrative is to be sought. In particular, Piterberg holds up as a model the poetry of the late Avot Yeshurun who is the nom de plume of Yehiel Perlmutter, an avant-garde and oppositional Jewish Israeli poet. Yeshurun blended narratives and identities by mixing Arabic and Hebrew idiom into Hebrew poetry. The closeness of the two languages did help in creating the alternative narrative that went beyond the particularism of the hegemonic discourse. He also fused into the narrative the remembrance of the plight of both Arab Palestinians and Israeli Jews. In essence, the implication is formidable: the fate of both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews is one and indivisible.

The fourth presentation was made by Professor Nadim Rouhana (Tufts University) who reviewed the narrative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) over the last 30 years when it was established in the mid-1960s for the dual goal of liberation of the land on which Israel was established and the return to such land. Such simple slogans were clear and powerful in mobilizing Palestinians. It was the first articulation of a one-state solution, albeit an Arab state. However, according to Rouhana, it lacked vision since it ignored the need to construct a new Palestinian society that would integrate the creation of a Jewish society in Palestine. In the mid-1970s, as a result of the manipulation of the Palestinian National Movement by Arab regimes and because of the tremendous events that took place between 1967 and 1974 (the Six Day War, Black September, the 1973 October War), the PLO altered its narrative towards the establishment of a two-state solution through the creation of a Palestinian state on
liberated territories. It even went further and dropped the right of return of refugees to Palestine. On the other hand, in Israel the narrative had also changed, and the two-state solution would be sold as being the ‘savior of Zionism’. Rouhana believes that any solution that does not take into account the Palestinian refugees as well the Palestinian Arabs living in Israel is doomed to fail. The opposition of the two-state solution should not be based only on the consideration of viability and irreversibility. There is, unfortunately, a possibility of population exchanges and expulsion of Palestinians. Rouhana believes that many Palestinians will never accept living within a state with Israeli Jews after all that has been done to them by the Jewish state. The one-state solution should be the negation of Zionist values that extol exclusion and denial of the other and should represent the values of inclusion.

Panel IV

The fourth panel as well as the subsequent two dealt with the possible strategies leading to the building of one country which transcended principles and ideas and focused on practical issues. Dr Hani Faris, who chaired the panel, emphasized the practical aspects of implementing a solution, also referring to the various speakers of the panel with an emphasis on the plight of Joel Kovel and Norton Mezvinsky – two American Jews who stood by the right of Palestinians: Kovel lost his tenure at his university (Bard) but nonetheless continues to fight for Palestinian rights.

The first presentation was made by Dr Husam Zumlot, a career diplomat and an intellectual and strategic thinker. He outlined the difficulty of conducting diplomacy in a climate where clarity and independent political will is absent, and this would be true for the European Union, for the United States, for Arab governments, and certainly for a fragmented Palestinian polity. He confessed originally to being an advocate of a two-state solution, previously having viewed it as a necessary way for Palestinians to express their national aspirations through statehood. It would be a transitional stage until a time when it would negotiate with Israel an open border and free movement of people and capital between residents of the two states. However, Israel, through the destruction it wrought on Palestinians and its land grabbing, has made the two-state solution impossible to achieve. He mentioned that currently the Palestinian polity is quite fragmented. Every time the Palestinians have come close to unity or to having a unified position, Israel has forcibly implemented draconian measures to break up the unity, the Mecca accords of 2006 being a case in point. Zumlot did, however, refer to the existence of a Palestinian Strategy group that would address the issues at stake. The group includes some 40 academics, scholars, experts, and activists from all walks of life of Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza, the diaspora, as well as Israeli Arabs of 1948 where all political movements are represented. They met, had extensive discussions, and produced a document defining a new strategy.

