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The Role of NGOs in Changing British Attitudes to Jerusalem and Israel's Expansionist Policies

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For most British people – a majority of whom remain nominally Christian, even if their lifestyle is largely secular – Jerusalem has a unique status as the holiest city in what is still widely referred to as the Holy Land. Though Jesus is believed to have been born in Bethlehem, well outside the city's limits, his entry into Jerusalem, as commemorated each year on Palm Sunday, as well as his crucifixion there have made Jerusalem central to Christian teaching, just as it is in both Jewish and Islamic traditions, for different but pre-eminently religious reasons. Moreover, according to the theology of the Church of England (otherwise known as the Anglican Church) in particular, Jerusalem several centuries ago became a metaphor for Heaven: a place of universal peace and love. According to the Book of Revelations (the last book in the New Testament of the Christian Bible), it is said that there will be a Second Coming of Jesus, who will establish a New Jerusalem, bringing celestial harmony down to earth. This concept generated what has become one of the most famous poems in the English language, 'Jerusalem', written by the visionary William Blake (1757-1827). This poem in turn became a popular hymn, with music by Hubert Parry, sung not only in churches all over England but on many public occasions too. It is not difficult to understand why, when one considers the deeply patriotic as well as idealistic, even Romantic tone of the lyrics:

*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?*

*Bring me my Bow of burning gold
Bring me my Arrows of desire
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!*

*I will not cease from Mental Fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*

This hymn is sung in Anglican churches all round the world on Jerusalem Sunday, a day which celebrates the Holy City. But it has also become a popular anthem in Britain, second only to the National Anthem, 'God Save the Queen'. 'Jerusalem' is also sung regularly at international sporting events in which England is competing, notably rugby and cricket. Interestingly, the song only really became popular after it was published in an anthology in 1916, at the height of the First World War, when it came to symbolise not only patriotism but also the values for which the Allied Forces were supposedly fighting. Thus the song was being performed fervently all over England at the beginning of the Arab Revolt and during the successful assault on the Turkish defences in Jerusalem by British forces under General Edmund Allenby. Once victorious, Allenby, in a gesture of humility in deference to the Holy

City, walked rather than rode into Jerusalem on 11 December 1917. He invited T.E. Lawrence – better known as ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ – to join him at the official handover ceremony at the Jaffa Gate.

After the War, the British were awarded a League of Nations mandate over Palestine, which made them formally responsible for Jerusalem, though the city also had an Arab Mayor and other local officials. At that time, there was only a small Jewish population in Jerusalem, which was quite well integrated into the wider community. But already the Zionist movement towards the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was gaining support, notably after the publication of the so-called Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917. This was a short statement contained in a letter from the then British Foreign Secretary (Minister), Arthur James Balfour, to one of the country’s leading Jews, Lord Rothschild, which was to be transmitted to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. This statement read, in part: ‘His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, *it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine...*’ [my italics]. This declaration was later incorporated into the Sevres Peace Treaty with Turkey and the terms of the British Mandate for Palestine.

In the words of Sir John Chancellor, who became High Commissioner of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1928, the Balfour Declaration was ‘a colossal blunder’, which, he later wrote, led to ‘one of the most intense, bitter and protracted conflicts of modern time.’ As Lord Curzon, a member of Britain’s First World War Cabinet, warned at the time, ‘What

is to become of the people of the country?... [The Arabs] and their forefathers have occupied the country for the best part of 1,500 years, and they own the soil... They profess the Mohammedan faith. They will not be content either to be expropriated for Jewish immigrants or to act merely as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the latter.' Alas, Lord Curzon's words fell on deaf ears. Jewish immigration into Palestine, including Jerusalem itself, accelerated and on 14 May, 1948 – the very day the British Mandate in Palestine expired – the Jewish People's Council, gathered at the Museum in Tel Aviv, declared the independence of the new, Jewish state of Israel. In the ensuing war with Arab forces, the Israelis expanded their territorial claims beyond the area designated for the Jewish homeland by the United Nations in its proposed partition plan for Palestine, pushing well into Jerusalem, dispossessing many of the Muslim and Christian Arab inhabitants and establishing full control over the western part of the city – a precursor of later occupations and Palestinian Arab dispossessions that continue to this day.

