

Oslo is dead, what's next?

The time has come to replace a process that has led to violence and despair with a new framework based on restorative justice.

By Avraham Burg | Mar.29, 2013 | 12:00 PM



President Clinton presides over the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Photo by AP

This fall will mark 20 years since the Oslo Accords were signed. The euphoria and the hope that accompanied the birth of the peace process gave way to bloodshed, cynicism and boundless despair, anger and fear.

We've reached a crossroads of decisions. We could continue with the same negative feelings for years to come - more humiliation and scorn, more revenge and hatred. We can wait for new cycles of suspicion, arrogance and disregard. We've become used to it all.

However, things could be different.

For both Israelis and Palestinians to get on the right path, we have to go back and honestly discern what went wrong in the previous attempt. It's easy to pin the blame on obvious external factors such as the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the Palestinian leadership, George Bush's term in office, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Barak and Benjamin Netanyahu and the repercussions of the Twin Towers attack. But the truth also lies in harder to reach places: One is political; the other goes far beyond politics.

On the political front, every one of us, Israelis and Palestinians, did not do enough, if at all, to rein in the peace-destroying mechanisms within us. The Israelis signed a peace accord and didn't stop the occupation enterprise via the settlements for one moment. Israel never understood Palestinian sensitivities to the Zionist movement's greatest colonial undertaking. The Palestinians'

expectation was, and remains, that in exchange for the great concession of the majority of their homeland, the erosion and creeping annexation of the little that remains would come to a halt. The Palestinians didn't understand Israeli sensitivities to the continued culture of incitement and violence that emanated from the mosques and was expressed horrifically in terror attacks.

The clash between the settlements and the incitement was unavoidable. When it happened, every structure collapsed. And the result? Oslo has been dead for years; they just forgot to inform the nations and their leaders.

The Oslo Accords were not born to live forever. They were just temporary scaffolding, meant to restructure reality, from occupation and control to partnership among equals. However, the absence of a Palestinian state that can sit at the negotiation table as an equal to the state of Israel created trouble for the unequal process. The Palestinian state was the ultimate decree that Israel, in its fear, never wanted to allow. The Palestinians, for their part, were never prepared to give up, and rightly so.

Meanwhile, current events don't wait for us. New realities now clash: The Palestinian state is an accomplished international fact. The Palestinian statesmen, by turning to the United Nations, revived the formula of two states for two peoples for the foreseeable future, while opponents of the two-state approach want to skip the stage of separating the communities and go straight to one, bi-national state. Some of the latter are positive voices, believing we can live together. Other voices, on both sides, which are stronger, are negative, violent and radical. They dream of one state in which one nation will dominate the other.

To return to the path of dialogue, reconciliation and peace, we, and everyone in our communities must bravely stand against those who are trying - both in Israel and Palestine - to kill the thirst for peace through violence and by sowing fear.

I believe the time has come to explore new paradigms that will save us from the enormous price of more humiliation and arrogance, occupation and violence.

Twenty years after Oslo, 45 years after Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 64 years after the establishment of Israel and the Palestinian Nakba, we have reached a dead end in which there is no freedom for the Palestinian nation and no security for Israelis. We have grown no closer to a just and viable solution of two states for two peoples. We all live under one, discriminatory, Israeli regime. Moreover, many of us lost hope and are no longer able to imagine a just solution for the foreseeable future.

In an effort to pave a new way toward a historic reconciliation and a true political engagement between the nations, we must abandon the perception of the current solution based on multiple layers of separation, isolation and structural discrimination. We must replace it with completely different principles and methods.

We, an international group of Israelis and Palestinians, some from here and others from the Diaspora, have met over the past two years through the Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue, and we have reached the conclusion that a joint dialogue and understanding is both possible and essential.

These principles have no intention of offering practical and detailed solutions, rather they intend to lay totally different foundations for a fair and viable Jewish Israeli-Palestinian partnership.

Our starting point is based on the belief that the fate of both nations is inextricably tied together; that Israeli Jews and Palestinians are part of the Middle East; and also that neither of them is entitled to privileges or exclusive sovereignty over the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

For this purpose:

- Every person living (or possessing residence status) between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea will be guaranteed equal personal, political, economic and social rights. These rights include: defense and security; receiving equal treatment free of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity or religion; freedom of movement; ownership and possession of property; legal access; and election and being elected.
- The collective rights of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians - linguistic, cultural, religious and political - will be guaranteed in every political framework. It is understood that neither side will have exclusive sovereignty on the entire land area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea (including exclusive ownership of land, exclusive access to natural resources, etc.).
- All exclusive privileges currently accorded to Israeli Jews will be canceled, among them: land ownership and access to natural resources. All the resources - material and political - will be redistributed on the basis of principles of restorative justice.
- Recognizing the Palestinian right of return as expressed in UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Implementing this decision will take into account the current reality. A lack of moral and political justice of the expulsion of Palestinians in the past won't be corrected by creating new injustices.
- The new political institutions will enact democratic immigration laws for regulating citizenship. At the same time, Jews and Palestinians living in the Diaspora will enjoy immunity in situations of danger (according to UN decisions). They will have a special status in the citizenship process relative to all other ethnic and national groups.

Like many, I believe with all my heart that mutual recognition based on these principles can bring forth an alternative political reality in which memories of exile and expulsions will turn into a comprehensive implementation of rights, citizenship and belonging. Loss will turn into life and despair will turn into hope.