Among the issues addressed were the prerequisites for a strategy, its objectives, the possible scenarios (acceptable, unacceptable, and preferred), power distribution among segments of Palestinian polity, strategies and options, and means of implementation. Among prerequisites is the need for a new discourse that will shed the prevailing ‘peace-making’ and state-building narratives. There are four acceptable scenarios for the Palestinians: a genuine negotiated settlement for a two-state solution; a one-state solution – whether bi-national or democratic; an interim situation of either dissolving the Palestinian Authority or reconstituting it; and finally, another interim
solution in the form of a United Nations trusteeship of the West Bank and Gaza. What is not acceptable to Palestinians is the status quo plus, that is: endless negotiations of a peace process; a bogus two-state solution such as the ‘provisional’ state advocated by the ‘road map’; unilateral disengagement; and Egyptian–Jordanian control of the West Bank and Gaza. It also produced a matrix for the degree of influence each party (Palestinians, Israelis, international community) on each scenario. The group also discussed issues related to power, its nature and its application – a novelty in the Palestinian narrative. In the end, Zomlot believes that the future is not that bleak for the Palestinians provided the leadership works with the people. It is the latter that produced the PLO, the two Intifadas and not the other way round.

The second presentation was by Karma Nabulsi and a continuation of her earlier one when she depicted the fragmentation of the Palestinian people. This segment was thoughtful blending strategic thinking, political and moral principles, a thorough understanding of the Palestinian experience over the years of struggle, and a practical bent towards implementing mobilization. In this presentation she focused on the positive aspect of representation of the Palestinians where the focal point in this case is the issue of Palestinians in exile. She also stressed the importance of justice in any solution which cannot be achieved in the absence of the sovereignty of the Palestinian people. She spoke of the need of a vision for the future, revolving around sovereignty being popular through participation. Refugees should be viewed as active citizens, and finally no solution can be implemented without the mechanism that takes into account the contents of the vision. Nabulsi spoke of practical and historical experiences of the Palestinian people as well as the most recent ones. In particular, she referred to the various grassroots meetings held in refugee camps in many Arab countries as well as in the diaspora where two common themes have emerged: the need for direct popular elections to the Palestinian National Council, and the right of return. In citing these experiences Nabulsi extolled the ability of Palestinians through their collective action and mobilization of extraordinary talents and energies to overcome almost impossible logistics where these should be the way to the future. In essence, her presentation was finally about the critical necessity of popular representation to shore up the rights of Palestinians from the meddling of politicians in the bazaar of regional and international politics.

The third presentation was made by Professor George Bisharat (University of California’s Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco) who spoke about the mobilization process (see his paper in this issue). Interestingly enough, he noted that the fragmentation of the Palestinian polity would yield different experiences and outlooks so a one- or two-state solution will be perceived differently by different Palestinian constituencies. This has a direct impact on the mobilization process for any solution as there is no one solution compatible with all and, hence, the need to explore and gather data about the various Palestinian perceptions of the solutions proposed. He noted in particular the polls undertaken in the West Bank where about 25% of responses favoured the one-state solution. This was quite encouraging according to Bisharat since no effort was made whatsoever at promoting the one-state solution. Bisharat distinguished the various perceptions of Palestinians toward the one- and two-state solutions where the first would be deemed just yet also be perceived as ‘unrealistic’. On the other hand, while the two-state solution would be deemed less fair to Palestinians, it would seem to be perceived as being more ‘realistic’. These distinctions are essential as they would define the content of the mobilization programme, at least in the persuasion phase as well as in the organization phase.
The fourth presentation was made by Professor Norton Mezvinsky (Central Connecticut State University). His topic was the mobilization of world Jewry for the one-state solution – the most difficult task, according to the speaker who began his presentation by presenting a set of polls demonstrating the negative perceptions of Israeli, American, and world Jews toward the Arabs and Palestinians as well as their opposition to a one-state solution. Mezvinsky explains such polls by the various irrational beliefs about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. The strategy of mobilizing world Jewry is to start first with the Jews who do not share the perception of the majority of Jews who need to be provided with information about the one-state solution. He further emphasizes the need to deconstruct Zionism. Of particular interest would be the conclusions reached by insightful anti-Zionist Jews who use moral, religious, and political arguments, and whose works he quotes. This is an essential prerequisite for preparing a base that could be amenable to a one-state solution proposal.

