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THE BAHRAIN DECLARATION

Ireland's definitive official
commitment to an
independent Palestine



THE FULL TEXT OF THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE ON PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AND EURO-ARAB RELATIONS ISSUED BY THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF IRELAND AND BAHRAIN AT MANAMA IN FEBRUARY 1980 WITH A SUMMARY OF THE BACKGROUND TO IRELAND'S POSITION AND REPORTS ON THE PUBLIC DEBATE

PROLOGUE

The official position of the Irish government on the Middle East and on the centrality of the issue of Palestine to a lasting peace there is neither as recent nor as opportunist as has been suggested in the controversy documented in this booklet.

The major influences on the development of the Irish position have been the U.N. Security Council resolutions on the Middle East, and the principles on which they are based; and the position of the EEC as expressed in their statements of June 1977 and of March and June 1979.

In a speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 1979, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Mr. Michael O'Kennedy T.D., said that Ireland 'rejected relations based on domination by any one human group over another. We accept that peoples have a right to see to their own security but not in ways which seriously threaten or endanger the security of others and contribute to the insecurity of all.'

Echoing an earlier EEC statement, he called for the observance of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 on the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the withdrawal of Israel to its pre-1967 borders. 'There should be acceptance of the rights of all states in the area to live within secure and recognized borders, adequately guaranteed, and there must be respect for the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, which would include their right to participate in the determination of their own future, and would take into account also their right to a homeland,' Mr. O'Kennedy said.

Repeating the requirements for a comprehensive settlement in his capacity as President-in-Office of the Council of Ministers of the European Communities, Mr. O'Kennedy told a later Assembly of the United Nations that 'it is essential that there be respect for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. These include the right to a homeland, and the right, through its representatives, to play its full part in the negotiation of a comprehensive settlement it is necessary that (Security Resolutions 242 and 338) be accepted by all those involved, including the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, as the basis for negotiation of a comprehensive settlement in which all of the parties will play their full part.

'Such a settlement would meet the legitimate rights and interests of all parties, including Israel, which is entitled to exist at peace within secure boundaries, accepted and adequately guaranteed, and the Palestinian people, who are entitled, within the framework set by a peace settlement, to exercise their right to determine their own future as a people.'

Ireland's attitude to the problems of the Middle East cannot be unaffected by the tremendous growth in cultural and commercial ties with the Arab world over the past decade. But the strongest influences remain those dictated by the country's established record and reputation as involved members of both the United Nations and the EEC, with a statutory commitment to support their basic principles and agreed policies.

The Bahrain Declaration

On February 10 1980, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ireland, Mr. Brian Lenihan, held official talks with the Foreign Minister of the State of Bahrain, His Excellency Shaikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, during the State Visit of the President of Ireland, Dr. Patrick Hillery to Bahrain.

The joint communique issued at the end of these official talks assumed a special importance in the development of Ireland's foreign policy in general, and of its relations with the Arab world in particular, in that for the first time a clearly-worded commitment to the human and political rights of another nation placed the Irish government in the position of leading European opinion, and perhaps even world opinion, on a matter of crucial importance to international and Middle East peace.

13 GENERAL RELATIONS

1. His Excellency Mr. Brian Lenihan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland and His Excellency Shaikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, Foreign Minister of Bahrain, exchanged views during their meeting at Manama on 10 February 1980. They reviewed a wide range of topics covering bilateral, regional and international affairs. The discussion was held in a most constructive atmosphere. The two sides expressed their desire to strengthen further the good relationships that exist between Ireland and Bahrain and especially to promote increased practical co-operation.



2. As regards their bi-lateral cooperation, it was agreed that scope for further such co-operation exists in the economic and technical fields. The areas of electricity generation, aviation, transport and export promotion were identified, as also the medical and educational areas, as those offering most immediate prospects. The two sides agreed to form a joint Technical Committee to study ways of promoting cooperation between the two States.

3. The two sides welcomed the ever closer links between Europe and the Arab world, which they believe to be of the greatest importance for the stability and prosperity of both regions.