The ending of the British mandate and the assertion of Israeli control over West Jerusalem provoked conflicting reactions in Britain. Jewish organisations such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews were thrilled, though interestingly some orthodox Jews in Britain opposed the creation of the modern state of Israel, on religious grounds – and still do! However, as a result of the horror of and European guilt over the Holocaust, and the appealingly idealistic, socialist nature of the early Israeli *kibbutzim* or collective farms, there was a lot of sympathy in Britain for the infant Jewish state and some young people from the United Kingdom – not only Jews – volunteered to work there. All three major political parties in Britain were essentially pro-Israel for many years, as was the bulk of the population. However, that situation has changed

radically since then, particularly among the general public. This shift in public opinion, including towards the status of Jerusalem and the situation of Arab inhabitants in that city, has, I will argue in this paper, largely been thanks to the activities of non-governmental players of various kinds, notably religious and humanitarian NGOs, universities and the media. That in turn has been having an impact on the policies of political parties, most noticeably, perhaps, on the junior member of Britain's current Coalition government, the Liberal Democrats.

Much of the original British NGO concern about Israeli policies in Jerusalem (especially after 1967, when East Jerusalem and the West Bank were occupied) related to the historic buildings and other holy sites such as the Via Dolorosa – along which Jesus was said to have struggled to his crucifixion, carrying his cross – which became places of pilgrimage for overseas visitors, as well as places of worship for Palestinian and foreign resident Christians. A number of different Christian denominations, including the Anglicans, continue to have direct or indirect responsibility for significant buildings and institutions, ranging from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to St George's Anglican Cathedral. Since the latter was founded in 1899, it has been the centre for Anglican activities in the region. The diocese covers Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Israel, as well as Palestine, and supports 33 varied institutions, including hospitals, clinics, kindergartens and schools, vocation training centres and special services for the elderly and the handicapped. St. George's is also active in inter-faith dialogue and co-operation. The Bishop of Jerusalem, the Right Reverend Suheil Dawani, stresses that he is based in the 'city of the Holy One who embraces the three Abrahamic faiths' but says that 'we have faced critical times since the year 1948. Our Holy Land is passing

through another Via Dolorosa, and we are searching for justice, peace and hope.’

That message of the suffering of local Christians is being transmitted not only to the people of Palestine and neighbouring countries, but also to the wider Anglican Communion – the worldwide body of Churches which are affiliated to the Anglican Church, under the religious leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Right Reverend Rowan Williams. Dr Williams, incidentally, himself wrote a volume of poems entitled *Remembering Jerusalem*. Anglican congregations in Britain receive news about the tribulations of many Palestinian Christians and their Muslim counterparts in Jerusalem, other occupied territories and in Israel itself, as have members of other Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholics and the Methodists, who also have representatives in Jerusalem and feed back information to Britain. The charity arms of these religious denominations have then often got involved in campaigning for justice for Palestinians, through direct action – such as boycotting Israeli settler produce – or public information and lobbying members of parliament in the United Kingdom. The largest British Christian organisation of this kind, Christian Aid, organised a ‘virtual pilgrimage’ to Jerusalem during Lent (the period of fasting leading up to Easter) in 2009, through which British Christians of all denominations could log on to a computer site that enabled them to visit virtually historic sites in Jerusalem with which they were familiar through studying the Bible, and related these to today’s situation, with interviews of people from all three Religions of the Book who were living in Jerusalem. As Simon Barrow, co-ordinator of the religious news agency Ecclesia, commented about the initiative, ‘Christian Aid has come up with an innovative way of connecting people in Britain to the movement for hope and change in Israel-Palestine – not

just by making donations and engaging in advocacy, important as those are, but by opening our eyes and hearts to what is going on and what it means in human and spiritual terms.'

This type of public awareness programme amongst Christians has helped encourage some to engage more directly with the problems, for example through the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). This multi-denominational Christian NGO, backed by the Geneva-based World Council of Churches, sends volunteers from Britain and other countries to live in vulnerable Palestinian communities, not just to learn more about their situation and report this back to their home country, but also to accompany individual Palestinians or groups as they go through Israeli security checkpoints, gates in the Security Wall that cuts Jerusalem off from much of its eastern hinterland, or move around in areas where aggressive Jewish settlers are active. This helps give vulnerable people more confidence and can lessen the difficulties they endure, though such activity can also sometimes put the accompanier at risk. The American activist Rachel Corrie, for example, was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer when she knelt in front of a Palestinian house in Gaza that had been condemned for destruction by the Israelis.

