

Israel can't make peace with force

The Leader-Post
Thursday, August 17, 2006

The letter "Terrorists to blame for Lebanese conflict" in the July 28 edition of the Leader-Post claims that Arab states and Palestinians have consistently rejected peace talks. This is completely untrue. Palestinians through the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), an organization that Israel branded as terrorists, signed the Oslo Peace Accord, participated in the Camp David and subsequent peace talks at Taba in 2001, and fully accepted the pro-Israeli, U.S.-driven, but now defunct, Middle East road map.

However, Ariel Sharon, former leader of the Likud Party, adamantly opposed the Oslo Peace Accord and the 2001 Taba Peace negotiations. After Ehud Barak's government lost the election, the new Sharon government refused to continue any peace negotiations. He then launched an attack on the Gaza Strip and West Bank to crush the Palestinian Authority under the false pretext of fighting terrorism.

All Arab states under the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt, offered Israel a comprehensive peace treaty and full sovereign recognition with full diplomatic relations provided that Israel withdraw from the occupied territories captured during the 1967 invasion. This offer is on the table even today. Israel has unequivocally rejected this historic Arab offer for peace.

The writers of the letter (Ian MacAusland-Berg, Alan Ross and Michael Katz) also claim that the terrorist attacks on Israel by Arabs date from 1947. But the truth is that it is the Israelis who introduced terrorism and religion into an otherwise nationalist conflict between the indigenous Palestinians and the European Jewish settlers.

Israel forcefully rejects all calls by the UN, European Union, Palestinians and Arabs to withdraw from the occupied lands through negotiations, and thus rejects peaceful coexistence with the Arab world.

All that said, in the historical Palestinian and Israeli conflict, there is no end to the blame game. Wrongs have been committed by all sides. Human suffering on all sides has to be acknowledged. The Jewish people also suffered long and horrendously in Europe. They have created and migrated to Israel to seek security and they have a right to live within secure borders free from real threats to their long-term security. Similarly, Palestinians have been suffering a miserable and brutalized life under Israeli occupation since 1967. This fact has also to be acknowledged, and the Palestinian right to self determination and security ensured within their own geographically and economically viable sovereign state.

Israel has to acknowledge that the last 40 years of territorial occupation and wars have proven that it cannot have the regional acceptance and security it seeks by military means. It is the continued occupation of Arab lands in the West Bank, Shebaa strip (Lebanon), and the Golan Heights (Syria) that breeds more regional militancy against Israel, and against those who support this occupation.

It is obvious that foreign conflicts are interpreted, and have different impacts on the diverse communities that form the Canadian mosaic. The harmony and security of the Canadian mosaic is paramount. Therefore, Canadian Muslim, Jewish and Christian faith communities have a duty to begin a dialogue that would seek a permanent just peace in the Middle East, and jointly influence the Canadian government to pursue the same objective diplomatically without taking sides through the United Nations.

Through the Leader-Post, I would like your concerned readers to know that I will take the first step locally to start such a dialogue.

Riazuddin Ahmed

Ahmed is president, Muslims for Peace & Justice (MPJ).

© **The Leader-Post (Regina) 2006**