The final presentation in this panel was made by Professor Joel Kovel (Bard College) who began by saying that there has been a tremendous conscience-awakening in the West in the aftermath of the brutal assault on Gaza. Many American Jews have occupied Israel’s consulates in US cities, a feat unheard of previously. The same applies to many Westerners who felt a deep sense of outrage that severed their attachment to Israel. In order to awaken and keep the conscience awake, an ‘emancipatory’ legend or narrative is needed. It is a narrative of liberation from bondage. It is also legendary as the term is somewhere in-between history and myth. This has happened in the past; the history of the United States itself is an example of such emancipatory legend that was established by the Puritans. Kovel believes that the function of conscience has a complex relation to the emancipatory legend. Though it is open to the issue of emancipation, it must resist an inversion into a facilitator of domination. On the other hand, conscience requires a higher mode of synthesis. It accepts the necessity of emancipatory legends yet it must submit them to the requirements of universality. Having stated these fundamental concepts Kovel examines how they have played out in recent history of the Jews in relation to Zionism. However, Zionism has hijacked the emancipatory legend of the Jews who felt persecuted over the centuries by dominant powers. In doing so, it has slipped into fascism, illustrating the moral degeneration of the Zionist project. Therefore, as the idea of Israel decomposes, its legendary status has become an obsolete narrative opening the way for another more authentic emancipatory legend to be enacted in Palestine. It is a legend that would capture the collective imagination of and eventually free the conscience of American Jews.

Panel V

The second day of the conference had three panels. The first dealt with methods for building one country. Five speakers made presentations. In the first, Phyllis Bennis (Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, DC) attempted to play the role of a Cassandra. She believes that a two-state solution will be imposed by the United States because the survival of Israel is at stake. What will make the advocacy of a one-state solution difficult is more due to the current posture of the Palestinian Authority and some Arab countries like Egypt than it is to outright opposition by Israel. She cited as an example the opposition led by Egypt and the Palestinian delegation at the United Nations to block a motion at the General Assembly condemning Israel for its assault on Gaza. She urged mobilizing civil society all over the world to advocate the
establishment of the one-state solution. The current moment in history in the United States and in the world would allow that as at no point in time has Israel been more isolated than it is now.

The second panellist was Professor As’ad Ghanem (University of Haifa) who suggested that in order promote the one-state solution among Palestinians, it is necessary to mobilize those who are considering a two-state solution. He also warned Palestinians about accepting the idea of a Jewish Israel for that would be the end of the one-state solution. He advocated the mobilization of Arab Palestinians living in Israel as well as giving them their due consideration in any discussion about the future of Palestine/Israel. They have been neglected so far and excluded from the peace process between Israel and the PLO. Professor Ghanem does not believe that it is possible to separate the Jews and the Palestinians or at least between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza. He also believes that a liberal state is presently unfeasible. The only solution left is the establishment of a bi-national state in the whole of territory of mandatory Palestine.

The third presentation was made by Nadia Hijab (Institute for Palestine Studies). She spoke about modes of non-violent activism to achieve Palestinian human rights (see her paper in this issue). At the outset of her presentation she indicated that the Palestinian leadership was able in the past to use a vast array of non-violent sources of power to advance the political goals of the struggle. In particular, she mentions the support given by the Non-Aligned Movement and other international forums, which supported the existence of Palestine rather than that of Israel. That period extended from the 1960s until the 1980s. However, the leadership abandoned such sources of support in the world. Her presentation was therefore focused on addressing three questions: Why the two-state political programme has not been achieved?; What sources of non-violent power could achieve Palestinian rights?; and What is the best strategy for that? First, clear goals are needed to unify the Palestinians. Second, she does not believe that armed resistance, though legitimate and legal, is effective, a position not likely to sit well with resistance movements in Palestine. Third, she advocates ploughing into various sources of power, political, economic, and cultural. She also is convinced that the PLO leadership has abandoned the original goal of a one-state solution and drifted to a two-state solution without being challenged by the Palestinian people. She spoke at length about the ‘boycott, divest, and sanctions’ (BDS) movement which has produced a document that defines the aspirations and goals of the Palestinian people and seems to be quite effective.