Last year, EAPPI issued a statement on Jerusalem, which reads in part:

The city of Jerusalem is at the heart of conflicts in the Middle East, due its shared historical and religious significance for the three Abrahamic faiths.

The current situation in Jerusalem is cause for intense concern. Israel systematically discriminates against Palestinians in the city through home demolitions, unfair planning practices and residency restrictions.

Such policies not only cause suffering, but have severe political implications. Efforts for peace can only succeed if there is an equitable, negotiated deal on sharing the Holy City...

In 1980, Israel formally annexed Jerusalem and declared the city its "united, eternal and indivisible" capital, in defiance of international law. The rest of the international community still views the east of the city as illegally occupied territory, but Israel is stepping up efforts to ensure a Jewish majority, at the expense of Palestinian residents.

In 2009, Israeli authorities announced they would intensify Israeli settlement in the east of the city, pre-empting negotiations. Israel has also withdrawn the right of thousands of local Palestinians to reside in their home city... These measures seriously undermine International Law and the possibility of a two state solution in the Israeli-Arab conflict.

Moreover, thousands of Palestinian Christians were prevented during last year's Holy Week from reaching holy sites in Jerusalem for their Easter celebrations. Israeli soldiers disrupted holy processions, blocked access to the Old City for two days during Holy Week and prevented Palestinian Christians from worshipping in Churches. In one case, Israeli police physically attacked worshippers who were trying to reach the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They also closed the main road from Bethlehem into Jerusalem, in what locals said was collective punishment for a peaceful protest on Good Friday. Such restrictions and mistreatment are of course very familiar to many Palestinian Muslims, who have been regularly prevented from attending the al-Aqsa Mosque and other holy sites in Jerusalem.

British Islamic organisations have, of course, come out firmly in solidarity with their oppressed co-religionists in Jerusalem and the other

occupied territories. There are approximately two million Muslims in the UK; this year's census will provide us with a more accurate figure. Muslims therefore probably represent about three per cent of the British population, though their religious presence is more considerable than one might expect, both because a higher percentage of British Muslims are devout than their Christian counterparts, attending mosques regularly, and because the Muslim population is largely concentrated in a small number of towns and cities, including and especially London. The vast majority of British Muslims belong to families which originate from former British colonies, notably Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, though there is also a sizeable quantity of Muslim refugees from countries such as Somalia and Iraq.

There is no single Muslim organisation which can claim legitimately to speak for everyone within this diverse community, but several have an important public function, including the Muslim Council of Great Britain, the British Muslim Forum, the Muslim Association of Britain and the Islamic Society of Britain. The largest mosques in Britain include the East London Mosque in Tower Hamlets (which houses the London Muslim Centre) and Regent's Park Mosque in Camden, north London. There are a number of British Muslim aid agencies, and although they tend to concentrate their international efforts mainly on such issues as flood relief in Bangladesh or Pakistan, or famine in Africa, they have helped raise public awareness about the situation in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories. Muslim Aid was part of a consortium of UK aid agencies which lobbied the European Union (successfully) to suspend the upgrading of EU-Israel trade agreements, for instance. Imams in many mosques in Britain make reference to events in the Middle East during

their Friday sermons and a number of more radical Islamic groups have campaigned specifically on the Jerusalem issue.

For example, Hizb ut-Tahrir – which is a permitted organisation in Britain, though proscribed in some other countries – reported and commented upon Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's concerns about the structural dangers to the al-Aqsa mosque by Israeli excavation work in the vicinity, and it called for Muslims in Britain and elsewhere to step up activity relating to Jerusalem. A political commentary on the organisation's website quoted the Qatari newspaper as-Sharq (from September 2010), saying, 'The protection of al-Aqsa Mosque against destruction and Judaisation is the most important duty of the Muslims and of the whole world. The intervention of the world's community organisation, especially the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the UN Security Council, has become importunate to put an end to the crimes of the Israeli Occupation, which target the first Qiblah and the third holy mosque. The developments on the ground necessitate from the OIC and al-Quds Committee to fulfil the duty of protecting the al-Aqsa Mosque and to convene at the earliest opportunity to debate the developments and to call for an international conference to protect the holy city.'