4-7 PALESTINE

4. As regards the Middle East, it was agreed that a solution to the Palestinian problem was central to any peace settlement. The two sides stressed the urgent need to reach a negotiated solution which would be comprehensive, just and lasting.

5. The two sides agreed that the Palestinian people had the right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State in Palestine within the framework of a negotiated peace settlement which would include the principles of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

6. The two sides stressed that all parties including the PLO should play a full role in the negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement. In this regard, Ireland recognises the role of the PLO in representing the Palestinian people.

7. Both parties agree that an essential aspect of a solution to the Palestinian problem was the withdrawal of Israel from all territory occupied since the 1967 conflict, including Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

8-12 OTHER ISSUES

8. It was agreed that the Euro-Arab dialogue has the potential for substantial mutual benefit and that the dialogue should be resumed as soon as possible. The question of closer cooperation between the countries of the Gulf and the European Communities was discussed.

9. The two sides reviewed the situation in the Arabian Gulf and its strategic importance and affirmed that this region must remain a zone of peace and stability and should not be involved in the rivalry of the great powers.

10. Both parties condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which they considered as a blatant interference in the affairs of a state that belongs to the Islamic world. They stated that the invasion was contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and constituted a threat to world peace and security.

11. Both sides expressed their faith in the principles of the United Nations. They affirmed their adherence to the principles of peaceful co-existence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states.

12. Foreign Minister Lenihan briefed his colleague in detail on the present situation in Northern Ireland.

THE PUBLIC DEBATE

'A sensible element...'

From The Irish Times, February 11 1980

Ireland recognised 'the role of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in representing the Palestinian people,' the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lenihan, said last night at the conclusion of President Hilery's official visit.

A communique issued in Bahrain stated that the two sides, the Irish and the Bahraini, agreed that the Palestinian people had the right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State in Palestine within the framework of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The two sides stressed that all parties, including the PLO, should play a full role in the negotiations for a comprehensive peace settlement.

Last night's statement came after a day of talks with senior members of the Bahrain cabinet. Mr. Lenihan said that the Palestinian people were entitled to their homeland and that they had a basic right to it. This right, he said, should not take from, or interfere with, the integrity of the Israeli State.

At a press conference, Mr. Lenihan was asked if he would invite the PLO leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat to Ireland for talks. The Minister said that Mr. Arafat represented a very sensible element in that organization and he would have no objections to having discussions with him. He said that Ireland and Bahrain agreed that an essential aspect of a solution to the Palestinian problem was the withdrawal of Israel from all territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, in keeping with the relevant Security Council resolutions. He also said that the Arabian Gulf with its strategic importance had to remain in a zone of peace and stability and should not be involved in the rivalry of the great powers.

Commenting on the Minister's statements, the Public Affairs Committee of the Jewish community in Ireland said early today that it did not believe it could be of any assistance in Middle East negotiations for Mr. Lenihan to talk of recognition of a role to be played by the PLO without total condemnation of their aim and activity. These had, said the statement, sought in the past and still sought today the destruction of the State of Israel as it now existed.

'Furthermore in any comment regarding Jerusalem it must surely be obvious that the holy city has only been freely accessible to all religious denominations since passing under Israel's control,' the statement said. It added that, with reservations, they would welcome Irish government support for moves which would lead to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

'Common sense to accept PLO...'

From The Irish Times (Editorial), February 12 1980

To most people, the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization, means a terrorist organization and nothing else. Hence the strong emotions aroused when Mr. Brian Lenihan is reported, or misreported, as saying that Ireland has officially recognised the PLO.

What the joint communique issued at the end of the visit to Bahrain said was that Ireland and Bahrain stressed 'that all parties, including the PLO, should play a full role in the negotiation of a comprehensive (Middle East) peace settlement. In this regard, Ireland recognises the role of the PLO in representing the Palestinian people.'

As much was implied, if not said, in Mr. Michael O'Kennedy's address to the United Nations last September, when he was speaking for the nine EEC countries. Then he specifically referred to the PLO as one of the parties involved; as he has earlier spoken of the right of the Palestinian people to play a full part in negotiations for a settlement through their representatives, it must be assumed that he was taking the PLO to be among those representatives.

