



Farouk Khaddoumi

AN argument can be made that a poor showing of only some hundred of persons with general slogans is hardly going to strike the fear of God into the Israelis; it might do just the opposite. Unfortunately the goal of demonstrators isn't going to be met.

Descending on Jerusalem en masse

IN a few days thousands of concerned persons, mostly from Europe and the United States, will be gathering in the occupied Jerusalem. It took much too long for this to be brought about—after all we're already into the Intifada's third year and the occupation's twenty second—but finally a lot of people from around the world are going to gather and peacefully demonstrate for the two-state solution.

The Intifada of course, is the catalyst for all this. Before it, about a hundred non-government organisations (NGOs) were registered with the United Nations' International Co-ordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ICCP) and not much was happening other than more Israeli settlements.

By last summer, however, that number of NGOs had grown to over 1,200!

Of course, the ICCP is in too many ways a reflection of the UN itself—plodding, consensus-bound, bureaucratic. The best world to sum it up, sadly, is "weak". But nevertheless this is the reality of the international situation today; and this might well be one of those cases where a little something is better than nothing.

Before looking ahead a bit to the Jerusalem demonstrations at the end of the month, let me back up just a bit to events at the United Nations in New York during the past few weeks.

Once again, of course, the Americans bullied the organisation, depriving it of dignity it cannot spare to lose at this point.

It shouldn't be forgotten that after all Arafat claims to have achieved since last December he bowed out without even a fight this November over coming to the UN for the General Assembly debate. The "Trojan Horse Dialogue" that I wrote about last week has Arafat tied in all kinds of political knots.

That was bad enough, for the American bluff about all these matters needs to be called and Arafat's own considerable credibility continues to drain—and sooner or later he will have to shift gears or someone else will try again to fill his shoes.

Then the PLO attempted to get seated as an observer state, rather than as the observer organisation it has been for some time. The PLO even pushed to the extent of an Arab League Foreign Minister's meeting on the subject coupled with a lot of blustering words from Arab League envoy Clovis Maksoud, words that once again proved totally empty of any serious content.

In retrospect though, it appears it was factional fighting within the PLO that brought about what took place and which ended in an important political defeat. In the end the PLO's stature was eroded, rather than enhanced; the whole strategy to give the PLO a needed boost thus backfired and achieved the opposite result.

Sources closely connected with Arafat, some of whom were in Tunis at the time the matter was under discussion at the UN, believe the Chairman not only had not

authorised the attempt to upgrade the PLO's status at the UN, but wasn't even aware of it when it began to happen.

Said one of these persons, a very knowledgeable Palestinian who is well-connected in both Tunis and Washington, "I don't think that the PLO studied their moves at the UN carefully." How it was handled "is clearly contradictory to the other stuff they are trying to do".

Apparently—according to administration sources here in Washington—it was the PLO's "Foreign Minister" and the head of the UN delegation, Farouk Khaddoumi, who took the step on his own initiative, thereby forcing everyone else, however reluctantly, to go along with it. At least this is what some in the know people here are saying, Khaddoumi's goal being to bring the US-PLO dialogue to a head or at least cause substantial irritation.

Asked about Khaddoumi's role, one astute observer who has recently spoken with him personally notes that he "doesn't buy the 'peace process' (and the dialogue with the Americans), he rejects it completely and doesn't want anything to do with it."

"He's even turned down all US overtures towards him," this observer added. "In the last few months in expanding the dialogue they are talking to everybody over there and he's refusing to talk."

So much for the most recent example of what Edward Said so thoughtfully commented about in his much-discussed interview last month—a combination of general PLO incompetence and bungling.

But back to the upcoming NGO demonstration which has been given the title "1990: Time For Peace."

Twice yearly the NGOs gather under ICCP auspices—a kind of international re-union of pro-Palestinian sympathisers and activists.

Not much has come out of these meetings over the past few years, other than the start of some new friendships and a couple of publications; yet a lot of money and effort has gone into bringing everyone together.

Then last August while meeting in Vienna, this Christmas-time demonstration in the occupied Jerusalem was decided upon, with the Europeans in the lead.

True to the spirit of UN meetings, a "Final Declaration" was issued in Vienna calling for a UN-sponsored peace conference. To this was added the need for more protection for the Palestinians under occupation with a call upon the Security Council to "establish an immediate UN presence in the post-1967 Israel-occupied territories" coupled with more UNRWA refugee affairs officers to monitor what is happening.

Also decided upon was this December 29 through 31 "peace march" in the occupied Jerusalem. The stated aim is to achieve the broadest possible participation from NGOs around the world under the banner of "two peoples—two states; respect for human and civil rights; negotiations for peace."

From



Washington

These are pretty simple, almost trite slogans, these days—not a lot of backbone in comparison to things being said in some quarters about China or El Salvador.

But that's the way of UN affiliates in this era; especially since the PLO itself has been encouraging such simple slogans which they think can help unite a lot of groups, rather than more advanced political steps to which fewer groups might be ready to respond.

Unfortunately, though, as I write in the days just before the event, it appears that the goal of many thousands of demonstrators isn't going to be met—though possibly there will be a last minute surge.

Actually, it wasn't a very ambitious goal in the first place when you realise that over 1,200 organisations are said to be working with the ICCP and that so many thousands of people are engaged with this issue in one way or another in many countries.

And thus an argument can be made that a poor showing of only some hundreds of persons, coupled with such general slogans, is hardly going to strike the fear of God into the Israelis; indeed it might do just the opposite and encourage them that there just isn't much wind in the sails of all those groups supporting the Palestinian struggle.

All I'm going to say right now is that it'll take an awful lot of people to achieve the most dramatic stated goal of a "human chain" around the wall of the Old City—the symbolism designed to demonstrate the uniting of the struggling Palestinians with their friends in both the Israeli peace movement and the international peace community.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, something similar to this ICCP venture will be taking place on December 31. At noon there is going to be a "White House Vigil For Peace in the Middle East". A march will go from the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church the few blocks to the White House where candles will be lit for the Palestinian martyrs. The slogans for this event are "two peoples, two states; respect for human rights; negotiations for peace."

In some ways, of course, it's good to see that someone here in the American capital cares enough to do something publicly. But in other ways these events tend to be politically depressing for they usually lack both spirit and numbers.

When the list of "sponsors" includes 18 locally active groups and when only a small number of people actually turn up (as has been the case so many times before and as is like this time too), and when this is the only event and one that took a lot of people many weeks to organise, there is the distinct danger of sending the opposite message of that intended.

But a New Year is just ahead. In 1990 we should all resolve to do much more than we have in 1989. May it indeed be "1990: A Time Of Peace".