

## Yoav Bar: ONE DEMOCRATIC STATE

Report by y Theresa Wolfwood

When Yoav Bar told an audience at Toronto's Beit Zatoun recently that he came from Haifa, Palestine, we knew we were going to hear something new and hopeful that would bring peace and democracy to the regions of Israel and Palestine's West Bank. The 'One Democratic State' (ODS) is the only realistic and possible solution to the volatile and unjust present situation. Bar said that it is already one state; an illegal, racist, undemocratic state ruled by the occupying military of Israel's government.



The task is to envision and to plan to make it democratic. The vision is clear – look at the map. There can be no possible 2-state solution for a region where three million Palestinians are squeezed ever more daily into pockets of land surrounded by the colonial power which has almost 8 million people. It is not a solution and as Bar notes is based on the oppression of all people in the Middle East and only perpetuates the policy of ethnic cleansing.

Bar says that the creation of an ODS includes the right of return of all those Palestinians and their descendents who have been exiled since 1948. The right of return must be given to all, but as Bar believes, not all will return; the vision of an ODS

needs to include planning an infrastructure for the return.

Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed by Canada and many countries enshrines the right of return of all exiles to their homeland.

The present state of Israel was envisioned by Zionists over 100 years ago and Zionists settlers stated moving into Palestine 100 years ago with the tacit and later overt support of imperial powers in Europe and North America. These powers support a degree of democracy in many countries to create a degree of stability that permits resource exploitation, in particular petroleum, but democracy is still not supported in the Middle East regions.

The forces of change are powerful now in many Middle East and North Africa countries; these forces are stirring in Palestine; new ideas and visions are mobilizing change daily and globally. When the forces of democracy (including economic democracy) and the right of return become stronger, Bar says Zionism will become unacceptable and be recognized as being outside global standards.

Bar told us that some members of parliament in both Israel and Palestine Authority already accept the goal of ODS. Many social movements and activists are also committed to ODS. Bar asks other solidarity and activist groups, like boycott groups or organizations defending Palestinians against home and land destruction & theft, to incorporate ODS into their goals. He said many activists on the ground are engaged in these daily struggles; the vision of ODS gives them strength and hope. There is a specific movement for ODS as well, where other activist groups can learn more and commit their support.



Bar is a quiet, soft-spoken person who brushed aside questions about his situation and treatment as a dissent Israeli Jew by saying what happens to Palestinians is what really matters. Research reveals, however, that he has been beaten and jailed for non-violent activity. We later learned he had been detained and questioned when he entered Canada. The immigration officer found his name on a list and questioned his birthplace, his writings, his political affiliation and asked him if he had been arrested. Bar replied he had been many times and the officer made him wait while he read his articles, then let him go asking, "Are you going back to Israel, after all the things that you write...?" Bar replied "Well, these are my positions. They are no secret. I stay there in order to make it a better place."

He has been a member of several a grassroots movements to realize an ODS future and has helped organize "March of Return – Masirat al-Awda" in Galilee since

their inception in 1996. He was active in the "Anti-Apartheid Movement" inside Israel. Now he is working to advance the 'One Democratic State' initiative with many partners. He helped organize the ODS Haifa Conferences: For the return of Palestinian refugees and a democratic secular state as well as conferences in Yaffa, Bethlehem, in London and Munich.

The immediate task is to raise consciousness internally and globally of the value and necessity of ODS; Bar's group works with Palestinian activists and groups including Mazin Qumsiyeh, (author of *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*. 2010. Pluto Press. See: [www.bookreviews.bbcf.ca/?s=Mazin+Qumsiyeh](http://www.bookreviews.bbcf.ca/?s=Mazin+Qumsiyeh) ) and with international activists who want to support the ODS. A conference on ODs will be held in Stuttgart, Germany, in May, 2013.

Many people talk about Palestine in pessimistic terms, deterring hope and action. Some people accept the possibility of One Democratic State, but few are actively pursuing this goal. Bar's trip to Canada kindled much interest and hope in the audience, including a Palestinian friend from Jordan who was in Toronto at the same time. One participant said that ODS is the only true solution. Bar is calling for partners everywhere to work for ODS. At the end of his moving presentation at Beit Zatoun, a new working group was formed for that very purpose.

Further information on ODS: <http://freehaifa.wordpress.com/> and information about the sponsor in Toronto see: [www.beitzatoun.org](http://www.beitzatoun.org)

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