

Headline: One-state solution is illogical

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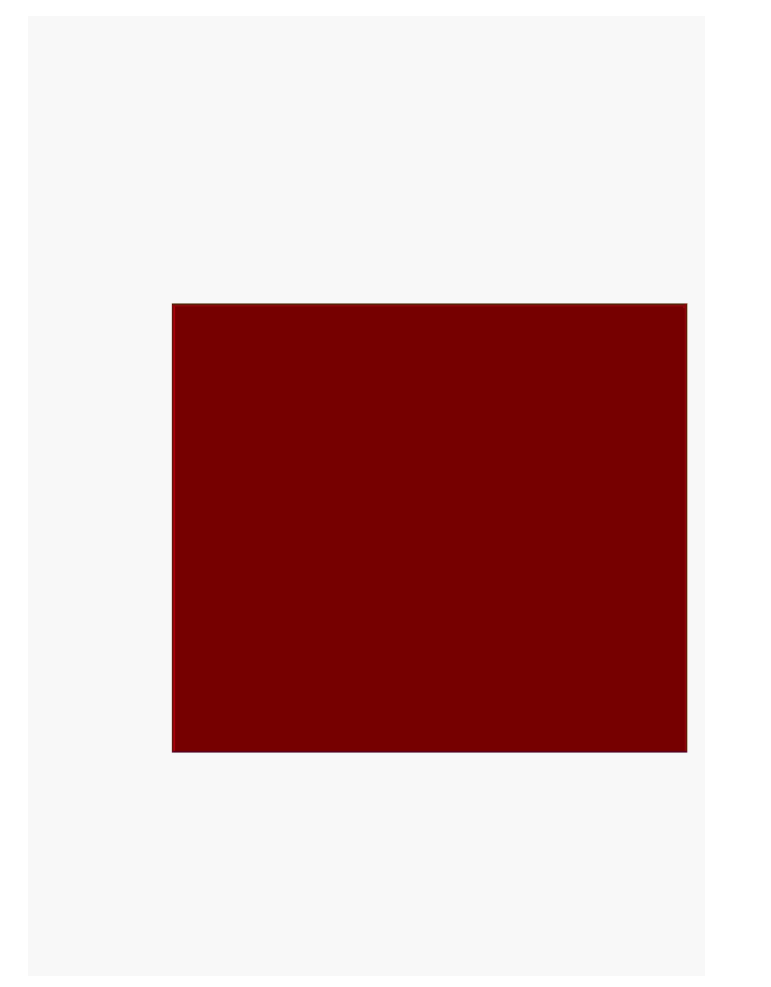
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COMMENT

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The charges against Israel cheapen the suffering of the black majority of South Africans under apartheid

IT IS UNFORTUNATE that respected academics seem to lose their critical faculties and intellectual rigour when they write about Israel. How else can one explain the poisonous mix of vitriol and ignorance that characterises Allan Boesak and Farid Esack's article "Pure and simple segregation (The Star, November 10)?"

The sacrificing of genuine and open-minded inquiry at the altar of cheap political grandstanding is regrettable, and sadly will do nothing to advance the cause of peace or justice in the Middle East – for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The distorted version of the "facts" presented in that article is so outlandish as to be unworthy of a response, yet we have decided to respond because the egregious claims therein form part of a conscious campaign to undermine ordinary people's understanding of the nature of our country, and their acceptance of the legitimacy of Israel's right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people. We cannot and will not let such an assault go unanswered.

By branding Israel as an apartheid state, the authors are joining in the delusory and ideologically driven attempt consciously to criminalise and demonise Israel, without any regard for either the historic facts of South African apartheid, or the current reality in the Middle East.

Quite aside from their substantive inaccuracy, such charges against Israel also cheapen the suffering of the black majority of South Africans under apartheid and the memory of their truly heroic struggle against that regime.

