

Ilhan Omar Accuses Israel of 'Ethnic Cleansing'

by Hugh Fitzgerald

As is well known, Israel is a multi-ethnic state, where Arab citizens have equal civil, religious, and political rights as Jews. This has not stopped others from accusing Israel of practicing "apartheid." Israeli spokesmen then point out that in Israel, Arabs serve in the Knesset, sit on the Supreme Court, go abroad as diplomats for their country, and even, if they wish – though they are not required to – can serve in the IDF. Israeli Arabs study with Jews in universities, work alongside Jews in offices and factories, play on orchestras and sports teams with Jews.

None of this evidence has prevented Israel's detractors from continuing to harp on that "apartheid" theme. And among those detractors, congressional pride of place must be given to Ilhan Omar, the Somali-American congresswoman, who not only continues to describe Israel as an "apartheid" state but now has a new charge: Israel, she claims, is guilty of "ethnic cleansing."

In her first speech since being re-elected, Ilhan Omar did not choose to address economic insecurity, rising unemployment, the coronavirus epidemic. None of those. Her subject was, as it so often is, perfidious Israel.

In that speech she accused Israel of "ethnic cleansing." Her denunciation is here: "Newly-Reelected Congresswoman Ilhan Omar Accuses Israel of 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" [Algemeiner](#), November 6, 2020:

Newly-reelected Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar of

Minnesota has accused Israel of “ethnic cleansing” following the demolition earlier this week of illegal structures in a West Bank Bedouin community.

Referring to the events in Khirbet Humsa, which is located in the Jordan Valley, Omar – known for her vehement anti-Israel views and repeated use of rhetoric widely viewed as antisemitic – charged, via Twitter, on Thursday, “This a grave crime – in direct violation of international law. If they used any US equipment it also violates US law. An entire community is now homeless and will likely experience lifelong trauma. The United States of America should not be bankrolling ethnic cleansing. Anywhere.”

According to Israel’s military liaison agency with the Palestinians, COGAT, an “enforcement activity” was carried out by Israeli forces on Tuesday “against 7 tents and 8 pens which were illegally constructed, in a firing range located in the Jordan Valley.”

“The enforcement was carried out in accordance with the authorities and procedures, and subject to operational considerations,” it added.

Israel does not practice “ethnic cleansing.” There are 1.8 million Israeli Arabs who live in Israel proper; they are not being harried, persecuted, forced to move out of the country. There are another 2.8 million Palestinian Arabs living in the West who are not being moved out of their homes, or the area, as part of any kind of “ethnic cleansing.” A few Palestinians – fewer than one in two thousand – in the West Bank have been made to move when they have built illegal structures, that is, structures for which they did not have a permit to build, that were then taken down. From 2006 until 31 August 2018, Israel demolished 1,360 Palestinian homes in the West Bank that had been built illegally, that is, without the proper permits. During that 12-year period, that works out to about 110

Palestinian homes being demolished each year. And their Palestinian inhabitants were not being “ethnically cleansed,” but simply were not being allowed to violate the law by building without the necessary permits. They were not being forced out of the country, and were free to apply for permits for building elsewhere. Jews who build without the proper permits also have had their illegal homes demolished, as at the settlement outpost of Kumi Ori, described [here](#). Every government in the Western world requires that permits be obtained from the government by those wishing to build; why should Israel’s enforcement of that requirement be considered uniquely unacceptable?

At Khirbet Humsa, Bedouins had set up an encampment of seven tents, and eight animal pens, on land in the Jordan Valley that they did not own, and inside territory that is used by the IDF as a place for live-fire training. For years Israel has been trying to get them to move off the land to which they have no legal claim. The Bedouins availed themselves fully of Israel’s legal system, helped by left-wing Israeli lawyers. Finally, after many appeals, Israel’s High Court ruled against the Bedouin, citing their failure to have legal title to the land on which they had been living. There was also the danger to the Bedouins themselves of remaining in a live-fire zone of the IDF.

The Bedouin at Khirbet Humsa had been on notice for years that, if they lost their court case, they would have to move. But they made no plans for such an eventuality, nor did they avail themselves of the help the Israeli government offered in finding an alternative place, outside a danger zone, where they could be granted permits to pitch their seven tents.

Note that Ilhan Omar, in denouncing the demolition at Khirbet Humsa, never mentioned that the Bedouins had no legal title to the land at Khirbet Humsa. And when she claims that this “community is now homeless and will likely experience lifelong trauma,” she forgets two things. The “community” she speaks of

– all of seven tents and their inhabitants – is not likely to remain “homeless” very long. Doesn’t Omar know that the Israeli government will help those Bedouins find another place on which to pitch – legally – their seven tents? And the Bedouin are unlikely to “experience lifelong trauma” from such a move; they are the quintessential nomadic people, shepherds whose livestock ordinarily require seasonal transhumance.

Nor did Ilhan Omar note that the Israelis, while flattening the tents, did not rip them to shreds, so that at least some might be reused, and that the Bedouins’ belongings were left largely intact. Nor did she mention that the Bedouins had made full use of Israel’s legal system to present their case all the way up to the High Court. In Ilhan Omar’s telling, one might think the Israelis had simply appeared out of nowhere and proceeded to ruthlessly raze to the ground, for no apparent reason, a Bedouin “village” built on land that the inhabitants had owned for generations.

There is no “ethnic cleansing” anywhere of Arabs in Israel or in the West Bank. But there has already been “ethnic cleansing” of a different sort in Gaza, where every last Jew was forced to leave in 2005. And if the Palestinians ever get their state in the West Bank, they have made it clear that there will be more “ethnic cleansing,” for no Jews will be welcome in that future state. Meanwhile, there is not now, and will not be in the future, any retaliatory “ethnic cleansing” of Arabs by Israelis. Israeli Arabs know perfectly well that they will continue to study, work, and play, side by side with Jews, and to enjoy equal rights with them.

Ilhan Omar ended by declaring that “the United States of America should not be bankrolling ethnic cleansing. Anywhere.” I take it, then, that Omar believes the U.S. should make sure none of its aid ever goes either to Gaza, which has banned Jews, or to a future Palestinian state that intends to make itself *Judenrein*. But I’d like to hear it from the horse’s mouth. Perhaps an inquiring reporter could ask that very

question of Ilhan Omar (D-Mogadishu) at her next public appearance.

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