There can be little doubt that the PLO does represent a major section of the Palestinian people. Given the scattered and divided state of the Palestinians, it is impossible to say how representative the PLO is, but it is plain common sense to accept that it must have an important role in any general peace negotiation.

That is not to grant 'official recognition' to the PLO as a government-in-exile. Indeed as has been pointed out, there are articles in the Palestine National Charter, the PLO's basic document, that are unacceptable to Ireland. One is the bald statement that armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. Ireland, and the EEC, are still committed to a negotiated settlement, and still insist on certain basic principles, one of which is the right of Israel to live in peace.

No one can feel too comfortable dealing with Mr. Arafat in view of his association with terrorist violence, nor is it easy to love the PLO. But the point is that the PLO has the right to be at the conference table, not because it has bombed and fought its way there, but because it can claim to represent the Palestinian people.

What Mr. Lenihan might stress is that it is still a fundamental principle of EEC — and Irish — policy that the PLO and others accept that there must be a negotiated settlement, and that the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of every state in the area must be recognised.

'The PNC a government in exile...'

From The Irish Times, February 13 1980

Ireland's new Chief Rabbi, Dr. Rosen, has been accused of, in effect, threatening Irish soldiers in the Lebanon. The allegation came from Senator Noel Mulcahy.

Dr. Rosen had said that the announcement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Bahrain that this country recognised the PLO's role in finding a solution to the Palestinian problem was influenced by a desire to ensure oil supplies.

Dr. Rosen had also said that this country, like others, was being compromised by

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'black gold' politics and he feared that Mr. Lenihan's remarks might endanger Irish troops in the Lebanon.

Dr. Rosen criticised Mr. Lenihan's description of the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, as a moderate, saying that he represented a terrorist organisation.

The full text of Senator Mulcahy's response to the Chief Rabbi's remarks is as follows:

'I am very surprised to see in today's papers that Ireland's new young and personable Chief Rabbi, Dr. David Rosen, should, in effect, be threatening our soldiers serving in Lebanon. He is reported as saying "there is a distinct possibility of increased selling of the Irish positions" (note the use of the word 'increased'). Also his reference to black-gold politics does less than justice to Minister Lenihan's concerted comments from Bahrain.

'It's about time that the Israeli propaganda lobby recognises that the Palestinian National Council, which is a government in exile, is also entitled to internationally promote its case.

'It is obvious that reconciliation of territorial disputes and conflicts in the Middle East concerns all of us, and the two groups at the focus of the conflict, the Israelis and the Palestinians, must engage in peaceful discussions and negotiations at international conference tables.

'Our troops in the Lebanon are performing a United Nations-backed peace-keeping mission, a thankless task. It makes no sense to threaten them with shells from the group lying to the south of them because their Foreign Minister recognises the representation rights of the group lying to the north of them.'

'A legitimate organisation...'

From The Irish Times, February 18 1980

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Lenihan, said yesterday that he was satisfied that the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was no longer a terrorist organisation and that, as it is structured now, had no associations with the IRA.

On RTE radio, Mr. Lenihan said that all the evidence available to him showed that the PLO had become a legitimate organisation now and was concerned with representing the Palestinians by way of negotiations prior to the achievement of self-determination. He said he saw no incompatibility in providing a homeland for the Palestinians and preserving the territorial integrity of Israel.

The Minister said that he did not think Irish-Israel relations really would be damaged by expressing these views. 'This is the sort of difference of opinion that takes place between all mature states. We want to ensure peace in the Middle East, which would be of enormous advantage to Ireland, to the Community and to the Western world generally.'

No commercial interests were involved in his making these views public, as Mr. Frank Cluskey, the leader of the Labour Party, had claimed, Mr. Lenihan said. It was a figment of Mr. Cluskey's imagination.

Mr. Lenihan said that what he had said in Bahrain was merely making explicit what was implicit already. He was amplifying what his predecessor, Mr. O'Kennedy, had said at

the United Nations and the stated policy pursued by Ireland in regard to the Middle East over the years. It was within the context of UN Resolution 242.

The speech by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lenihan, had cleared up a lot of confusion which had existed among Irish Jews and others throughout the world following the Minister's recent remarks on the PLO, Mr. Ben Briscoe TD* said yesterday.

