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South African Chapter of the Global Anti-Apartheid Movement Officially Launched

PRETORIA: A historic moment of great pride and commitment in the universal fight against racism, colonialism, exploitation and dehumanisation has been marked in South Africa as the local chapter of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) was officially launched. Held over two days at Freedom Park in Pretoria, this event signifies South Africa's resolute stance against Israel's settler-colonial apartheid regime and genocide against the Palestinian people.

The launch was attended by prominent leaders in civil society, Palestinian solidarity groups, members of the diplomatic corps, academics, leaders representing various faith traditions, government and ordinary South Africans who want to add their weight to the local and global AAM campaigns. The movement, inspired by the legacy of South Africa's fight against apartheid, aims to mobilise a broad coalition of societal forces to oppose Israeli apartheid and to advocate for the total isolation of the Israeli state.

With this launch, South Africa makes its contribution to the global fight for the liberation of Palestinians, declaring its unwavering commitment to human rights and justice. The last 14 months have put the intensified genocide, unleashed by the Israeli state against Palestinians in Gaza, under the microscope. The launch of the SA AAM Chapter sets the fire alight for other countries to follow suit in building the momentum that will result in a global movement. In affirming South Africa's response to the plight of all Palestinians, Rev Frank Chikane, Chairperson of the South African Steering Committee of the AAM, emphasised the urgency of this movement, stating "The genocide against Palestinians and Israel's impunity must end and we actively extend our solidarity to Palestinians who continue to endure unimaginable atrocities. Together, we demand accountability, justice, and freedom from apartheid from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea."

The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ronald Lamola, endorsed the AAM as a step in the

right direction of demonstrating solidarity with the people of Palestine. In his address, the Minister highlighted the critical role South Africa must play in this struggle: “It is about time for someone to stand up and take the first steps of action towards mobilising solidarity for the people of Palestine and as a Department, we commend the launch of the Anti-Apartheid Movement.” The Minister emphasised that the work of South Africa in this global campaign, evidenced by its submissions to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), is based on the national stance against all forms of oppression as echoed in the South African Constitution. Therefore, Min. Lamola’s address reiterated the rallying call for all South Africans to unite in support of Palestine, using their voice and actions to challenge injustice globally.

Rev Mzwandile Molo, General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, called on faith communities to join this critical movement. He stated “As the South African Council of Churches, we know the tragedy of racism and the victory of universal solidarity as championed by our faith leaders of yesterday,” adding that the disproportionate violence of Israel that has reduced the tiny area of Gaza in which 2.5 million Palestinians are concentrated, into rubble with heavy artillery and bombardment is not only unacceptable, but it bears the hallmarks of a genocide. Therefore, the SACC calls out the genocidal actions of Israel in their total destruction of homes, hospitals, schools and universities, churches and mosques; and in so doing denying the people of Palestine access to their fundamental human rights.

Rev. Molo added that as Christian leaders, our faith calls us to stand with the oppressed through prayers and actions. He stated “We acknowledge that this situation cannot continue, and must be addressed from its root cause, including the illegal occupation of Palestine. Therefore, the SACC joins the multitude of voices to end the war on Palestine immediately.”

The launch included presentations from Palestinian leaders who emphasised the need for global support and that they were deeply appreciative of awareness raised by the AAM. Ms Nadia Habash Habash, from Jerusalem shared heartfelt gratitude to the people of South Africa, stating “As a Palestinian, I carry the pain of my homeland in my heart every day. South Africa understands this pain. You, more than anyone, know what it means to live under the shadow of apartheid. You know the indignity of segregation, the brutality of oppression, and the courage it takes to resist. Today, you honour us with your solidarity, showing that the same determination that dismantled apartheid in South Africa will also help dismantle apartheid in Palestine.”

Chief Zwelivelile Mandela lamented the destruction of Gaza at the hands of the Israeli government, noting that not even religious buildings - mosques and churches - or hospitals have been spared from the violence. Chief Mandela referenced the manner in which global sanctions against apartheid South Africa had been successful in ensuring that enough pressure was applied to the economic activities of the apartheid state so as to cripple its ability to fund and sustain its institutional oppression. He further called for all participants to apply the same kind of pressure on Israel, stating “We call for the same global solidarity in sanctions in order to apply the same level of pressure that will put an end to the oppression of Palestine.”

The launch conference of the AAM hosted various panel discussions with different stakeholders who have worked to advocate for the struggles of Palestinians, both collectively and independently, and who have found

consolidated expression in the context of the AAM. These discussions highlighted the roles played by different actors to date, emphasising the plight of men, women, children, and the elderly in Palestine.

The South African chapter of the AAM is committed to collaborating with the South African government in its attempts to hold the Israeli state accountable for its genocide against Palestinians and the denial of their inalienable rights, including that to self-determination. Thematic groups have been formulated to structure this work. These groups are focussed on taking the broader themes of the Movement forward and ensuring that action is taken across all these thematic areas.

AAM Thematic Groups:

1. Stop arming Genocide
2. No trade with Apartheid
3. Don't play with Apartheid
4. Stopping the Scholasticide
5. End Reproductive Genocide
6. Defending Children's Rights
7. Ending the Ecocide
8. Confronting Zionist Propaganda and Promoting the Palestinian Narrative
9. Punishing the Zionist Project Legally and Diplomatically
10. Supporting Palestinian Prisoners and their families
11. Mobilising Faith Based Communities

There was a strong view that the destruction of all sectors, including the vital healthcare sector in Palestine, and the apartheid prevalent therein be addressed by the movement.

AAM will engage with international government parties and organisations, including the corporate sector, pension funds, universities and other investors to divest from and implement sanctions on the apartheid state of Israel.

To this end, the launch of the Global Anti-Apartheid Movement culminated in concurrent peaceful protests at the US embassy in Pretoria, as well as the US consulates in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. "We have mounted peaceful protests as a means of applying pressure to those governments whose actions support and fund the Israeli state's violent actions," concluded Rev Chikane.

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