

Apartheid: The missing truth

The most integrated country in the Mideast is... Israel

Israel has been accused of apartheid by people ranging from New Zealand columnists John Minto and Matt McCarten to US ex-President Jimmy Carter. Before you accept their conclusion, consider the following facts.

Israel. All of the 1.4 million Arab citizens of Israel have equal rights, including the right to vote. There are Arab members of the Knesset (Israel's Parliament), there is an Arab High Court Judge, and Arab judges in the lower courts. Arabs peacefully walk the streets, mingling with Jews and Christians. Arabs enjoy the same governmental services as Jewish citizens and attend the same universities. The only 'right' that Arabs do not share in full with Jews is that they are exempt from compulsory military service. According to polls, most Israeli Arabs would rather remain in Israel than become part of a Palestinian state.

Gaza. Israel withdrew its forces and evacuated all Jewish villages from Gaza in 2005. With no Israeli presence, there can be no apartheid. When Hamas took over in 2007, with its announced (and demonstrated) intention of destroying Israel, Israel closed its border. How many governments would open their borders to a people who are bent on its destruction? Israel also imposed a partial blockade which, according to the UN charter, is the first measure to be taken to deter aggression, and has been used by other countries without being called apartheid. Even so, humanitarian supplies are permitted.

The West Bank. Since the Oslo Accords of 1993, Palestinians living in cities of the West Bank outside of Jerusalem have been under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, and their laws are made by Palestinians. Again, ipso facto, no apartheid. However there are Israeli-manned checkpoints along some roads and a security fence along the border. While the location of the checkpoints and security barrier is a matter of dispute, the reason for them is not. They are there to stop Palestinians from killing Jews, not to oppress a racial group or to deny them the right to life and liberty. They are not apartheid.

In conclusion, Israel is one of the most integrated, multi-cultural societies in the world, with equal rights for all — despite the hostile circumstances it is in. One can only wonder about the motives of those who, knowing these facts, accuse Israel of apartheid. (To read more, visit www.kbrm.org.nz and click on Feb. 23 post.)

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