

President Mahmoud Abbas Lecture

Cooper Union

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President Bharucha, Mr. Clark distinguished faculty and guests, religious leaders, dear students and members of the Cooper Union community, thank you for this opportunity to speak at one of the world's most distinguished Colleges.

From Cooper Union I would like to say: thank you America for extraordinary efforts that you have made to create peace in Palestine. And in particular to President Barak Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry, for their endless trips, back and forth, in search of peace.

What President Obama and Secretary Kerry did took courage. Just as it took courage for Abraham Lincoln to stand at this very podium to argue for the end of slavery.

I am honored today to stand in front of you at this podium, where eight men who were or became American Presidents have stood and announced their programs and platforms.

This Great Hall has been instrumental in furthering the Abolitionist Movement, the Women's Suffrage Movement, American Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Native American Rights Movement. These walls have heard men and women speak far more eloquent than me; I ask their accommodation for the next half hour, to also hear me.

I come here today to convey to you the greetings of my people in Palestine who aspire for peace and justice. Palestine is a country in the heart of the Middle East. A country in the Middle East where Christians and Muslims live in harmony. A country in the Middle East, the birth place of Jesus Christ, in Bethlehem, where I pray with my fellow Palestinian Christians three times every year. A country that hopes to live in peace and security side by side with its neighbor the State of Israel.

I come today to pledge to create the new peaceful State of Palestine. I come here to ask you to **Rethink Palestine.**

This may especially be seen by some as an odd and hard place for a faithful Muslim to talk peace. Here, almost in the shadow of Ground Zero, where thousands of innocent American men, women and children were also victimized on a quiet September day.

But today in Cooper Union I stand on the same place where Abraham Lincoln stood over 150 years ago and condemned the scourge of slavery, to state, loud and clear, that we the Palestinian people condemn terrorism, we condemn what happened on 9/11, we condemn the treatment of Christians and non-Christians by ISIS (Daaish) I am speaking on behalf of 99 percent of the Muslim peoples around the world Here, today, nearly in the shadow of Ground Zero, I state to the world: the barbarians of ISIS (daaish) and Al Qaeda who kill innocent people are not faithful Muslims. And to the children and families of the victims of 9/11, I say as a Palestinian

Muslim, I am sorry for your pain. These murderers do not represent Islam, we all stand against them to defeat their evil plans. At the same time we must work to end the Israeli occupation and establish a Palestinian state, for we cannot fight terror only by the gun.

Recently in the Vatican, Pope Francis, Shimon Peres, the former President of Israel, and I prayed together for peace. We prayed together because though we come from three different religious traditions, we all pray, in fact, to the same one God of Abraham.

Our holy book the Quran says:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah the most righteous of you.”

I am older than you. 79 years old to be exact. My life has been largely lived – for better or worse.

So today, I come to tell you young people what I prayed for in the Vatican. I prayed for different world.

I prayed that day for an end to the occupation of my country Palestine, and my people. I prayed for a free and independent Palestine that will live side by side in peace, security and prosperity with its neighbor the state of Israel.

As you may know, Jews, Christians and Muslims have lived peacefully together in Palestine for centuries. So peace between religions runs through the heart of the most sacred City in the world, Jerusalem. Peace between the world's religions runs through Jericho the Oldest City on Earth. Peace between the world's religions runs through Palestine.

I prayed with the Pope that day for a Palestine and Israel that build bridges together instead of walls.

I made a prayer that someday I will be able to enforce the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, which I have signed, and that we can make our new state of Palestine a model of women's rights in the Arab world.

I also prayed that Israel will finally, after a long wait, live next to Palestine as a good neighbor and not as an occupier. So we Palestinians can continue to build our institutions for a modern and open state and society.

I made a prayer for an America that is a real friend of Israel, not a false friend. And just as real friends do not let friends drive drunk, so too a real friend of Israel would not let them engage in the widespread killing of women and children, including bombing United Nations schools and hospitals, such as we just saw in Gaza.

Just as real friends in America do not let friends break the law, a real friend of Israel would not let them advance 15,000 new illegal housing units while at the same time claiming to engage in peace talks.

Just as real friends in America don't let their friends abuse their neighbor's children, America as a real friend of Israel wouldn't let them routinely arrest, beat and jail without charges Palestinian children, which has been well documented by both journalists and by independent human rights groups.