Mr. Briscoe said that he had been speaking to the Minister about his earlier speech, but Mr. Lenihan had made the situation quite clear yesterday. The PLO would not be recognised by Ireland until they publicly declared the right of the State of Israel to exist and the integrity and security of that State, Mr. Briscoe said.

** Mr. Briscoe is a leading member of the Irish Jewish community, and a member of the Dail (the Irish parliament) and of Fianna Fail, the government party.*

'Willingness to abandon violence'

From The Irish Times, 27 February 1980

Replying to questions on the Republic's recognition of the PLO, the Minister (Mr. Lenihan) said that Government policy on the Middle East was based on the conviction that it was necessary that there should be a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the problems of the region. Ireland had expressed the view that the legitimate rights of the Palestinians included their right to self-determination and their right, should they wish to exercise it, to an independent State.

But he stressed that this would be within the framework of a negotiated settlement in which all parties, including Israel, would fully participate. 'These rights of the Palestinians are therefore not unqualified. There is a conflict of rights in the present situation which must be reconciled in the context of a negotiated settlement,' he said.

Mr. Lenihan said that if a comprehensive settlement was to be worked out it was clear that all concerned must participate in the negotiation and that included the Palestinians. It was Ireland's view that the Palestinians should have the right to decide for themselves those who would represent them in such negotiations. In that regard, the PLO appeared to enjoy the support of a very substantial proportion of Palestinians among the refugees and in the occupied territories. It was accepted by the Arab states as the legitimate spokesman of the Palestinians.

The Minister said: 'We recognise therefore that the PLO is an important element and should have a role to play. That is why we stated in the Bahrain communique that we recognise the role of the PLO in representing the Palestinian people.'

He pointed out that in the contacts Ireland had had with the PLO, every opportunity was used to emphasise that the Irish Government totally condemned violence from whatever source, and to impress upon the organisation the necessity of accepting the existence of the State of Israel. In that regard, Ireland had been assured by the PLO that they maintained no link with the IRA. Ireland had also impressed upon Israel the need to negotiate with the Palestinian people and to recognise their legitimate rights.

What was required now, Mr. Lenihan added, was that the willingness to abandon violence in favour of political means, which had characterised many leaders and groups within the PLO, should be encouraged.

'Respectable institutions...'

From The Irish Times, 26 February 1980

Sir - If peace is to be brought about in the Middle East, it is quite clear that the disputants, the Palestinians and the Israelis, must get together at some point to negotiate an agreed geographic and political solution.

It is in this context that I agree with the recognition of the PLO, and in particular the Palestinian National Council, by European Governments and the EEC.

History repeatedly has shown us that forms of political terrorism coexist with organised attempts to achieve nationhood. History also shows us that in many cases these processes have led to respectable political institutions. For anybody living in this country not to recognise this fact is blindness indeed. We have a duty to look beyond the terrorism to the underlying causes of the problems. The final geographical and political solution to these will be difficult to achieve. The process is not helped by denying recognition of representative institutions.

It's about time also that people learned to distinguish the difference between the terrorist activities of a group of people struggling to have a government of their own in a state of their own from the activities of a group using violent means while operating in a state which already has its own government and its own legitimate peace-keeping and defence forces. I'm sure that I don't have to tell Dr. Tolkin that one characteristic of a nation is that, in it, only *one* group can legitimately use force and this only under the direction of individuals who are empowered by the votes of the people. This is what democracy is all about.

One may say, why should we get involved in this anyway? It's not our problem. But I'm afraid it is our problem. It is our immediate problem because some six to seven hundred of our citizens are stuck in the middle of these conflicting groups. Also it's our problem as full members of the European Community, lying, as it does, to the north of the Mediterranean region, whose future depends on a peaceful settlement of the political situation in the Middle East.

The voice of small neutral nations can be very loud indeed when it speaks the truth and is not over-influenced by the foreign policies of the dominant powers nor by the corporate strategies of the dominant multi-nationals. Yours etc., Noel Mulcahy, Seanad Éireann, Leinster House, Dublin 2.