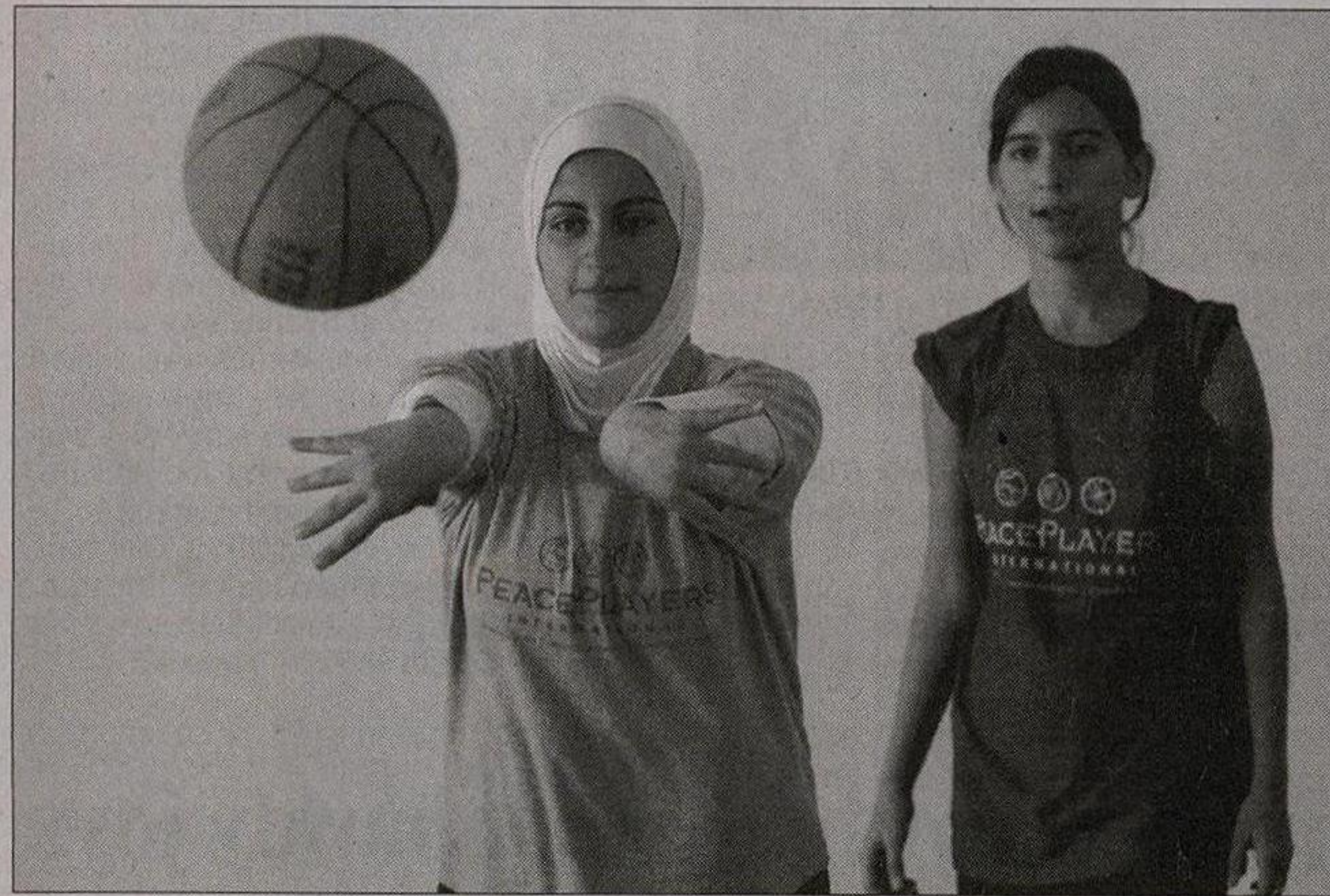
This is something ordinary South Africans no doubt find distasteful.

In Boesak and Esack's article, there is much confusion between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. Arab Israelis are people of Arabic ethnicity, who may also identify themselves as Palestinians, but who have chosen to live in Israel.

They are thus recognised Israeli citizens and as such equally enjoy all rights bestowed by the law.

Palestinians, on the other hand, are not Israeli citizens, nor do they wish to be, and they are aspiring to establish their own state. It is clear therefore why Palestinians in Israel can't vote, as is the law in any other country regarding non-citizens. Many Palestinians, though, are able to vote for their leaders and institutions in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority.

All Israeli citizens are equal before the law. The implementation of this fundamental principle can be seen in the basic rights of every non-Jewish citizen of Israel to vote and be elected, and in the various high positions held in Israel by non-Jews, from MPs to Supreme Court judges, deputy ministers, ambassadors, police officers, the Israel



RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES: Palestinian and Israeli girls play basketball in Jerusalem. Israel is one of the few countries in the Middle East where Arab women have the same status as men, says the writer. PICTURE: REUTERS

Defence Forces, and many professionals.