And so today, I come to ask you, the students of Cooper Union, I come indeed to ask all of the students of America and the world. Will you join this old man in his prayer? Will you help me to build a peaceful world? I am sure your answer is yes we will.

Will you build this world I prayed for, and in fact, a better world than that, because, as the Christian Arab Philosopher Khalil Gibran once said: **(the future world of our children is so magical that an old man like me can never visit it, not even in my dreams).**

The people of Israel live today as our occupiers, and without a permanent vision of a peaceful coexistence with their very closest neighbors. Not acceptable.

My people in Gaza live under siege by Israel, without freedom of travel, or of trade, with 80 percent of them now reliant on foreign aid, and in constant fear of being randomly bombed. They live locked in an open air prison. **Not acceptable.**

To date, Israel maintains control of Gaza's air space, territorial waters, electromagnetic sphere, population registry and the movement of all goods and people. The relatives of the very people in Gaza that Israel just killed even have to apply to Israel to obtain their death certificates. Is that a free people? **Not acceptable.**

My people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem live under Israeli occupation – with segregated highways, behind huge walls, travelling through constant internal checkpoints, a large number of them with no running water, a large number of them still in refugee camps for decades, with no right to a fair trial and no right to post bail, often physically beaten and abused upon arrest, and with little hope for the future. Palestinians today have far fewer rights than African Americans in America had in the 1950's. **Not acceptable.**

I ask you to **Rethink Palestine**. You are smart. Study us carefully. Find the truth. Contrary to what is so often portrayed in your media. In the last decade we have done our part.

We tried for many months to begin serious negotiations with Israel. We said to the Prime Minister Netanyahu, since you openly state to the whole world that you support the two-state solution, why can't we agree on a map for two states on the basis of 1967 borders? Despite many, many requests, we have never gotten a Map.

I ask you to **Rethink Palestine. Help us stop the illegal stealing of our land. This week I will propose to the United Nations a new timetable for peace talks. The key is to agree on a map to delineate the borders of each country. I say today to Prime Minister Netanyahu, end the occupation, make peace.** A quarter century has passed since the Palestine Liberation Organization officially endorsed the two-state solution. In a historic decision, that has since been accepted by all the Arab states, Palestine recognized the State of Israel based on pre-1967 borders, conceding over 78 percent of historic Palestine. Rather than

accepting 78% of the land in question, the current Israeli government has chosen to use the peace process as a smoke screen for more colonization and oppression. We still wish to believe that our Israeli neighbors do not expect the Palestinian people to live under a system of apartheid. The desire of peace and freedom-loving nation for independence can't be eliminated by force.

We are the only people on earth, who still live under occupation. **Not acceptable.**

The fact is that the Arab League has presented a complete regional peace plan, the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. This plan, which still stands, offers Israel full recognition and normalization of relations by 57 member countries of the Arab League and the Islamic Conference, in exchange for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 border and a just and agreed solution to the refugee issue, based on UNGA Resolution 194. So our **(Nekbah)** can come to an end. If anyone ever again tells you that the Arab countries are the primary barrier to peace that is simply false. And it has been this way for over a decade.

Rethink Palestine. Help us stop the illegal stealing of our land. Prime Minister Netanyahu, end the occupation, make peace. The Eighth Commandment says “Thou Shalt Not Steal.” America itself directly asked Israel to stop building illegal settlements on Palestinian land. But then Israel did the opposite -- during the last nine months of negotiations sponsored by the United States, after being asked to freeze settlements, Israel advanced housing units for 55,000 new settlers in occupied territory, bringing to 600,000 the Israeli settlers

population in the West bank and East Jerusalem.

Isn't stealing land covered by the Eighth Commandment? Under international law Israel has no right to take that land. Israel's constant confiscation of our land is our most pressing and fundamental problem. It obstructs the achievement of a just and lasting peace with Palestine, This Israeli conduct reminds us of the wise words of late President Kennedy:

“We cannot negotiate with those who say, ‘What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is negotiable.’”

When Palestine exercised its long-overdue right to seek recognition of statehood before the United Nations 2012, it was not in an attempt to bypass a negotiated peace. Instead it was to allow us to be a leader for peace and human rights in the Muslim world, mainly through access to multilateral treaties and international organizations. The worldwide vote to make us an observer state was in our favor by count of 138 to 9. 138 to 9 in our favor.