However, while some Muslim groups in Britain joined protests against Israeli actions in Jerusalem, Hizb ut-Tahrir had a more radical message for its supporters and the readers of its website: 'Dear Muslims,' it said. 'How long will the criminal rulers and the Kafir West continue to control our affairs? How long will we continue to be a game in their hands? They sidetrack us away from the sound solutions to our issues, including the issue of Palestine, be it by inciting the masses to partake in futile marches

and demonstrations, or by declaring days of rage in support of al-Aqsa, to send messages that are apparently designed to salvage al-Aqsa from the dominion of the Jews, whereas in fact they are designed to internationalise the old city in al-Quds, once the Muslims and the countries of the world have been mobilised to salvage al-Aqsa from the attacks by the settlers and the excavation work underneath it. Consequently, the notion of internationalising al-Quds would gather unprecedented international support and the old city of al-Quds would be used as yet another base for the malicious Kufr states, enjoying the protection of all the states of the world affiliated to the United Nations.'

Undoubtedly such rhetoric appeals to some radicalised Muslim youth in Britain, including students on some university campuses. But the frustration felt by many British Muslims over Israel's actions in Jerusalem is being channelled in other ways by different types of Muslim or inter-faith groups. One such is Faith Matters, a community-cohesion based UK organisation which works towards conflict resolution and cohesion through activities with faith communities in the UK and the Middle East. Last November, Faith Matters took a group of young British Muslims to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Hebron on a tour supported by the Holy Land Trust. The aim of the trip was to enable these young British Muslims to gain awareness of issues within the region and to build links with faith-based and interfaith groups in the arena. They held meetings with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Atallah Hanna, with whom they discussed relations between Muslims and Christians, and with members of a local interfaith organisation, Musalaha, to discuss relations between Palestinians and Jews. Musalaha is a Jerusalem-based Arab organisation trying to promote

reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians in ways demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus.

There is more dialogue than one might think between Jews and Palestinians on the ground in Jerusalem. In fact, some of the UK-based organisations campaigning for Palestinian rights and against specific Israeli violations, such as house demolitions, rely heavily on close cooperation with groups such as the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B'Tselem. B'Tselem was set up in 1989 by a group of prominent Israeli academics, journalists, lawyers and members of the Knesset (Parliament). As its missions statement says, it endeavours to document and educate the Israeli public and policymakers about human rights violations in the Occupied Territories, combat the phenomenon of denial prevalent among the Israeli public, and help create a human rights culture in Israel.

Similarly, in Britain there are Jewish organisations which strongly oppose Israeli policies in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories and campaign alongside Palestinian and other activists. Particularly notable amongst these is a group called Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP), a network of Jews who are British or who live in Britain and who 'oppose Israeli policies that undermine the livelihoods, human, civil and political rights of the Palestinian people.' JFJFP has won celebrity endorsement from many British Jews prominent in the Arts, in particular, and its very sophisticated website carries large numbers of articles and photographs of interest and use to campaigners. For instance, Aaron Dover reported on the site in 2009 about what he called a 'Jerusalem Ethnic Cleansing Tour', in which, amongst other examples, he describes Palestinian evictions from properties in the Shakh Jarrah district of Jerusalem and

what has happened in Silwan, a district close to the Old City. Of the latter, he wrote, 'This bustling neighbourhood has been home to its Palestinian residents for decades. No fewer than 88 multi-occupancy housing units are scheduled for demolition, on the pretext of an archaeological excavation. A viewing tower has been installed in preparation for tourists to observe the excavated site, connected to the old city via a tunnel such that they need never see the Palestinian homes all around or have any sense of the evicted and dispossessed residents.' Such eye-witness accounts, backed up with photographs, offer valuable campaigning material for protest and lobbying groups in the UK and elsewhere.

Israeli house demolitions in East Jerusalem and other occupied territories are closely monitored and publicized by the UK office of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHD), which in fact organised Aaron Dover's tour, which I just described. ICAHD was set up in 1997 as a non-violent, direct action organisation to resist Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied territories (of which there have been an estimated 24,000 so far). ICAHD was largely the brainchild of an American-born Jew, Jeff Halper, and works closely with the small but determined Israeli peace movement, Palestinian groups and sympathisers abroad. ICAHD physically attempt to block the destruction of houses where possible, helps Palestinians deal with the Israeli police and other authorities, and conducts speaking tours in Britain and elsewhere to publicise illegal and inhumane Israeli actions.

