

What is it about the Palestinians?

By Tan Sri Mohamed Jawhar Hassan

DISPLACED: *No other people have had their land taken away and given to another to whom they did absolutely no wrong*

WHAT is it about the Palestinians that they have become the victims of so many injustices and tragedies?

Throughout history, Palestinian land has been conquered and re-conquered. But so have the territories of many other peoples and nations, from the ancient civilisations girding the Mediterranean to the kingdoms and empires of medieval Europe, Asia, South America and Africa, down to modern times.

The Palestinians were also not the only ones to be colonised in recent centuries. The Europeans colonised and exploited the resources of nearly every other country on the planet during the period.

But there are certain things that, taken collectively, are unique about the Palestinian experience in the last two to three generations that makes one ask, what is it about the Palestinians that they have to endure so many atrocities and injustices?

No other people have had their land taken away and given to another to whom they did absolutely no wrong. Five million Palestinians and their descendants today live as refugees in neighbouring lands and as displaced persons in Gaza and the West Bank, often in communities separated from one another and from the land they till.



Smoke rises after an Israeli shelling at the Shijaiyah neighbourhood in Gaza City on Monday. Palestinian civilians are bearing the brunt of Israel's airstrikes. AP pic

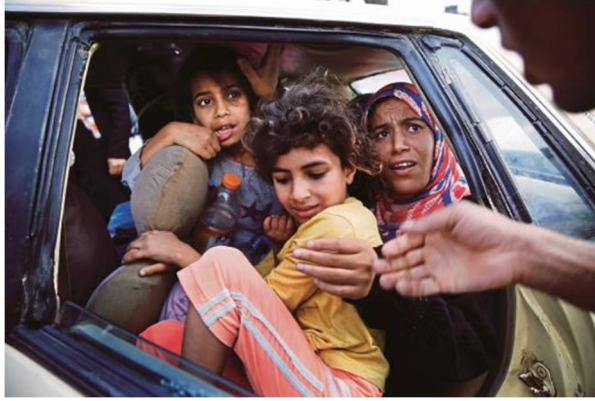
What is it about the Palestinians that they have to beg like no other people, to be granted the right to return to their own land by the regime that displaced them and be denied their pleas?

What is it about the Palestinians, even when left with barely 22 per cent of their original land, that they cannot be granted full member status in the United Nations, only because one permanent member, the staunch ally of Israel, threatened to veto the bid in the Security Council in 2011?

What is it about the Palestinians to suffer the bitter irony of being denied that status, when the regime that took over its land was promptly granted it as early as in 1949, just a year after it declared Israel's founding?

All the Palestinians have secured so far is "Non-Member State Observer" status, granted by an overwhelming majority in the UN General Assembly where no member can cast a veto.

What is it about the Palestinians, that they are denied the basic human and sovereign right to arm themselves adequately to defend life and property, and to fight oppression and further theft of their shrinking land through the building of an ever-growing number of illegal Israeli settlements?



Palestinians flee in a vehicle from Israeli shelling in Bet Lahiya

in northern Gaza Strip on Monday. Reuters pic

What is it about the Palestinians that even a neighbouring country that considers itself a leader of the Arab world colludes with the oppressor to fence the Palestinians in and enforce a blockade that is contributing to the humanitarian disaster in Gaza?

What is it about the Palestinian leadership that it is no longer able to inspire solidarity among the Arabs to vigorously support its cause?

What is it about Hamas, legitimately chosen by Palestinians through elections recognised to be free and fair by foreign observers, that they must be excluded from participation in the peace process, whose inherent utter lopsidedness has prompted Marwan Bishara, professor, writer and host of TV series *Empire*, to label it “hegemonic peace”?

What is it about the militant wings of Hamas, that they are reduced to a foolish, fruitless and futile strategy of firing rockets into Israeli territory that now kill or wound hardly anyone, and that instead provides the pretext for Israel to unleash concerted attacks by air, land and sea on the inhabitants of Gaza?

What is it about the Palestinians that Hamas is called a terrorist organisation by the master terrorists, whose periodic appetite for bombing and killing Palestinian civilians, including families cowering in their homes, children playing on rooftops, people fleeing in the streets with nowhere to hide, and the wounded and sick lying in hospitals, dwarfs anything that the militant wings of Hamas have done in all the time that they have existed?

This does not even take into account the thousands of Palestinians that are held in prisons in Israel without fair trial. B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, numbers them at 5,053 security detainees and prisoners as at May this year.

What is it about the Palestinians that they are powerless to induce the world, including the powers that blithely broadcast themselves as guardians of global peace, upholders of international law, and champions of human rights and humanitarian order, to condemn these acts of barbarism and bring the perpetrating regime to justice in the International Criminal Court? Instead these powers collude with that regime by resolutely and repeatedly upholding its “right to defend itself”.

What is it about the Palestinians? Or should the question more properly be, *What is it with all the rest of us?*

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