

PRIZE OF PEACE

By David Knoll

*"Peace hath her victories
No less renowned than war"*
- Milton

In her Sydney University address on 5 November 2003 entitled "Peace in the Middle East: A Global Challenge and a Human Imperative" Dr Hanan Ashrawi spoke on many levels to an audience far larger than the 600 persons in attendance at the Seymour Centre. The address was intriguing as much for what she did not say as for what she did say.

Dr Ashrawi acknowledged that "for the conflict to be resolved, its causes must be identified and solved, while grievances and fears on both sides must be addressed and laid to rest." This is the closest Dr Ashrawi has yet come to publicly recognising the actual fears and needs of her peace partner, the Jewish people. That is a welcome change as she hitherto had rejected the Oslo Accords, Camp David process, the Roadmap and the recent "symbolic peace treaty" reached in Switzerland between mid-level Palestinian officials and Israeli left-wing opposition leaders (known as the Geneva Accords). She even publicly lauded Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War.

Dr Ashrawi's credibility as a peacemaker will only be assured by her distancing herself from the rejection of the necessary compromises that peacemaking inevitably involves. As recently as October 20, 2003, her "Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue & Democracy" (MIFTAH) rejected even the "symbolic peace treaty" contained in the Geneva Accords. MIFTAH published a call for an "absolute rejection of compromises that infringe on the Palestinian people's inalienable rights". Regrettably, no Australian journalist asked her about MIFTAH's public position during her visit to Australia.

In her address she recognised at last that Palestinians and Israelis have reached the stage of dependent legitimacies, but did so with only an evanescent balance. She maintained her cycloptic view that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as "the longest standing case of military occupation and as the most persistent unresolved case of denial, dispossession and exile in contemporary history." And she sought to address something she termed a "balance of terror". There is no such thing. There is no terrorism equation to which equivalence or balance can be ascribed. No fair minded Australian can accept that there is any moral equivalence between the homicide bombings targeted against innocent Jewish civilians, with the Israeli response aiming to deter and eliminate the very people who despatch the murderers.

There is one other important matter in Dr Ashrawi's address that warrants comment. She said that: "The Palestinian refugees must be granted historical, legal, moral

and human recognition and redress in accordance with international law and the requirements of justice." To understand what that could mean, one must recall that in 1951 at the insistence of the Arab states the Palestinians were expressly excluded from the protection of the Convention on the Status of Refugees (which applies to asylum seekers who come to Australia). That Convention would require their resettlement in the lands where they have sought refuge. Such resettlement is the remedy that international law provides for refugees. No Arab State has complied, and the burden cannot be shifted to Israel. Historical accuracy requires one to note that there is no ongoing claim regarding the 565,000 Jewish refugees who in the same period of conflict fled for their lives from Arab lands. Israel quite properly resettled them.

Once a peaceable Palestinian State is established it will have the right, under international law, as does any sovereign nation, to determine for itself who will be its citizens, including Palestinians not living within its boundaries. If the return is to be to the territory of a new Palestinian State, then the issue would not need Israel's agreement at all. Dr Ashrawi has not departed from the view that Jews must not be allowed to live in peace in the new Palestinian State, while Arabs must be allowed to live in the Jewish State. The point is simply that neither – by sheer force of demography – would then be a Jewish State. The equity of treating Jews and Arabs equally in terms of their respective self-determinations is not an equity to which Dr Ashrawi has yet subscribed.

Dr Ashrawi continues to complain that the Roadmap, a peace process which she has consistently opposed, was defective as "Front-loading the process with Palestinian obligations, adopting the sequential and conditional approach and creating further interim phases without guarantees on the ground have rendered the road map inoperative and subject to extremists on both sides." The condition to which she obliquely refers is an end to the terror unleashed by Chairman Arafat three years ago so that the parties could negotiate peace unconstrained by the terrorism that is directed to the elimination of the Jewish State. She apparently continues to see some unfairness in requiring an end to terrorism to enable the negotiation of peace.

Dr Ashrawi regrettably continues to resist *unconditionally* deploring terrorism aimed at the destruction of the Jewish State. One can only hope that she will soon begin to explicitly recognise Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State in the Holy Land within secure and recognised borders. Only when she does so will she be able to claim that she has transformed herself from partisan advocate to serious peacemaker. R

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Ashrawi in Sydney