According to ICAHD's research, more than 2,000 homes have been demolished in East Jerusalem since 1987, though there may be as many as 20,000 demolition orders outstanding. The vast majority of house

demolitions are so-called Administrative Demolitions. These can be ordered by the Jerusalem Municipality (in areas that have zoning plans) or the Israeli Interior Ministry (for areas that do not). Israeli Courts can authorise the demolition of a home when it does not have the requisite planning permission. However, Arabs are often obliged to build without permission, as fewer than 100 permits are granted to them each year (unlike the numerous permits for Jewish housing developments, often receiving public subsidy). There have also been a limited number of 'punitive' demolitions targeting the families of Palestinian activists, though the Israeli authorities have been using this method less frequently in Jerusalem recently as it has proven to be counter-productive.

Meanwhile, since 1967 Jewish settlements have been multiplying in East Jerusalem, ICAHD reports, for the stated purpose of expanding the Jewish character of the city and guaranteeing its indivisibility. While applications for re-zoning of green or un-zoned areas are routinely denied to Palestinians, these same applications are regularly granted to Jewish settlement companies. Jewish settlements built on the outskirts of Jerusalem also dissect the continuity between the northern and southern West Bank, jeopardising the feasibility of a future Palestinian state. It is worth restating that all such settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank is illegal under International Law, which clearly forbids the transfer of civilian populations into occupied territory.

Paramount amongst the British non-religious NGOs which have been campaigning on Jerusalem and related issues is the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC). The PSC describes itself as an independent, non-governmental, non-partisan and non-party political organisation with members from many communities across Britain. The PSC says it

represents peoples of all faiths and political parties who have come together to work for peace and justice for the Palestinian people, though in truth its support is mainly from the Left of the political spectrum, largely because it is heavily supported by trade unions and favours a radical campaigning style. It is declaredly against all forms of racism, including anti-Jewish prejudice. The PSC has branches in many parts of the country and helps organise demonstrations and events against Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories and in favour of economic boycotts and disinvestment. A major part of its work, through its branches, involves lobbying politicians, including holding meetings with candidates for the British and European parliaments at election time. A number of parliamentarians or former MPs are among its patrons, notably Tony Benn (Labour) and Baroness (Jenny) Tonge (Liberal Democrat). Parallel to the PSC and working closely with it are a number of 'twinning' organisations, which twin towns and cities in Britain with counterparts in Palestine. Fes in Morocco is twinned with Jerusalem (Al-Quds), it is worth pointing out, while New York City, maybe not surprisingly given its large Jewish population, is twinned with Jerusalem (Israel). But in Britain, the twinning arrangements have been at a much more modest level; a notable example is Camden (in North London) which has a twinning arrangement with Abu Dis (a Palestinian community in the Jerusalem governate, which is cruelly divided by the Israeli Security Wall). Abu Dis is sometimes referred to as the Gateway to Jerusalem, and it houses a major checkpoint manned by the Israeli security forces.

The Camden-Abu Dis Friendship Association (CADFA) essentially promotes human rights and international law in Abu Dis, Palestine. But behind that rather brief introductory statement there can be found a whole range of activities, especially on the Camden side, which are aimed at

raising awareness and strengthening solidarity between the two communities, including and especially in schools. CADFA is a registered charity, like many such groups; my own home London borough of Tower Hamlets is in a similar twinning arrangement with Jenin. This means that CADFA is restricted by the Charity Commission in the sort of activities that it can do, if it is still to maintain the favourable tax and other advantages given to registered charities. Things permitted include educational and humanitarian activities. In more detail, CADFA carefully defines its activities as:

- *raising awareness of human rights and humanitarian issues relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and Abu Dis in particular*
- *researching and monitoring abuses of human rights and infringements of humanitarian law in Abu Dis*
- *educating the public about human rights and humanitarian law*
- *promoting public support for human rights and the observance of humanitarian law*
- *working to eliminate abuses of human rights and infringements of humanitarian law in Abu Dis*
- *working to obtain and promote redress for the victims of human rights abuses and infringements of humanitarian law in Abu Dis and their families*
- *providing support to and relieving need among the victims of human rights abuses and infringements of humanitarian law and their families in Abu Dis*

