The PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department to hold an international conference at the end of 2023

August 27, 2023

Overview

- In recent months the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, headed by Ramzi Rabah, a member of the PLO Executive Committee and a senior Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) figure (see appendix), has been organizing an international conference against "Israeli apartheid," expected to take place in South Africa at the end of 2023. According to the organizers, its objective is to "**build a global front against 'Israeli apartheid' with extensive Arab and international participation, which will adopt an operational strategy and common vision for action to condemn and boycott the Israeli government and demand it be held accountable for its 'crimes' against the Palestinians, their land and their rights**."
- During June 2023, in preparation for the conference, senior figures of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department visited several European countries to form sympathetic fronts while promoting a European forum before the international conference had been held. After the visits the decision was made to hold **the European forum in Belgium on October 15, 2023**. In July 2023 senior Department members met with government and political figures and senior members of the BDS movement in South Africa to prepare and coordinate the conference.
- It will be the second annual conference organized by the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department; it held the first in al-Bireh on December 11, 2022 in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority (PA) ministry of justice,[1] NGOs, human rights organizations and the BDS movement. The conference in South Africa and the visits to European countries is the implementation of the first conference's recommendations to form Palestinian, Arab and international alliances on which to found a united world front against "Israeli apartheid."

[1] For further information see the December 19, 2022 ITIC report, "The Palestinian committee to 'fight apartheid' and slander Israel meets for the first time to discuss policy."

- The activity of the PLO department is consistent with the policy of PA senior figures and is part of **the program for the "political and diplomatic struggle" against Israel announced by Mahmoud Abbas in 2023**. He has often claimed the deadlocked political process and the establishment of a right-wing government in Israel left the Palestinians no option but to extend the international struggle against Israel.
- The Palestinian leadership and public often claim Israel pursues a "policy of apartheid" towards the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, in effect equating Israel's treatment of the Palestinians with the policies of the South African authorities towards the non-white population. Academic researchers and international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, B'Tselem, and the Human Rights Watch have published reports claiming that the measures taken by Israel towards the population in the Palestinian territories are apartheid (Wafa, March 14, 2022). According to the 2002 Rome Convention, apartheid is a crime against humanity.
- Slandering Israel in the international arena is a facet of **the PA's strategy of "peaceful popular resistance"** [popular terrorism], and serves as a tool in the political, propaganda and legal campaign it wages against Israel and as a way to exert pressure on Israel, the countries of the world and UN agencies. The PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, which operates internationally, was established as another tool to slander Israel.
- South Africa was not a random choice as a venue for the conference and plays a prominent role in boycotting Israel. The BDS campaign and the measures to boycott Israel were born in the first Durban Conference (2001), which was sponsored by the UN, and over the years the ruling party in South Africa has been anti-Israeli and pro Palestinian.

Additional Information

Overview

- In recent months, PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, headed by Ramzi Rabah, has been making preparations for an international conference against Israeli "apartheid" which will he held in South Africa at the end of 2023. During June 2023, a delegation which included Ramzi Rabah and Maher 'Amer, the department director general, paid visits Germany, Belgium, Holland and France. The members of the delegation met with government, political, diplomatic, legal officials and senior BDS activists. Their objectives were to form a global "struggle front" against "Israeli apartheid" and to promote the

convening of a European anti-apartheid forum in preparation for the international conference.

- As a result of the PLO Department's efforts the "European-Palestinian initiative against apartheid"[2] decided to hold a European forum conference **in Belgium on October 25, 2023** (Dunia al-Watan, July 12, 2023). In July 2023, senior officials of the PLO Department paid a visit to South Africa to coordinate the international conference planned for the end of 2023.

Visits to Europe

- **Germany**: In Germany the delegation met with Ulrich Ernst, head of the Middle East Department at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They gave him a document related to the settlements and the annexation of Palestinian lands, along with a list of the government ministers and Knesset members who live in the settlements. They also gave him the open letter published by the "first national conference against racial segregation and settler colonialism" held on December 11, 2022 in al-Bireh (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 10, 2023). The members of the delegation also met with the nameless woman in charge of international relations in the German left-wing party Die Linke ("The Left"), and with Heinz Bierbaum, chairman of Die Linke's Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 9 and 10, 2023).