The fourth panellist was Professor Smadar Lavie (Macalaster College) who spoke about Israeli feminism and the one-state solution. Lavie made extremely interesting points about the history of Israeli feminism, its origins in the Ashkenazi community moving to Israel, and its racist and class-oriented approach of dealing with the Sephardim women (Mizrahi) as well as the Arab Palestinian women. It seems that there could be interesting prospects if the disenfranchised Mizrahi women were to be addressed by Palestinians and made part of a struggle for a secular democratic state in Palestine. It would start with a constructive dialogue between the Mizrahim feminists, Arab feminists, and Palestinian feminists. Premises of such dialogue were made clear in 2006 after the second Lebanon War even if the prospect of such a dialogue has been slammed shut for the time being.

The last panellist was a representative of a Palestinian grass roots movement in the United States: Munâljîl (aptly named as it means in Arabic ‘militant’) Herzallah was short on theory and long on practical, no-nonsense experience. He stressed the need
for a unified Palestinian front with clear goals; a position repeated by many other presenters. He also was the only presenter who linked the Palestinian struggle to that of its Arab brethren: Zionism is not just a threat to Palestinians but also to all Arabs, and Palestine is not an island disconnected from its Arab environment. He reminded the audience that the Palestinian struggle is also an Arab one. He also referred to the mobilization of youth in the United States. As to the US labour movement, it is greatly influenced by the Israeli Labor Party which successfully sold the idea that Israel is the fruit of the struggle of labouring classes. To date, the US labour movement has been solidly behind Israel and until it comes to realize the fraud of Zionism, it will not be of any support to the grassroots movement developing in the United States in support of the one-state solution.

Panel VI
The sixth panel focused on the organization for building one country for all its citizens. The first speaker was Professor Ghada Karmi (Exeter University) who explained the obstacles facing the establishment of an international movement promoting the one-state solution. She acknowledged that much of her presentation would be a reiteration of what had already been said by the various presenters who came before her but would insist on increasing the awareness of the difficulties faced. In particular, the lack of a unified Palestinian leadership and the lack of a clear and unified message among Palestinians are mortal obstacles. Notwithstanding the fact that Zionism is still alive and well and working to replace the indigenous people of Palestine, it also benefits from a large network of influential people all over the world in all walks of life. Furthermore, it draws upon the huge capital of empathy provided by the Holocaust, and finally, it builds on the emotional ties that Jews have toward Israel. Yet, against this formidable array of obstacles, Karmi believes the moment is right to start that movement where the first order of business is to mobilize Palestinians in their various constituencies. Second, the PLO should be revived and eventually dissolve the Palestinian Authority. Third, the United Nations General Assembly should be used as a venue for discussing the idea of the one-state solution. She proposed the establishment at the Conference of an ad-hoc committee that would coordinate the establishment of an international movement promoting the one-state solution.

The second presenter was Professor Leila Farsakh (University of Massachusetts – Boston) who addressed the issue of building a movement in the Arab world and among Palestinians promoting the one-state solution. She indicated that the challenges to creating such a movement hinge on three issues: first, the need to rethink the state paradigm as the framework for Palestinian struggle for self-determination; second, the need to identify the kind of leadership and grassroots activism that will mobilize support for this idea among Arabs and mostly among Palestinians; and third – and probably the most difficult – how to deal with the anger generated by Israeli actions in the Arab and Palestinian streets, especially when addressing the question of Jewish Israeli political and civil rights in Palestine. The difficulty lies in the continuous Israeli war on Palestinians and the victims’ legitimate refusal to engage with their victimizers. Farsakh indicated the need to move from statehood to equal rights for all. The Arab and Palestinian experiences have shown that statehood does not mean equality of rights. If the one-state solution, which is based on moral and practical arguments as well as on legal and political considerations, is to move forward, the challenge lies in
how to transfer the one-state idea from being moral into becoming a realistic political project that has currency among the inhabitants of the land as much as internationally. At the Palestinian level, the first step is to reunify the fragmented Palestinian body politic, a theme developed by Karma Nabulsi and that could be achieved by reviving the PLO. Discussions with the various political constituencies in the refugee camps, in the diaspora, in the West Bank and Gaza, and with Palestinian Arabs in Israel have already been initiated and should continue. Also, at the Arab and Palestinian levels, she indicated that two debates need to take place for the one-state to gain momentum. The first would be an open discussion on identity and free open space to rehabilitate the concept of the Arab Jew. It was an indirect response to the call made by Smadar Lavie. The second debate ought to be about multiculturalism in the Arab world, how to reinvigorate the present Arab identity with the cosmopolitan character it once had. This means affirmation of the impossibility of Zionism but not negating Jewish identity.