Visits in both directions are organised by the Camden-Abu Dis Friendship Association and those travellers from Camden who go to Palestine are encouraged to share their experiences and observations

when they return, among family and friends, at public meetings, in the media or wherever. The experience can often have a profound effect on the participants. As one recent Camden visitor to Abu Dis wrote, 'This was the best thing I have ever done in my life. People were unbelievably welcoming... The situation was much worse than I thought. I hate to be back, thinking of people living in that situation.' Group visits are organised for people with particular interests, e.g. teachers, college lecturers, musicians and trade unionists.

What groups such as CADFA cannot do – because of their charitable status – is to be overtly political, for example campaigning for boycotts of Israel. Those British charities which do engage in such campaigning have by necessity formed a separate company which is allowed to do so (but does not enjoy the advantages of charitable status). The borderline between the two types of organisation is sometimes blurred, but the Charity Commissioners are vigilant against infringements of relevant laws and regulations. Accordingly, some more overtly political activities relating to Jerusalem and Palestinian rights are more effectively carried out by political lobbying groups, such as the Council for Arab British Understanding (CAABU), on whose Board I happen to sit. Founded in 1967, CAABU defines its aim as being 'to promote a positive approach to Arab-British relations by providing an unrivalled forum for a diverse range of politicians, journalists, opinion formers and members of the public to co-operate on issues relating to the Arab world.' Though the organisation's geographical remit covers the whole of the Arab world and it is building up its activities relating to the Arabian Gulf and North Africa, historically it has been far more focussed on the Near East, and in particular Palestine. Accordingly, Jerusalem has been a recurrent topic of concern and campaigning. Some CAABU staff members go out to

schools around Britain on a regular basis, to inform pupils about issues relating to Jerusalem, Palestine and the wider Middle East.

CAABU is jointly chaired by three MPs, one from each major political party, and about 120 parliamentarians are currently members of the organisation. There is an annual reception in Parliament, usually attended by the Foreign Secretary (Minister), other Ministers and senior MPs, and regular briefing events on specific topics relating to the Arab world are held in committee rooms in Parliament. Perhaps CAABU's most valuable single contribution is in the parliamentary visits it organises for small groups of MPs and members of the House of Lords (Upper House) to Arab states, especially Palestine. Accordingly, over the past four decades, thanks to CAABU, scores of parliamentarians have been able to see for themselves the realities of the steady encroachment by Israeli settlers into the Occupied Territories, including Jerusalem; the monstrosity of the Security Wall and the way that it cuts people off from Jerusalem, as well as, in many cases, their olive groves; the humiliation endured by Palestinians at Israeli checkpoints, etc.

Another vital aspect of CAABU's work is its media monitoring. Any TV newsreader who inadvertently refers to Israel as the capital of Israel (a position not accepted by Britain or most Western countries), or who refers to East Jerusalem as being in Israel, will receive a stern rebuke from CAABU, whose Director, Chris Doyle, regularly writes letters to the Press as well, putting forward a pro-Palestinian view or countering messages that are too uncritically pro-Israel. This is a very necessary operation. Although the Jewish lobby in Britain is nowhere near as strong as its equivalent in the United States, it does still exist. Moreover, it was traditionally quite effective in influencing British governments and

political parties. The very noticeable shift in opinion in Britain – and in British government positions – has been encouraged by the lobbying work of CAABU and other campaigning organisations, several of which have become quite professional at getting their members and supporters to write to their MPs or to go to lobby them personally. There is an annual ‘Mass Lobby’ of Parliament on issues relating to Palestine and big street demonstrations at times of great controversy, such as Israel’s Operation Cast Lead against the people of Gaza and the illegal assault on the Turkish ship carrying aid to Gaza. It was interesting that David Cameron, who is Prime Minister in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government that was formed after last May’s general elections, has declared that the Israeli blockade of Gaza had turned the Strip into a ‘prison camp’ – something one cannot easily imagine being said by former (Labour) Prime Minister, Tony Blair, or indeed any of his other predecessors.