Right: Ramzi Rabah (far right) meets with the head of the Middle East Department at the German Foreign Ministry (next to him). Left: a meeting with the woman in charge of international relations in Die Linke party (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 9, 10, 2023)

[2] A body established in June 2022 in Brussels by the "National Bureau to Defend the Land and to Resist the Settlers" (a depot of the PLO's Executive Committee, established in 1996 by Taysir Khaled, a member of the Executive Committee and formerly a member of the DFLP's political bureau). The Bureau's headquarters are in Nablus and it operates jointly with the BDS movement, human rights organizations, social organizations and pro-Palestinian organizations in Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Holland and Britain.

▸ **France**: The delegation visited European Union headquarters in Strasbourg where they met with Özlem Demirel, head of the Left Bloc in the European Parliament, and her assistant Alexandra Mehdi. Rabah called on the Left Bloc to attend the European forum. Demirel praised the measures taken by the Department and expressed her willingness to participate in the activity and invite the Left Bloc parties to it (PLO website, June 18, 2023)

Ramzi Rabah meets with senior members of the EU Parliament's Left Bloc (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 16, 2023)

▸ **Belgium**: The delegation met with the head of the Middle East department at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the person holding the Palestine portfolio (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 17, 2023). While in Belgium they also met with representatives of Romania, Lithuania, Malta, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Denmark, and called on them to support Palestinian measures on the international level in general and the steps taken by the Department moves in particular (PLO website, June 18, 2023). They also met with representatives of the Irish Sinn Fein Party in the European Parliament, who expressed the party's willingness to support the Department's anti-apartheid activities, including participating actively and effectively in the European Forum (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 18, 2023) .

The members of the delegation meet with representatives of the Sinn Fein Party (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 18, 2023)

▶ **Maher Amer, Department director general**, met with Muhammad al-Shami, chairman of the International Alliance for the Defense of Rights and Liberty in Brussels.[3] Al-Shami welcomed the idea of holding an international legal conference against "Israeli apartheid" and creating a front against "Israel's racial segregation," emphasizing the Alliance's willingness to put its means at the Department's disposal and to be part of international activity and the preparatory committee. Amer also met with Michel Legrand from ECCP (European Coordination of Associations and Committees for Palestine) to discuss the importance of cooperation for holding an international legal conference and participation in the upcoming conference in South Africa (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Apartheid Department, June 15, 2023).

▶ In addition, Ramzi Rabah and Maher Amer met in Brussels with Fiona Ben-Chekroun, the coordinator of the BDS movement in Europe (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 13, 2023).

Rabah and Amer meet with Ben-Chekroun (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 13, 2023)

▶ **Holland**: The delegation's final visit was to Holland, where they met with the European Legal Support Center (ELSC) team, who welcomed the department's activities (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 24, 2023).

[3] L'Alliance Internationale pour la défense des Droits et des Libertés (AIDL)

A meeting with legal figures in the Netherlands (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, June 25, 2023).

Visit to South Africa

▶ About a month after the visits to Europe a delegation from the department led by Ramzi Rabah left for a preparatory visit to South Africa. The delegation included members of the Palestinian Coordination Committee against Apartheid, BDS representative Saleh Hejazi,[4] and Hassin Aliyan, the Council of Palestinian Human Rights Organizations representative from the al-Haq organization in Ramallah. The delegation met with members of the South African Coordination Committee, led by Reverend Frank Chikane, the former president of the World Council of Churches and a prominent leader in the African National Congress (ANC). The meeting was also attended by representatives of civil society organizations, Roshan Dadoo, head of the Boycott Movement (BDS) in South Africa, academics and human rights activists active in the Palestinian solidarity committees.

▶ The delegation also met with Zane Dangor, director general of the foreign ministry, and Ashraf Suleiman, head of the Middle East and North Africa department. The two expressed the foreign ministry's willingness to fully support and assist in holding the conference (Facebook page of the Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, 25 in July 2023).