The third presentation was made by researcher and political activist Omar Barghouti, a highly compelling articulation of the vision of a one-state solution and the vehicle to achieve it (see his paper in this issue). Barghouti is a rising star in the intellectual and political spectrum of Palestinian society. His vision of an ‘ethical de-Zionization of Israel’ as well as a vehicle for achieving that – namely, resistance – is an extraordinary fusion of moral principles and political determination in solving the problem at hand in all of its dimensions, whether they are moral, political, economic, or cultural. The reader is invited to a most provocative paper submitted at the Conference where the ovation given to his presentation is a testimony of the resonance his words among the audience.

The last speaker was the noted Israeli ‘new’ historian Ilan Pappe (University of Exeter) who commenced his presentation by referring to an incident that happened earlier in March, namely the march into the town of Umm el Fahm by right-wing Israeli fanatics and the clashes that ensued. His reference to that incident was to underline the urgency of the one-state solution. He indicated that if the narrative on the one-state solution is not linked to the urgency prompted by the facts on the ground, the whole initiative will become an exercise in futility. He then warned the audience and the speakers about dwelling too much on the final product, i.e. the contours and contents of the one-state solution. The movement advocating such a solution is – by nature – a fluid movement that will respond to facts. Change is incremental and many times the by-products of change are as important as the final product itself. The de-Zionization of Israel will not happen because of the actions of the movement but because of changes that will take place outside its control, such as the demise of capitalism and the loss of monopoly power by the United States. The actions of the movement are to add individual dots that will constitute the final picture. He also indicated that the Gaza massacres are just a preamble of actions that Israel will take in the future. The Umm el Fahm incident is a rehearsal of what may happen if there is a decision to expel the Arab residents from that town. Israelis do not feel they have been chastised by their actions in Gaza and are therefore likely to repeat them, and therefore another Gaza is just around the corner.

Panel VII
This was the last panel and its theme was Israel’s strategies of destruction and debilitation. It also explored the implications of the war on Gaza to coexistence, cohabita-
tion, and future statehood. Three speakers were featured including two from the preceding panel. The new speaker was American activist Nancy Murray who spoke about ways to make Israel’s war on Gaza a pyrrhic victory. For that she emphasized the need to devise a narrative, a Gaza story, which would seize the moment of the changing atmosphere in the United States. Many in the United States are having second thoughts about Israel, Zionism, and Palestine. She believes that it is possible to tell Gaza’s story in a way that uncovers what Israel’s creation and occupation have meant for Gazans and all Palestinians. The second major point of her presentation was the need to change American perceptions about Hamas. One of the hurdles faced by proponents of the one-state solution is overcoming the interpretation of the ‘war on terror’ as an ideological struggle between moderates and extremists, in which Muslim radicals seek the annihilation of Jews. She describes the prevailing atmosphere in the United States and how Zionists have successfully managed to depict Hamas as a real threat to the United States. Both the media and Capitol Hill are totally immersed in that inaccurate narrative. This perception needs to be changed and can be changed which is what her movement and the one-state solution movement are seeking to accomplish.

