



Africa's Past Is Our Present

Palestine, Africa and the unfinished struggle against colonialism

Palestinian World Social Forum Statement for the World Social Forum

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As the World Social Forum returns to Africa, gathering in Cotonou under the call that another world is possible, Palestine comes not as a distant cause seeking sympathy, but as part of a shared and unfinished struggle for liberation. Africa and Palestine are joined by histories of colonial conquest, racial hierarchy, dispossession and resource extraction; and by generations of resistance that insist that land, dignity, freedom and the future of peoples are not commodities to be traded by empires.

Africa's past is our present. What Palestinians are confronting today; including genocide, mass displacement, the destruction of social and economic life, and the attempt to erase a people's political existence; recalls what many African peoples endured under European colonial ventures. The technologies and language have changed; the underlying logic remains disturbingly familiar. A people are represented as an obstacle. Their land is treated as empty or underused. Their resources are opened to outsiders. Violence is renamed security, conquest becomes development, and the colonizer claims the authority to decide which lives, histories and futures matter.

The historical connection is not incidental. Theodor Herzl looked to Cecil Rhodes as a colonial model and sought his support precisely because, in Herzl's own formulation, the Zionist project was "something colonial." Rhodes embodied an imperial vision stretching from the Cape to Cairo: a continent reorganized around European power, settlement, infrastructure and extraction. Political Zionism emerged within that same age of empire, seeking to transplant its methods into Palestine and to present colonization as a service to Western strategic interests. What was tested across Africa; the seizure of territory, demographic engineering, racial separation and the subordination of indigenous life; was not left behind by history. It was carried into new geographies and institutional forms.

Today Gaza is again being approached through the colonial fiction of terra nullius: not as the living homeland of a people with rights and agency, but as a devastated space available for redesign, investment and control. Under the umbrella of the so-called Board of Peace, powerful



states and private interests presume the authority to determine Gaza's governance, security, reconstruction and economic future while Palestinians are denied meaningful sovereignty over their own land. Plans are discussed in the language of recovery, opportunity and modernization, even as Palestinian return, reparation, self-determination and accountability are pushed aside.

This resembles a twenty-first-century scramble: external powers dividing roles, contracts, zones of influence and political authority over a territory whose people are expected to accept decisions made elsewhere. Gaza cannot be treated as a real-estate opportunity, an investment frontier or a laboratory for externally imposed rule. Reconstruction without liberation risks becoming the continuation of destruction by economic means. Peace without justice becomes the management of subjugation. No board, donor consortium, corporation or foreign government can substitute for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to determine their own future.

The same political economy that drove colonial expansion continues to shape our present. Racialized capitalism converts land, labor, natural resources and even human suffering into sources of accumulation. Across Africa, communities continue to resist land and water grabbing, extractive industries, illegitimate debt, unequal trade, greenwashing and carbon markets that reproduce dispossession in ecological language. In Palestine, corporations supply weapons, surveillance systems, cloud infrastructure, construction machinery and financial services that sustain occupation and destruction. The chain connecting colonial violence to corporate profit is global.

Gaza also exposes a dangerous technological frontier. Artificial intelligence, automated targeting, biometric surveillance and data infrastructures have been incorporated into systems of domination and warfare. Palestinian lives and communities are treated as data points in an experimental environment, while military and technology firms market systems as "battle-tested" and export them abroad. Technologies refined through the surveillance and targeting of Palestinians do not remain in Palestine. They travel to borders, police forces, militaries and authoritarian governments; threatening migrants, racialized communities, workers, activists and social movements across Africa and the world.

We therefore reject the myth that technology is neutral. When designed and deployed within structures of colonial power, AI can accelerate violence, widen the distance between decision-makers and those harmed, and obscure responsibility behind algorithms and proprietary systems. Digital sovereignty must mean more than access to technology. It must include democratic control over data and infrastructure, protection from mass surveillance, transparency, enforceable corporate responsibility and an absolute refusal to allow profit or automation to dilute legal and human accountability.



The genocide in Gaza is not only a Palestinian catastrophe. It is a test of whether the world has learned anything from colonial history. International law cannot be universal in language and selective in application. African peoples know the cost of a legal order that proclaims civilization while licensing conquest, and of institutions that demand obedience from the Global South while granting impunity to powerful states and their allies. If genocide, apartheid, unlawful occupation and colonial domination are tolerated for strategic or economic reasons, no people can rely on law as protection from power.

The answer cannot be the abandonment of international law, but its decolonization and equal enforcement. States must fulfil their duties to prevent and punish genocide, end complicity, halt arms transfers that facilitate violations, regulate corporations, and support meaningful accountability before international and domestic institutions. Corporations and their executives must not be permitted to hide behind complex supply chains, government contracts or claims of technological neutrality. There can be no credible global order in which profit is protected more consistently than people.

Cotonou offers a powerful place from which to say this. Benin carries histories of African sovereignty, cultural survival, enslavement, colonial rule and resistance. The Forum's emphasis on decolonization and sovereignty, resource governance, social and climate justice, self-determination, digital power, popular mobilization and resistance to capitalist globalization provides a framework for bringing our struggles together. Palestine belongs within each of these conversations; not as a single-issue exception, but as a site where the structures confronting peoples across the Global South converge with exceptional intensity.

Our solidarity must therefore be political, practical and reciprocal. Palestinian liberation is bound to African struggles for economic sovereignty, debt justice, control of natural resources, climate reparations, dignified mobility, democratic technology and freedom from foreign military domination. Pan-African and Palestinian traditions of resistance remind us that liberation cannot be delivered from above by the institutions that profit from domination. It is built through organized peoples, shared knowledge, cultural steadfastness, worker and youth movements, feminist leadership, indigenous and rural resistance, and sustained international solidarity.

We call on the movements gathered at the World Social Forum to oppose every attempt to convert Gaza's destruction into a new market; to reject externally imposed governance that sidelines Palestinian agency; to demand an end to genocide, apartheid, occupation and settler colonialism; to confront the companies and financial institutions that profit from these systems; and to build coordinated campaigns for divestment, arms embargoes, corporate accountability and equal application of international law. We call for alliances linking Palestinian movements with African struggles against extraction, militarization, digital surveillance, illegitimate debt and racialized borders.



Africa's past must not become the world's future. Yet in Palestine, that past is being made present before our eyes; updated through drones, algorithms, cloud computing, predictive systems and globally integrated markets. To remain silent is to permit colonialism to reinvent itself once again. To act together is to affirm that the lives and futures of peoples cannot be subordinated to imperial ambition or corporate profit.

From Cotonou to Gaza, from the Cape to Cairo, and across the Global South, our struggles are interconnected because the systems confronting us are interconnected. Our response must be equally connected: decolonial, anti-imperial, anti-racist, internationalist and rooted in the sovereignty of peoples.

Palestine will be free when the structures that sustain its colonization are dismantled. Africa will be fully free when the systems that outlived formal colonial rule are overcome. These are not separate horizons. They are part of the same unfinished journey toward justice.

Another world is possible; but only if we build it together.