Within political parties, there are pro-Palestinian campaigning groups, largely set up to counter the work of the ‘Friends of Israel’ groups in those parties. The Conservatives, for example, have an active Middle East Council, Labour has a Friends of Palestine and the Middle East, and the Liberal Democrats have a Friends of Palestine. All these groups organise events of various kinds at party conferences, as well as during the year, and provide briefings as well as online links to relevant sites and other organisations. They can help draft motions of relevance to Palestinian issues for debate at the party conferences. In the case of the Liberal Democrats, at least, if such a motion is passed, it then becomes party policy. Political parties have youth and student groups as well, particularly in universities, which provide an excellent forum for political

debate and awareness-raising on such issues as Jerusalem among the next generation of opinion-formers.

British universities themselves have been playing an important role in motivating people to take a critical interest in Israel's occupation policies and to participate in demonstrations, boycotts etc. One of the more controversial aspects of that development has been the debate about the desirability of boycotting Israeli universities and co-operation with Israeli academics. Some people argue that such a boycott would be a violation of the important principle of academic freedom and point out that some of Israel's most liberal thinkers – and those most open to Palestinian concerns – are to be found among university faculty members. Similarly, proposals for British universities to twin with Palestinian seats of learning – such as Oxford University with Bir Zeit – have caused heated discussions within both the teaching and student bodies, mainly because of objections from Jews. However, Goldsmith's University in London did successfully set up a twinning relationship with Al-Quds Open University, a mainly distance-learning educational institution largely based in Amman. This should not be confused with the similarly-named Al Quds University, which is indeed based in Jerusalem, but which has suffered considerable disruption and disturbance from the apartheid-style policies of the Israelis. Al Quds University produces regular fact sheets on issues relating to Jerusalem, which are disseminated to some British centres of learning, such as London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), as well as through its US partner, Brandeis University. Several British universities, including Oxford, have offered teaching posts to Palestinians or to Israelis critical of the regime, an excellent example of the latter being Avi Shlaim.

To some people it might seem strange that I include universities among non-governmental agencies, but in Britain, at least, they are largely independent, despite receiving large financial grants from government – though far less after the recent government cuts, I regret to say! I would argue that the universities are indeed an essential part of Britain's civil society – the third sector that is neither government controlled nor part of the market or business. At the time of writing, there is only one private university in Britain – Buckingham – though that situation may change in the future.

Similarly, the media in Britain, unlike in many countries, especially in the Arab world, are independent of the government. This is even true of the BBC, whose status is often misunderstood. The BBC is a national corporation, but it is not a state corporation; it is funded by a compulsory 'licence fee', which all owners of television sets must pay, or else face large fines or even imprisonment. This curious status, which means that the BBC is beholden neither to the government nor to commercial advertisers (unlike so-called independent channels, which in fact depend on advertising), is made even more unusual by the much-vaunted principles of BBC objectivity. In other words, in principle, at least, the BBC is meant to look at stories objectively, to give both sides to any argument and to be resolutely 'fair'. Traditionally this has meant that whichever government has been in power, the BBC has been accused of being against it, which is probably a good sign. Such a standard of 'objectivity' was dropped during the Second World War, on the grounds of national security and maintaining the public's morale, though this was not, interestingly, the case in subsequent conflicts, including the Iraq War. The only time I remember balance being cast aside during peacetime was during the last few years of apartheid or 'racial separate

development' in South Africa. BBC managers and producers eventually declared that there was no way one could deny that the apartheid laws and regime were obscene and the sooner they were replaced the better.

That situation has so far not happened in relation to Israel-Palestine and what have increasingly been described by Israel's critics as its 'apartheid policies'. The BBC bends over backwards to be 'objective', which means that it gets regularly attacked, from both sides. The Israeli government is convinced that the Corporation is shamelessly pro-Palestinian – and even, at times, 'anti-Semitic' – whereas those on the other side of the argument feel the BBC gives far too much credence to the official Israeli line, not least on the issue of perceived 'security needs'. Whether things will ever change in that regard I cannot say. What is certain, though, is that TV coverage, both by the BBC and by the better independent channels such as Channel 4, has helped shift British public opinion away from supporting the Israeli government and its actions. Though the Israeli authorities tried to keep foreign reporters out of Gaza during Operation Cast Lead, enough material got out to outrage British public opinion. Similarly, the reality of evictions and dispossession in East Jerusalem and other parts of the Occupied Territories have been brought into the living rooms of ordinary British families through TV documentaries and news bulletins. Mercifully in Britain most people do not have access to Fox News or any other similar right-wing American channel, which largely support not just the Israeli government position but also the myth that an undivided Jerusalem is all part of God's plan for a Greater Israel, in keeping with some very dubious biblical predictions. On the other hand, growing numbers of viewers, especially within Britain's Muslim community, do have access to satellite or cable channels – including Al

