

CPD Statements on Syria and Israel

June 11, 2011

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy issued two statements on June 9, one on the movement for democracy in Syria and the other on Israel's brutal response to unarmed demonstrators.

CPD Salutes Syria's Courageous Democratic Movement

June 9, 2011

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy expresses its deep admiration for the amazing courage shown by the people of Syria, struggling for democratic reforms in the face of horrific repression. Though they have been subjected to lethal force time and again, unarmed demonstrators have repeatedly taken to the streets.

Syria has been under brutal authoritarian rule for decades, and many Syrians, and others, had hoped that Bashar al-Assad would move to democratize the system. However, the past three months have shown that Assad is determined to maintain his dictatorial grip on power no matter what the cost in Syrian lives.

Despite the attempt by authorities in Damascus to prevent information from getting out, enough has been documented to show the criminal behavior of the regime.

Amnesty International has evidence of 120 people killed this past weekend alone and "has the names of 986 people reported to have been killed by the Syrian security forces during the past 11 weeks. Thousands have been arrested, with many held of them held incommunicado." [AI, "UN urged to act following deadly weekend in Syria," June 6, 2011.]

Human Rights Watch has reported: "Since the beginning of anti-government protests in March 2011, Syrian security forces have killed hundreds of protesters and arbitrarily arrested thousands, subjecting many of them to brutal torture in detention^{1/4}. The nature and scale of abuses, which Human Rights Watch research indicates were not only systematic, but implemented as part of a state policy, strongly suggest these abuses qualify as crimes against humanity." [HRW, "'We've Never Seen Such Horror,'" June 1, 2011.]

Among its more cynical pretenses to legitimacy, the Assad regime claims to protect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. In response, opposition forces meeting in Antalya, Turkey, have affirmed that the Syrian people are of many ethnicities, and called for "the legitimate and equal rights of all under a new Syrian constitution based on national unity, civil state and a pluralistic, parliamentary, and democratic regime." [Text.]

We stand with the people of Syria in their remarkable struggle for democracy.

CPD Condemns Israel's Murderous Attack on Unarmed Palestinians

June 9, 2011

Twice now, unarmed Palestinians demonstrators and their supporters from the refugee camps around Israel, adopting the tactics of the Arab Spring, have challenged the Israeli occupation and their own historic dispossession by marching on Israel's occupation borders. And on both occasions, Israel has adopted the vicious tactics of the most ruthless Arab regimes by responding to these unarmed demonstrators with lethal force.

On May 15, Israeli officials hid behind the excuse of being unprepared for massive protests — as if they couldn't read the same social media that the demonstrators used to organize their actions. Human Rights Watch reported: "In a too-familiar pattern, Israeli troops responded to stone-throwing youths with live bullets, with predictably deadly consequences. The evidence shows a disturbing disregard for protesters' lives." [HRW, "Israel: Investigate Killings During Border Protests; Troops Responded to Stone-Throwing With Live Bullets," May 20, 2011.]

On June 5th, Israeli officials charged that the Syrian regime was responsible for the deaths because it didn't keep people away from the Israeli-controlled frontier fence. No doubt, Damascus was happy to divert attention from its own atrocities. But this doesn't negate the fact that Israel's brutal actions were morally unacceptable — whatever Syria's motives might have been in allowing Palestinians to approach the territory that Israel has annexed in violation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The demonstrators were killed in cold blood by Israeli snipers who were in no danger, acting on the orders of their superiors.

Washington too directed all its criticism at Syria. A State Department spokesperson declared: "we condemn what appears to be an effort by the Syrian Government to incite events and draw attention away from its own internal issues.... And I just would add that Israel, like any sovereign nation, has a right to defend itself." A reporter asked, "Even if the people are unarmed?" to which the spokesperson replied in full: "But again, this is clearly an attempt by Syria to incite these kinds of protests, and they [the Israelis] have a right to protect their — this disengagement line." [U.S. Dept. of State, Daily Press Briefing (Mark C. Toner), Washington, DC, June 6, 2011.]

The cruel and unjust Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories conquered in 1967 as well as of the Golan Heights must be ended. And so must U.S. support for the occupation.