This is in accordance with the Israeli Declaration of Independence (14/5/48), which ensures "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or sex".

The human tapestry that is Israel is there for any visitor to see. One such visitor, Dr Tashbih Sayyed, a Shia Pakistani scholar, visited Israel expressly to "see if there was any truth in the media allegations that Israel was an apartheid state".

He concluded that Israeli Arabs are protected by Israel's democratic principles and that the Muslim Arab citizens of Israel are afforded all the rights and privileges of Israeli citizenship.

He noted that Israel is one of the few countries in the Middle East, in contrast to the non-Israeli Arab world, where Arab women enjoy the same status as men, and have the right to vote and to be elected into public office.

Muslim women, according to Sayyed – in his article *A Muslim in a Jewish Land* in *Muslim World Today* – are in fact more liberated in Israel than in any Muslim country, as Israeli law prohibits polygamy, child marriage and female sexual mutilation.

Boesak and Esack raise a litany of charges to support their slur of apartheid, charges which it is important to refute. First, there is no registration of ethnicity in Israeli identity cards. This provision was cancelled by law in 2003. Moreover, before that it had no application to the citizens' rights, which are secured by law, regardless

of ethnicity.

The claim that Israel enacts restricted living areas is also false. The cities of Jerusalem, Haifa, Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Acre, among others, are home to citizens of all religions and many ethnicities. The fact that smaller communities often choose to be homogeneous in their ethnic make-up has nothing to do with discrimination or any other inappropriate approach. Indeed, Israel takes pride in its advanced liberal and judicial system, as well as its world-respected Supreme Court rulings, which include a prohibition on the banning of people from living in a certain place on the grounds of their ethnicity and/or religion.

Interestingly, a recent (July 2010) poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research among Palestinians in East Jerusalem found them to be highly satisfied with service delivery by Israel in the fields of electricity, water, sewerage, telephone services, medical services and access to places of worship. These findings accord with similar polls since 1996 regarding Palestinian satisfaction from services supplied by Israel.

As for marriages, the authors neglected to mention that besides Jews, Christians and Muslims who marry within their faith in their relevant religious courts, many mixed-marriage couples (Jews and non-Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, and gay couples) also live in Israel and are recognised by the state.

The misrepresentations of Israel's detractors aside, yet another fact that

distinguishes Israel from the apartheid regime in South Africa is Israel's multi-party political system and its single parliamentary chamber:

Israeli Arabs both from sectoral Israeli Arab parties and as members of broader non-ethnic political parties, have been members of the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) since the first elections in 1949, and have been represented in the Knesset ever since. They serve on parliamentary committees and in all aspects of parliamentary work.

The Jewish claim to a state in the land of Israel is based not solely on its historical and religious right, but also on the rights granted by the League of Nations in 1922 and the UN in November 1947.

Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza in 2005, with the only Israeli in the area now being Gilad Shalit, the young soldier who was abducted by Hamas and who is being held and has been denied any humanitarian aid for more than four years, in contradiction to the Geneva Convention and international law.

Israel has frequently declared that it is willing to withdraw and make concessions in the West Bank, in return for peace and security.

A one-state solution is as illogical, inconsistent and impractical as is the one-state philosophy. Separation is the only logical solution to managing the tension from ethnic, and especially religious, differences within the area; the former Yugoslavia has broken up into six different sovereign entities, a process accompanied by considerable bloodshed and disruption that is still ongoing, yet no one is advocating a solution putting Yugoslavia together again. Let us take another well-known conflict: the Indian-Pakistan conflict. Will anyone suggest to amalgamate the two countries into a single India once more?

To represent the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a modern example of apartheid, for which the remedy is of course well known, is to abuse emotive terminology to "win" the battle through propaganda, rather than relying on negotiations and dialogue to end it. Under circumstances where two peoples both seek national expression in their own states, how is the notion of "one state" to be understood except as an attempt to deny those peoples' own self-determination?

Finally, one more way in which the South African story differs from the Israeli-Palestinian one: in South Africa, the challenge was how to allow one people to live together, whereas in Israel/Palestine we have two nations who both seek and need to find a way to live apart, in mutual respect, security and peace.

● *Dov Segev Steinberg is the Israeli ambassador to South Africa.*