

Writing great letters to the editor

Credit for content to Maher Mughrabi, collated by Jessica Morrison
September 2020



Recommendations for letters on Palestine,

- Politeness is virtue.
- Put own reaction aside, and instead focus on persuasion. What is it going to take to get someone to change their view?
- Avoid condemnation - needs to be constructive.
- Don't need to rubbish someone, remember you're taking part in a conversation with the newspaper and their readers
- Do your homework. Read the letters page everyday to get a sense of the 'tone' of the letters page
- Ensure you read the 'recommended tips' for newspapers (here is [SMH for example](#)).
- Need to refer to something else in the newspaper – doesn't even need to be about Palestine. Refer and cross-refer.
- Need to do more than agree with what's been said – need to add something to conversation. Suggest something concrete about what comes next. What deadline or next step could be relevant?
- With such a short space, just have one idea.
- Our issue has very complicated arguments and dense facts. Try to use accessibly every-day language, rather than technical language of the conflict. If your letter has to be checked by an editor, because it is so specific, then much less likely to get printed.
- Get it in quickly – the day it is printed is great, the morning of the next day is even better.
- Try to face your audience, not the person that annoyed you.

Some examples of published letters to the editor about Palestine

JOHN KOTSOPOULOS, North Balwyn

Jerusalem's heart is still Palestinian

Despite more than 30 years of Zionist civic planning designed to distort the racial character of Jerusalem and the refusal of successive Israeli "peacemakers" even to allow the Palestinian natives of Jerusalem (such as Dr Hanan Ashrawi) a place at the negotiating table, the city's heart is still inhabited by Palestinians who happen to be part of a wider Arab race and happen to belong to the Christian and Muslim faiths.

My father and his forefathers were born in Jerusalem before modern Israel came into existence. The days of people like Israeli prime minister Golda Meir and Rabbi Meir Kahane claiming to receptive Western audiences that Palestinians are just migrant Arabs from somewhere else are thankfully behind us, but the full ramifications of our existence are still too painful for many Israelis and their supporters abroad to contemplate.

To acknowledge that Palestinians exist is to acknowledge that Jews stole land by force, that they have denied people their right to self-determination, and that they have made other human beings second-class citizens and worse in their own streets and homes.

If Doran Ur (25/7) sees Palestinians not only as an inferior people but as children of a lesser God, he should say so directly. We exist, regardless of what any encyclopaedia or scripture may say. It is past time that our humanity and our losses were taken into account.

MAHER MUGHRABI, North Melbourne

Another look at

A state must belong to all its citizens

In his analysis of the Middle East "road map" to peace (*The Age*, 6/6), Ed O'Loughlin tells us it envisages Arabs recognising "Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state". I understood this to be an extraneous Israeli demand and is not mentioned in the road map itself — although letter-writer Ettie Rosenbaum (6/6) claims it is the key to peace.

In the modern world, it is accepted that nations tend to be multi-ethnic, and any measures by the state that privilege one ethnic or religious group over another are rightly deplored — whether it is forced Arabisation of northern Iraq or ethnic cleansing in the Balkans or central Africa. One wonders how a black or Asian Briton — or a Chinese or Aboriginal Aussie — would react to a demand that they sign a document affirming their nation's "essential" Anglo-Celtic character.

It is, of course, imperative that Israel's right to exist within secure borders and safe from outside attack should be guaranteed by all Arab countries. But the question of Israel's "character" as a state is one properly left to that country's citizens — Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

Sari Kassis, Parramatta, NSW

De Klerk analogy

Daniel Hutter's (16/6) attempted analogy between South Africa's F. W. de Klerk and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas is hopelessly flawed.

De Klerk was chief executive of an established state that ruled the land under dispute. His Middle Eastern equivalent is Ariel Sharon, not Abbas. The latter, with his limited autonomy in scattered pockets of land, most closely resembles the puppet leaders of South Africa's "black homelands", or "bantustans".

As for the extremist Afrikaners mentioned by Hutter, with their ideology of a God-given right to the land — their counterparts are the religious settlers of Kiryat Arba and Elon Moreh.

I wonder if Hutter believes any Israeli leader would match de Klerk's offer to his country's disenfranchised inhabitants — full and equal citizenship in a single state under a new flag and constitution — even though that meant his own ethnic group accepting minority status and the election of a convicted "terrorist" as the country's president?