'A considered proposal...'

From The Sunday Press, 2 March 1980

Sir - In a story last Sunday about the communique issued on February 10 during the visit to Bahrain by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, your columnist Gulliver suggests that the word 'State' was 'quietly inserted by Bahraini officials.' This is not correct.

The Minister, Mr. Lenihan, has authorised me to inform you that the word 'State' was in fact put forward as a considered proposal by the Irish side for inclusion in the communique. Yours etc. Andrew O'Rourke, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, Iveagh House, Dublin 2.

EPILOGUE

C/P 21 JUL 1980

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The reported warning on February 12 1980 by the Chief Rabbi of Ireland, Dr. David Rosen, that the Bahrain Declaration on the role of the PLO would bring increased shelling of Irish positions by the Christian militia supported by Israel was soon to be given meaning.

On April 7, in the first serious incident involving UNIFIL forces in the Lebanon for more than a year, nine Irish soldiers were captured as they arrived to relieve 30 of their colleagues under strong pressure from a force of Christian militia at the village of At Tiri. In the gun-battles during the siege, one Irish soldier, Private Stephen Griffin from Galway, was seriously injured - he was to die nine days later.

Amid strong diplomatic reaction to the event, and to the support of the militia by Israeli liaison and regular forces, units of the Israeli army moved in strength into the Irish and Ghanaian areas of the UNIFIL territory. At the same time, suggestions that the Irish had facilitated infiltration of the border area by the PLO were linked with demands that the Irish battalion of the UNIFIL force be withdrawn in a propaganda campaign carried out at local level by Major Haddad himself and his commanders, and on an international level by Israeli government representatives and diplomats.

Against this background, a group of youths, encouraged and accompanied by armed militia, were involved in a demonstration at At Tiri that developed into an exchange of fire between the militia and Irish UN forces; in the exchange, two civilians and one militia member were killed, one of them as a result of a shell fired from an Irish armoured vehicle. In the aftermath of the incident, in which a Fijian member of the UNIFIL forces was also killed, threats of direct retaliation against the Irish troops were made.

On 17 April 1980, these threats were carried out by a militia group headed by the brother of the militiaman killed at At Tiri. Three Irish soldiers escorting unarmed UN observers and two media personnel to a forward post at Ras were ambushed near Bint Jubail; two of them, Privates Thomas Barrett and Derek Smallhorne, were later shot at close range.

In an unprecedented storm of diplomatic activity, in which the United States and the UN Security Council supported Ireland in its call for Israeli withdrawal of support from the militia, Ireland's support for the PLO was repeatedly identified, sometimes by Irish opposition politicians, as a major element in the confrontation between Irish forces in Lebanon and the de facto forces of Major Haddad.

Speaking in the course of a Dail debate on Irish participation in the UNIFIL forces on May 8 1980, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Lenihan, said that Ireland's position on the Palestinian question was completely separate, and acknowledged even by the Israeli government to be separate, from the question of security in the area of South Lebanon patrolled by the UNIFIL forces. On this, as on other policy matters, the Irish government was guided by its support for basic human rights and its need to take the national interest into account as an essential part of its mandate.

This publication has been produced by Eurabia (Irish Office), the Dublin-based representation of Eurabia, the European Co-ordinating Committee of Friendship Societies.

Eurabia was founded in Paris in 1972 to help achieve greater cooperation between European organizations working for friendship with the Arab world.

It includes both parliamentary and non-parliamentary groups and while these cover a very wide range of opinions and interests, Eurabia itself is wholly independent and has no ties with any political group or party.

It sponsors meetings, seminars and conferences with a view to improving understanding of political, social and economic aspects of the Arab world, including the need to recognize the national rights of the Palestinian people.

Eurabia (Ireland Office) provides facilities and services for a number of organizations, including The Irish-Arab Society and the Irish-Arab Parliamentary Association.

Cover photos (clockwise from lower left): Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland Michael O'Kennedy addresses the United Nations on Palestine as President of the EEC Council of Ministers; the Foreign Ministers of Bahrain and Ireland at their official talks in Manama; and Mr. Brian Lenihan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, at a press conference on the Palestinian question.

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