

Yanis Varoufakis on Why the West's Recognition of Palestine Is a Dangerous Lie

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Yanis Varoufakis: Hello, I'm Yanis Varoufakis with a message from DiEM25 during a week that a number of Western governments, Britain's, France's, Canada's and Australia's, have belatedly recognized on paper the state of Palestine. If only they had done so many decades ago, maybe Israel's ethnic cleansing of a people whose existence Israel did not recognize and still doesn't recognize, on a land that Israel was keen to expropriate from these unrecognized people, well maybe, maybe, that ethnic cleansing project would have been halted. Maybe it would not have morphed into the genocide that is unfolding with untold cruelty while we speak. Is it not a good thing that the governments of Britain, France, Canada and Australia were forced by public opinion, by sensational losses in voter support, to recognize the state of Palestine? Well, I suppose it is a good thing in one sense. But, friends, make no mistake, I'm very much afraid that Keir Starmer, Emmanuel Macron, Mark Carney in Canada, Anthony Albanese, Prime Minister of Australia, did not recognize Palestine so as to ensure that it comes into existence as a real, a sovereign state for a people Israel has put on death row, but only so that they do not actually do what they can to end the genocide and to make the Palestinian state a possibility. In a nutshell, these governments, after decades of complicity, are suddenly falling over themselves to perform a performative act in a manner that has nothing to bring about that which they proclaim – a functioning Palestinian state.

So let us not applaud them. Let us not be fooled by them. Theirs is not an ethical awakening. I wish it were. It is merely the calculated management of a genocide they are doing nothing to stop. It is hypocrisy, polished to a fine sheen, designed not to end the suffering in Gaza, but to sanitize their role in perpetuating it. On the one hand, we observe the grand theater of great power diplomacy. The press conferences, the solemn declarations, the recognition of a state that exists on paper. Meanwhile on the ground, the very foundation of such a state – its people, and their institutions – are being systematically erased. These governments, – the Starmer, Macron, Albanese and Carney administrations – they want you to be distracted by their brave and principled stand while they remain complicit in the war crimes, in the ethnic cleansing, in the genocide. And why now? Why after tens of thousands dead? After the schools and the hospitals were turned into rubble, after thousands of wounded children were and are being forced to survive alone without their families, who now lie buried under blocks

of cement. Because global outrage, outrage in their own countries and electorates, has reached a boiling point that can no longer be contained by their usual pro-Israeli propaganda. Their recognition of Palestine is a pressure valve. Designed precisely to defuse the outrage, to save Israel's legitimacy in the knowledge that Israel will continue with their tacit support and actual support to block each and every move toward a viable Palestinian state. They are recognizing a Palestinian state while conniving with Israel's leaders to ensure it never comes into being. How do they do this? By actively refusing to take the one set of actions that has a proven historical record of ending oppression, of ending apartheid: boycott, divestment and sanctions on the perpetrator.

Thankfully, that's not all. Mercifully, something else is going on. While Western leaders perform their diplomatic pantomime, hundreds of people are sailing right now, as I speak, in the Mediterranean Sea, the Global Sumud Flotilla. A flotilla of teachers, journalists, activists, dreamers, parliamentarians, carrying with them the global majority's commitment that Israel's siege on Gaza, that the planned and meticulously executed genocide of Palestinians will be terminated, that it will not continue, at least not in our name, that impending acts of piracy by the Israeli state – they will definitely abduct our comrades. These acts will be exposed for what they are: misanthropic violations of minimum ethical standards of international law. Israeli propaganda, echoed by its apologists, claims that these brave souls are choosing to enter a war zone to violate prohibited security zones. Well, this is a shameless lie, of course. The Flotilla ships are not entering a warzone. They are heading towards a coast, a site of genocide, on a land that Israel is illegally occupying, a fact confirmed by the International Court of Justice, which in June 2024, last year, ordered Israel to vacate it.

So I ask you, if Starmer, Macron, Carney and Albanese really wanted to end the genocide, what would they do? They would not be issuing statements. They would be sending a naval vessel, or more than one, to protect the Flotilla. They would be enforcing international law. They would be introducing BDS – Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. But they will not. Because their recognition is meant as an empty gesture. And actual solidarity requires a break with organized misanthropy. It requires a break with the arms dealers who fund them and their political campaigns. This duality, this chasm between Western governments' words and their deeds, is the essence of hypocrisy. They grant a piece of paper called statehood with one hand, while with the other they continue to arm, fund and diplomatically shield the very power that ensures this statehood remains a cruel fiction. They remind me of a monument I once saw in Canberra, in Australia's capital. Remember, I was walking from the High Court to the National Library. And when you do that, you stumble upon a unique monument. It's a monument celebrating a High Court of Australian judgment. On the monument are inscribed the magnificent words of Sir Gerard Brennan from the Mabo case, if anybody has heard of it. They read, these are the words: "The common law of this country will perpetuate injustice if it were to continue to persist in characterizing the indigenous inhabitants of Australian colonies as people too low in the scale of social organization to be acknowledged as possessing rights and interests in land." A magnificent statement. A legal revolution. But what followed? Words on a monument. The recognition of native title was granted, but the

power structure, the economic dispossession, the systemic inequality – they were largely left intact. The recognition became a shield against more substantive justice.

This is the playbook of imperialist white settlers: recognize a right in theory to avoid implementing it in practice. This is what is on offer today for Palestine by the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Canada and several other Westerners. A state recognized on an imaginary map in a European capital, while on the ground the apartheid reality is reinforced with every bomb, every bullet, every checkpoint. The key, the only key that unlocks the door to freedom is not so much recognition. It is BDS. Boycott, Divest and Sanction. And its goal must be to bring about equal political rights from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Recognition would have mattered in Oslo decades ago. It was a leverage that was squandered. Now, in the absence of any peace process to speak of, it is merely symbolic. And in its current form, it's worse than symbolic. It is a pacifier. We must understand the fundamental truth so elegantly captured by that marble judgment in Australia, but so tragically ignored in its aftermath. Violent instability is baked into any system where one side has power and rights and the other has none. You cannot have peace. You cannot have security for anyone, Israeli or Palestinian, under a system of apartheid. The violence of the occupier begets resistance. The violence for the oppressed is then used to justify further overwhelming state violence. It is a vicious cycle engineered by the powerful.

So, when these Western leaders herald their recognition as a progressive move, ask them one question: where are the sanctions? Where is the arms embargo? Where are trade restrictions? Where is protection for the flotillas? Until they answer you convincingly, their words are not just hollow, they are weapons. They are the grease for the machinery of genocide. They are a modern-day equivalent of the colonial administrator who acknowledges the humanity of the native in a London speech, while signing the order to clear their land. Let us not let them get away with it. See their recognition for what it is: a desperate attempt to save a crumbling system of oppression. Not to end it. Our duty is clear. To amplify the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions. BDS. To stand with the flotillas. To demand not words on paper, but justice on the ground, on the water, in the air. The Palestinian people do not need their hypocritical recognition. They need their freedom. And freedom only comes when the cost of oppression becomes too high for the oppressor to bear. *Carpe diem.*

END

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