Jazeera in English – which take a strongly critical line towards Israel over Jerusalem and related issues.

The situation regarding the print media is less clear-cut. There is no presumption, let alone obligation, for objectivity when it comes to the British Press. On the contrary, most newspapers are quite evidently either right-wing (and in favour of the Conservative Party) or moderately left-wing (and in favour of Labour, or at the time of the last general election, the Liberal Democrats). This is true even amongst the so-called ‘serious’ newspapers. *The Times*, which is part of Rupert Murdoch’s holdings, is usually solidly pro-Israel, for example; indeed its editorial at the time of the Israeli assault on the Gaza flotilla read as if it had been written by the Israeli Embassy! On the other side, the *Guardian* and to some extent the *Independent* have been highly sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, insofar that this has been a matter of clear injustices and inhumane action perpetrated by Israeli forces, government and settlers. This has been reflected in the editorial comment in the *Guardian* and its Sunday sister newspaper, the *Observer*. Though the *Guardian* online has a far larger readership than the physical newspaper, nonetheless we should not exaggerate the percentage of British people who get accurate coverage of what is happening in Jerusalem through the Press. Most of the popular newspapers do not cover such foreign news and many of the readers do not read any news anyway, only celebrity gossip and sport.

Given the lack of interest in foreign news amongst large sections of the British public we must therefore not over-emphasize the shift in public opinion relating to Jerusalem and Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories. Nonetheless, the change of attitude among the ‘thinking classes’ has been dramatic, and this has certainly impacted on both

Parliament and the Government. This shift has not been a case of a top-down transfer of ideas or ideology from government to the people, but rather the opposite, through the intermediary of third sector actors, notably non-governmental organisations, political parties, universities and the media. In this paper I have paid particular attention to NGOs, not only because they are so numerous but also because they can, I think, claim most of the credit for this sea-change in opinions. Moreover, at many levels they are more closely interconnected with people on the ground in East Jerusalem and elsewhere in Palestine. The NGOs are themselves so varied that they can reach different parts of society in ways that political parties, universities and the media probably cannot hope to emulate. The religious-based NGOs, in particular, can establish close working relationships with partners on the ground, but so too can lawyers, doctors, architects and many other professionals or members of special interest groups who have counterparts both among the Palestinians and among sympathetic Jewish Israelis. Although the following is largely outside the scope of this paper, British NGOs moreover have developed good networks with similar organisations in other parts of the world, which means that they are able to coordinate their activity. Any boycott campaign against Israeli goods or services, for example, could only have a significant effect if so coordinated. Already, NGOs within the European Union co-operate through an NGO Liaison Committee that meets regularly in Brussels. And just as NGOs are lobbying British politicians on subjects relating to Palestinian rights and the status of Jerusalem, so increasingly they are lobbying members of the European Parliament and other European institutions as well. What the cumulative effect of all this may be and whether what Britain thinks and does in relation to Palestine really matters any more – either alone or in concert with other EU member states – is a matter for conjecture. But I am not a pessimist and

Paper for Doha conference

From: **Jonathan Fryer** (jonathanfryer@msn.com)
Sent: Monday, January 17, 2011 4:17:53 AM
To: Mohamed Sobieh (mmsobeih@hotmail.com)
1 attachment
Jerusalem Lecture for Doha.doc (95.5 KB)

Dear Sir,

Further to our earlier email exchange, please find attached my 7,000-word paper for the Doha conference on Jerusalem. I am much looking forward to the event and to te other contributions.

I assume someone will contact me about travel arrangements to Qatar. It would be very helpful to know these soon, so I can rearrange my other work around the visit.

With best wihs,

Jonathan Fryer