[4] Saleh Hijazi is a senior activist and coordinator of the BDS campaign in South Africa.

A meeting with senior foreign ministry officials (right to left): Ashraf Suleiman (apparently), Ramzi Rabah, Zane Dangor, Tahsin Aliyan, head of the Boycott Movement (BDS) in South Africa, Roshan Dadoo, and Saleh Hejazi (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, July 25, 2023)

The delegation presents plaques to the head of the BDS in South Africa, Roshan Dadoo (right), and Reverend Frank Chikane (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, July 25, 2023)

The meetings mainly dealt with preparations for the conference and accompanying documents. A decision was made to appoint joint committees to monitor the preparation of the documents and the details of the conference, with the cooperation and coordination of all the parties involved (Facebook page of the PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department, July 24, 2023).

Appendix

The PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department

▶ The PLO Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid Department was apparently established in July 2022. It is headed by Ramzi Rabah, a senior DFLP member. According to Ramzi Rabah, the committee was established as a task assigned to the PLO's Executive Committee, and is responsible for publicizing "Israel's crimes" locally and internationally and especially the [alleged] anti-Palestinian "apartheid regime" Israel is consolidating in Judea and Samaria and "historical Palestine" [i.e., Israel] (Dunia al-Watan, July 5, 2022).

The logo of the PLO Department of Anti-Discrimination and Apartheid (Department Facebook page, November 27, 2022).

▶ Since its founding, the department has been working to establish contact and coordinate with all relevant local and international groups, including various grassroots and civil organizations, solidarity movements, human rights organizations and boycott committees. Their objective is to build a broad international coalition that will exert pressure on international organizations and the international community to punish Israel for its [alleged] "crimes" and develop an integrated legal-propaganda action plan. The Department began its activities on July 4, 2022, when Ramzi Rabah met at PLO headquarters in Ramallah with a delegation from the secretariat of the National BDS Committee to discuss closer cooperation and coordination (Dunia al-Watan, July 5, 2022).

▶ The **Department is chaired by Ramzi Rabah Farid** (whose original name was Farid Boutros Maroun Sarwa) (al-Hadath, March 22, 2021; website of the Palestinian Central Election Committee, 2006). He is Christian, 72 or 73 years old, a member of the DFLP's Central Committee, and in February 2022 was elected by the PLO's Central Council to the Executive Committee to replace Taysir Khaled, who resigned (Wafa, February 7, 2022).

- During an interview he said his family's roots were in the village of Biram in the Upper Galilee.[5] Rabah said he began his activities in Lebanon in 1966, and in 1969 joined the ranks of the DFLP and was one of the founders of the organization in Lebanon. In the 1970s he belonged to the organization's leadership in southern Lebanon. After the PLO forces left Lebanon he remained there with the DFLP leaders. He then moved to Syria and between 1992 and 1996 was in charge of the Syrian branch of the organization. Until 1998 he was in charge of the organization's branches abroad. At the end of 1998 he arrived in the Gaza Strip and held many leadership positions until 2010, including responsibility for the organization's office. After that, he moved to Judea and Samaria where he held a position in the popular organizations (NPA website, 14 April 2022).

Ramzi Rabah interviewed during the first anti-apartheid conference in al-Bireh (Watan TV, December 11, 2022)

- Other activists:
  - **Dr. Maher Amer**: Director general of the Department (Petra, November 24, 2022; PLO website, December 9, 2022) and a DFLP activist (Dunia al-Watan, March 10, 2021). According to his Facebook page studied at al-Najah University in Nablus.

[5] Biram was a Maronite village in the Upper Galilee whose residents were evacuated during Israel's War of Independence and not permitted to return.

Dr. Maher Amer (right) at the meeting in Brussels, following which the European-Palestinian Initiative against Apartheid and the Settlements was established (Maher Amer's Facebook page, June 10, 2022)

- **Shadi Zahed**: Head of the public relations department (Petra, November 24, 2022).

According to his Facebook page he studied at al-Najah University in Nablus.

Shadi Zahed (Shadi Zahed's Facebook page, May 28, 2022).