The second presentation was made by Ilan Pappe who built on his presentation in the preceding panel. He started by indicating that there are three different kinds of struggle associated with the issue of Gaza. The first is the struggle for memory with academics. In this respect, he viewed that the Gaza massacre must be contextualized as a continuation of the ethnic cleansing that started in 1948 – a fact which academics have accepted nowadays. The second struggle is over the media. Israel’s destructive policies are incremental so as not to alert the media. The third is political and resides in the manipulation of politicians by Israel. He cited the delegation of five European heads of state sent by an angry European electorate to stop the Gaza massacres and all they did was to extol Israel’s democracy and respect for human and civil rights. According to Pappe, Europe is continuing to pay the price of atonement for the Holocaust which Israel is more than happy to use as an implement of blackmail. It is, according to Pappe, the worst form of anti-Semitism.

The third and final presentation was made by Omar Barghouti. Building on his earlier presentation and that of Pappe, he made a series of points about the implications of Israel’s war on Gaza. First, the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in Gaza thwarted Israel from achieving its goals. Second, the war has forced Israel to drop its mask and reveal the true nature of Zionism. Third, it also exposed Western complicity. Sending five European heads of state to celebrate Israel’s 60th anniversary on the eve of the ceasefire is absolutely inexcusable. Fourth, there is a radical transformation within civil society all over the world in its view of Israel but also in need of action. The BDS movement of which Barghouti is one of the leaders is starting to hurt Israel by its effectiveness. He cited numerous examples of such achievements. Barghouti concluded that Palestinian human rights are universal rights that are articulated within the framework of international law. The peoples of the Global South should lead a takeover of the United Nations and democratize it. The United States cannot be left alone to dictate policy in the United Nations. Finally, by affirming Palestinian rights and humanity the grassroots movement he is advocating will help liberate not only Palestinians, but also Israeli the prisoners of a collective psychosis.
Appendix 1. The Boston Declaration on the One State

The first North American conference to discuss a one-state solution in Palestine/Israel took place in Boston on 28–29 March 2009. Building on debates initiated at previous conferences, including those held in Madrid and London in 2007, the conference programme broke new ground in its focus on the strategies, logistics, methods, policies and organizational means needed to implement a one-state solution. Boston is central to contemporary American intellectual and academic life, and has a storied role in American history. The symbolic birthplace of the American struggle for democracy, it offered an ideal venue for a conference dedicated to promoting genuine democracy in Palestine/Israel.

Following detailed discussions of the limitations of the two-state solution, the proceedings offered a rich examination of the context, opportunities, advantages of – as well as the difficulties, obstacles, and possible objections to – the movement toward a one-state solution. The audience was large, diverse, and enthusiastic, devotedly following the debate and engaging in it via questions and discussion to the extent time allowed.

Research and analysis presented at the conference confirmed the reality that, since the beginning of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1967, a single state – Israel – has governed all of historic Palestine. Thus, in effect, a single state already exists. However, the current arrangement is both unjust and unsustainable, affording full political rights only to Israeli Jews (and even among Jews there are considerable differences in access to power and privileges between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim) while denying them to Palestinians.

Currently, no Palestinian enjoys the full spectrum of rights afforded to Jewish Israelis. Palestinians who survived the expulsions attendant on the creation of Israel in 1948, and their descendants, are second-class citizens of Israel and, simply because they are not Jewish, they face systematic and institutionalized forms of discrimination, political marginalization and escalating racially motivated threats to their well-being. Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza have suffered decades of brutal military occupation; thousands of them have been killed or injured; their homes have been summarily demolished, their lands expropriated, their sources of livelihood destroyed or confiscated, their ability to move around their own territory severely restricted, their access to healthcare and education curtailed, and their children slowly but inexorably stunted, both physically and emotionally. Meanwhile, the single largest component of the Palestinian people – those in enforced exile or refugee camps in the Arab World – are denied their fundamental human right of return to their homeland, again, simply because they do not happen to be Jewish.

