

Open Letter: *From The Arab-American And Muslim Community To The US Anti-War Movement.*
January 17, 2004

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Background: *A call to mobilize against colonial occupations on March 20th, 2004, was issued and endorsed by a large nationwide coalition of organizations and communities that included the A.N.S.W.E.R Coalition; Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition; the National Lawyers Guild; the Arab Muslim American Federation; the Free Palestine Alliance-USA; the Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation; and the Muslim Student Association of the U.S. and Canada. The National Council of Arab Americans (NCAA) supported this call in full.*

The call to mobilize demanded ending "all colonial occupations from Iraq to Palestine to everywhere". It also called for "bringing the troops home NOW" without delay, and for opposing giving an international cover to the colonial occupation of Iraq.

Some sectors in the anti-war movement objected to and are organizing against these demands, insisting that Palestine be dropped from the call for March 20 (as these same sectors have often demanded), and that internationalizing the occupation of Iraq should remain a viable option.

As a result, and in the context of a long history of being silenced and marginalized, the Arab-American and Muslim community prepared this open letter to the movement.

Dear peace and justice organizations and activists,

On March 20, 2004, the world will mobilize against war and colonial occupations. The significance of this historic day is evident to all and requires no further elaboration. The political clarity and character of this mobilization in the US, however, remains illusive.

This is where our community stands: In confronting war, the people of Palestine and Iraq have paid dearly. They stand against the imperial project shoulder to shoulder with communities of color and the working class in the United States, along with great many subjugated peoples around the globe - from Afghanistan to Colombia, and from the Philippines to Vieques, and on. Without a doubt, the Palestinian and Iraqi people are both welded together in an inextricable unity at the forefront of the global anti-war movement, transforming themselves as a whole as its embodiment and paying in its defense with the dearest of all - their very existence. Yet, despite every home destroyed, child murdered, acre confiscated and tree uprooted, town colonized and ethnically cleansed, wall built, refugee remaining nation-less, and incremental robbery of their self-determination, they remain the very antithetical formulation of empire and with a vision of justice for all.

In the United States, we, Arab-Americans and Muslims have been maliciously targeted, stripped of our rights, and positioned outside the constitutional framework of this country. A new COINTELPRO has been unleashed against our homes and living rooms, as our fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters are plucked away and thrown into unknown prison cells. Thus, in a continuum of history, we stand with African Americans, Japanese Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and all others in the painful struggle for justice. From them all, we take our cue, for they are our predecessors and our partners in this long march.

Accordingly, we the undersigned hereby declare that:

1. We do not accept delinking the struggle of the Palestinian people from the anti-war movement, and regard the struggle in Palestine, as it is viewed worldwide, to be central to any peace and justice mobilization.

2. We insist that the Palestinian right to return and to self-determination are the key anchors of the Palestinian struggle, and that organizations that attempt to diminish, sidetrack, or abrogate these rights, regardless of any other position they may take on Palestine, are acting contrary to the will and aspiration of the Palestinian people.

3. We view all attempts to relegate our collective presence to the margin and to tokenize our participation in the movement to be racist in character. In its attempt to silence the Arab and Muslim voices for decades, particularly that of the Palestinian people, the movement in the US has stood alone in the global movement for justice. We see ourselves as full partners in leading the movement as signified in the heavy price we continue to pay along the way, and reject any attempt to objectify our presence.

4. We regard the positions that the "colonial occupation of Iraq must be internationalized", or that ending the occupation must be conducted over a period of time until the "Iraqis are able to secure their democracy", as implicitly colonial and racist. These are positions that are rooted in the construct of "manifest destiny" and the "white man's burden" to "civilize".

5. We call on our people everywhere to hold all organizations accountable to the positions they take, especially those that depict racist attitudes towards us, implicitly or otherwise, particularly those that tokenize and objectify our struggle. Any organization or movement that finds it acceptable to minimize or disregard for political expediency the struggle of any people

should not be allowed to function within the global justice movement. Justice is neither selective, nor partial or conditional.

We are firm on these principles for the March 20th mobilization and beyond as we call on all communities and organizations to mobilize and stand in force under the following unifying five slogans:

1. End all colonial occupations from Iraq to Palestine to everywhere!
2. Bring the troops home NOW!
3. No to internationalizing colonial occupations!
4. Stop the attacks on civil liberties!
5. Money for jobs, education, and healthcare not for war!

As we salute and stand empowered with sectors of the movement that have taken a principled stand on justice, we seek to participate in the empowerment of all as we call for a genuine global united front against war.

All out on March 20, 2004!

(List in alphabetical order. To be included, please write to: rashmawi@sbcglobal.net)

1. Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition
2. Al-Bireh Palestine Society, California Chapter
3. Al-Qalam Institute
4. American Muslims for Jerusalem (AMJ)
5. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Greater Sacramento Area Chapter
6. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, New Jersey Chapter
7. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Seattle Chapter
8. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Los Angeles/Orange County Chapter
9. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
10. Arab Muslim American Federation
11. Arab-American Community Center, Chicago
12. Arab-American Forum, New Hampshire

13. Arab-American Press Guild
14. San Francisco Bay Area Palestine Coalition
15. Canada-Palestine Association
16. Canada-Palestine Friendship Society
17. Canadian Arab Federation
18. Committee for Democratic Palestine - Canada
19. Committee for Justice - USA
20. Deir Yassin Society of New York
21. Free Palestine Alliance - USA (FPA)
22. Friends of Ghassan Kanafani, Toronto Chapter
23. Kana'an Review
24. Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation (MAS Freedom Foundation)
25. Muslim Students Association of the U.S. and Canada (MSA-National)
26. Muslim Students Association, California State University, Sacramento
27. National Council of Arab Americans (NCAA)
28. Palestine House Educational and Cultural Center, Canada
29. Palestine Right of Return Congress - USA
30. Palestine Solidarity Committee - Los Angeles
31. Palestine Solidarity Committee - Seattle
32. Palestine Solidarity Group - Chicago
33. Palestinian American Women's Association (PAWA)
34. Sacred Roots
35. Students for Justice in Palestine, California State University, Sacramento
36. Students for Justice in Palestine, University of California, Davis
37. The Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP)
38. The United Muslim Association of High Schools Club