Sari Kassis, Parramatta, NSW



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July 01, 2005

Shootings by Israeli forces

FROM MR BERNARD MILLS

Sir, The guilty verdict on the Israeli army sniper who shot the British peace activist Tom Hurndall was hailed by Israeli officials as a vindication of Israel's willingness to prosecute soldiers violating rules of engagement (report, June 28).

During my time at the UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees) as officer in charge of operations in South Lebanon (1983-95) and director of operations in Gaza (1986-88) I wrote several hundred detailed reports to the Israeli Occupying Authorities about the killing or wounding with live ammunition of Palestinian (and Lebanese) women and children by the Israeli Army, as witnessed by my UN staff.

Neither I nor any member of my international staff, who were eyewitnesses to many of these incidents, were ever interviewed by the Military Police, nor did I hear or read in the Israeli media of any courts martial taking place.

BERNARD MILLS
Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Canberra Times,
5/4/2018



Letters to the Editor Editorial Opinion Cartoons

September and show Australia is generous towards the needy beyond our shores.

Peter Graves, Curtin

Gaza a ghetto

I have recently returned from living for some months in Palestine. I was deeply saddened by what I witnessed in Gaza. It is a ghetto created by a ruthless blockade.

The United Nations has predicted that it will be uninhabitable within a few years. Some days ago, 1400 Palestinians were injured and 17 were killed in Gaza, in an action that brings to mind Sharpeville or Kent State.

Like those two notorious events, these victims were non-violent protesters.

They were shot by Israeli soldiers, often by snipers from a long distance. The Israeli government claim, quoted in The Canberra Times (3 April), that it "acted judiciously to prevent a dangerous breach of its borders" is demonstrably absurd to anyone who has seen the extent of Israel's fortifications on the wide stretch of no man's land between Gaza and Israel.

We believe that the right to peaceful protest is sacrosanct and so did the 15,000 Palestinians protesting at their 70 years of Nakba – their catastrophe of dispossession and expulsion by the Israeli government.

This "Great Return March" was about the undeniable basic rights of Palestinians, like all people, to live freely in their homelands.

The Israeli military believe that any time the Palestinians demand their basic rights they will be considered violent and will be met with vicious brutality. I witnessed this on so many occasions.

How then can the Israeli military be described very recently by Prime Minister Netanyahu as "the most moral in the world" when it deliberately shoots unarmed civilians protesting on their own land?

Mary Kelly, Yarralumla

8/9/2020, *The Age*

Strange West Bank Stance

The challenges of Palestinian living in the West Bank were partially revealed by, “In the Jordan Valley, international deals don’t change reality for Palestinians” (5/9). In 2016 writers from around the world travelled to Palestine-Israel to spend time in the occupied territories. Their experiences were collected in the book *Kingdom of Olives and Ash*. This book of essays confirms the experiences the article describes are representative of everyday life for many Palestinians.

Daily life for most Palestinian is intolerable. The permit system, the checkpoints, make routine life – shopping, getting to work, to school – exhausting. Yet this year in the UN, when Israel threatened to forcibly annex up to a third of the Palestinian West Bank, Australia voted against a resolution condemning the annexation. The Australian government rightly promotes a “rules-based international order”. There is no justification for Israel and Palestine relations to be an exception.

Jan Lacey, North Melbourne.

25/5/2020, *The Age*

A chance to remember

Your article about Israel’s plans for the West Bank gives us the opportunity to remember that in 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine without any consultation with Palestinians.

In 1948 the State of Israel was proclaimed unilaterally. Seventy-two years later, May 15, is commemorated by Palestinians as “al-Nakba”, the “Day of Catastrophe”: Palestinians becoming refugees in their own land. In the same year, UN General Assembly Resolution 194 stated that refugees “wishing to...live at peace with their neighbours” must be allowed to return or be compensated: this resolution continues to be defied by Israel to this day. Thus for more than 72 years Palestinians have accumulated death, suffering and the abuse of their human rights.

Now the government of Israel is proposing to annex part of the West Bank – this is morally corrupt, as is the continued occupation of Palestine. As the article concludes “When it comes to upholding international law and UN resolutions, Palestine should not be the exception”.

Judith Morrison, Mount Waverly,

Other sources for advice - recommended by Maher

[Oxfam Australia - Writing a letter to the editor](#)

[Climate Council - How to write an effective letter to the editor](#)

[Community Tool Box - Writing Letters to the Editor](#)

[NRDC \(US Environmental group\) How to write a successful letter to the editor](#)

[Union of Concerned Scientists - Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor](#)