Even were it still feasible, a two-state solution designed to preserve Israel as a Jewish majority state, would fail to adequately address the rights and interests of all Palestinians. Israel would have a permanent warrant to discriminate against its Palestinian citizens, and the rights of Palestinian refugees to return would be effectively annulled by the creation of a Palestinian ‘state’ scattered throughout the West Bank and loosely connected to Gaza. Indeed, in the unlikely event that Palestinians under occupation – who comprise only a minority of the Palestinian people – could be coerced into compromising away the rights of the majority of their fellow Palestinians, the most that they could hope to receive in turn would be an archipelago of disconnected islands permanently and structurally dominated by Israel.

Only a single state offers a way to protect the human rights of Israeli Jews and all the components of the Palestinian people: those inside Israel, who would no longer suffer the stigma of being non-Jews in a state intended for Jews; those under occupation, who would be relieved of its pressures and burdens; and those in exile, who would be able at last to exercise their right of return. It is increasingly evident that a variety of factors – chief among them Israel’s relentless colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem – have rendered the two-state solution little more than an ever-receding mirage that entices but never fulfils its promise. It is time to recognize that the re-partition of Palestine into two political entities is neither just nor practical, and has, for decades, been a distraction from the work that needs to be done for a just and lasting peace.

Instead of pursuing the two-state solution mirage, conference participants articulated a vision of a country founded on democratic, inclusive and egalitarian principles, and on institutions and practices that comply with international law and universal human rights. The constitution and actual practices of such a state would address the rights and needs of all its citizens.
Conference speakers explored different possible configurations of a single state, including democratic secular and confederal or bi-national models, and agreed that further study and articulation of the relative advantages of these models is critical.

Conference participants took note of the substantial obstacles facing the implementation of the one-state vision, including the opposition of the majority of Israeli Jews, and some Palestinians as well—including PA and PLO officials who command vital resources and monopolize many of the institutions intended to serve the Palestinian people. The ‘international consensus’ in support of the two-state solution will be difficult to challenge while the Palestinian leaderships in the occupied territories either pursue negotiations toward two states or promote resistance without strategies to achieve full Palestinian rights. Revitalizing and democratizing the PLO, and making it accountable to the needs of the entire Palestinian people, thus looms as a priority for Palestinians. A vision is needed that transcends the existing falsely ‘realistic’ options and offers something new to both Palestinians and Israeli Jews, inviting both to accept justice and democracy as the keys to lasting peace.

And even though there are undoubtedly challenges ahead, the conference also took note of the one-state movement’s substantial assets: the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in their quest for justice, peace, and equal rights; the small but growing number of Israeli Jews determined to find a way to live democratically and in mutual respect with Palestinians; the struggle for legitimacy in which universal principles of justice and democracy are beginning to turn the tide against narrow chauvinism and worn-out exclusivism; and an international solidarity movement that has responded to the call for justice by supporting boycotts, divestment, and sanctions against Israel to force its compliance with international law. Most of all, conference participants upheld the one-state vision as the only idea with the requisite moral clarity and power to transcend the current contours of the conflict, and to bring a just and therefore lasting peace to the region.

Signatories: Ali Abunimah (Co-founder of Electronic Intifada); Munir Akash (Professor of Literature); Salman Abu-Sitta (President of Palestine Land Society); Susan Akram (Clinical Professor of Law); Naseer Aruri (Chancellor Professor Emeritus of Political Science); Oren Ben-Dor (Professor in the Philosophy of Law); Seif Da’na (Professor of Sociology); George Bisharat (Professor of Law); Hani A. Faris (Professor of Political Science); Leila Farsakh (Professor of Political Science); As’ad Ghanem (Professor of Political Science); Monadel Herzallah (Arab-American Union Members Council); Ghada Karmi (Palestinian Academic & Writer); Mujid Kazimi (Professor of Nuclear & Mechanical Engineering); Joel Kovel (Professor of Social Studies); Howard Lenow (Union & Civil Rights Attorney); Michael Lynk (Professor of Law); Saree Makdisi (Professor of English & Comparative Literature); Norton Mezvinsky (Professor of History); Ilan Pappe (Professor of History); Gabriel Piterberg (Professor of History); and Najib Saliba (Professor of Middle East History