Only 9 countries in the entire world opposed our application; the dozens of other countries who all voted for us found that we were well qualified to join the peaceful community of nations. These countries have all, **Rethought Palestine**, just as you must now do.

Rethink Palestine. Help us stop the illegal stealing of our land. Prime Minister Netanyahu, enough, end the occupation.

We ask that the international community stop hiding behind calls for “resumption of talks,” without holding the Israeli government accountable for its stealing of our land. The international community has the responsibility to protect our people living under the terror of settlers, an occupying army and a painful siege.

The attitude of the international community toward the Israeli government must be related to holding it directly accountable to international law and human rights.

On behalf of the brave Palestinian people, in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, I still come here to deliver a message of peace and justice to Israel and the rest of the world.

Security requires justice and an end of occupation. We cannot understand how the Israeli government can be misguided as to fail to understand that the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza that kills hundreds of women and children only sows more hate?.

As the President of the Palestinian people I remain totally committed to the vision of a two-state solution, so we can live in peace with our neighbor – Israel. This is the reason I joined Pope Francis - together with President Peres - in our prayer for peace.

Now, I have told you about my world. The world of this old man. But you are young. In the language of youth, there is no such word as tired. In the vocabulary of youth, there is no such word as failure.

In Maine every summer, young Palestinians, Israelis, Americans, Arabs, and others meet in a camp called seeds of peace, founded in 1993. They build the very world I am calling for in Palestine. It works. It's real. It's the future. To those who say peace between Israelis and Palestinians is impossible, I say, let them visit America. I say, let them visit Maine.

In closing again, at 79, I do not know for certain if I will ever hold in my hand and taste the sweet fruit of peace. But I do know this for certain. I have held in my hand, and seen with my own eyes, the seeds of peace. The seeds of peace are the young Palestinians, Israelis, Americans and others all over the world who form peace groups on college campuses like J Street and Students For Justice in Palestine. Those are the seeds of peace.

You are the seeds of peace. **(Pointing to young person).**

You are the seeds of peace **(Pointing to another young person).**

You are the seeds of peace (**Pointing to another young person**).

Do not underestimate the power of your youth.

It was the young people who marched in Birmingham, Alabama, with Martin Luther King, who caused race relations in America to be rethought. It was the young people in America whose protests on college campuses against the Vietnam War forced that war to be rethought. It was the young people in America whose protests on college campuses against apartheid caused that injustice to finally end. And I say this to

you; you have the power to convince the American people to **Rethink Palestine**.

Wisdom may come from the old, but passion for justice is the province of the young. The old ask -- what day will justice come? But for the young, the time for justice is always NOW. In the vocabulary of youth, the time for justice is always RIGHT NOW. And so it should be.

It was to the young, that Nelson Mandela, a great friend of Palestine, once said that South Africa could never be fully free until Palestine was free.

Now will each of you seeds of peace start tonight to build the world I prayed for with Pope Francis?

Will you seeds of peace create the world of tomorrow, where there will be no more Palestinians or Israelis Killed?

Will you seeds of peace create a world that supports the 99% of peace loving Muslims, Jews and Christians, and reject violent radical religion?

Will you seeds of peace **Rethink Palestine** and ask others to rethink it?

Will you do that, for the sake of Palestinians and Israelis?

Of course you will. Because here at this magnificent College -- the Cooper Union -- where magical things are created -- as at colleges across America, religious and ethnic diversity already exists. You have already created in your Universities a model of the very world of interreligious co-existence and peace and love that the old people try to tell you is impossible in my country.

Despite all Israeli attempts to make our nation accept a reality of exile and apartheid under a cover of impunity, we continue our peaceful march toward freedom. Paraphrasing our late poet Mahmoud Darwish (**standing here, staying here, permanent here, eternal here, and we have one goal, one, one, ..to be**). And I say : **yes we will be.**

So you already know how to build the road to future peace, and you know that it runs through Cooper Union, it runs through America and yes it runs right through Jerusalem and Palestine.

We have all made mistakes. But today, I say, let us move forward. Let us forgive not seven times, but as Jesus himself said, **seventy times seven times**. Martin Luther King once said **“The arc of the moral Universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”**

Today I say: the arc of fear is long, but it circles back to love. I intend to close that circle, and today I humbly ask you, the magical students of Cooper Union, of America, and of the world, to be part of that change. **Rethink Palestine.**

May God bless you all