

Palestine Unbound

Published each issue and updated regularly on *Palestine Square* (palestinesquare.com), this section strives to capture the tenor and content of popular conversations related to the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Increasingly, these conversations are held on new and dynamic platforms unbound by traditional media. Therefore, items presented in this section are from a variety of sources and have been selected because they either have gone viral or represent a significant cultural moment or trend.

This Quarter's Topics

#Balfour100	98
#StandwithIssa.	100
Tweet a Breakthrough (#GharadBi-Infiraja).	102
Update: Rasmea Odeh Leaves the United States.	102



The #Balfour100 social media campaign was a part of "Balfour: A Colonial Project," an initiative of the newly formed Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad. (30 October, Middle East Monitor)

#Balfour100

The newly formed Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad and other Palestinian groups launched a social media campaign using the hashtag #Balfour100 to mark a century since the issuance of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 1917. The campaign marked the day

Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 2 (Winter 2018), p. 98, ISSN: 0377-919X; electronic ISSN: 1533-8614. © 2018 by the Institute for Palestine Studies. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2018.47.2.98>.

when then British foreign secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour addressed a sixty-seven-word letter to Lord Walter Rothschild, liaison to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, stating that the British government supported the creation of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. The purpose of the #Balfour100 campaign was to remind the public that the declaration made possible

the 1947 United Nations partition of Palestine, the Nakba, the creation of the State of Israel, and decades of military occupation and apartheid.

#Balfour100 permeated social media on 2 November, with several events held worldwide from the United States and Europe to the West Bank and South Africa.

The effort was part of a larger campaign that the groups launched in September called “Balfour: A Colonial Project,” whose purpose was to highlight the impact of Balfour on Palestinians and to review Britain’s responsibility for “the declaration and its repercussions on Palestine.” The Palestinian activists’ website can be found at www.balfour100colonial.com.

#Balfour100 also turned out to be a popular hashtag among Zionists and those celebrating the one-hundred-year-old document, such as Israel’s ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mark Regev. In fact, a website with the address www.balfour100.org was registered in 2015 to an undisclosed entity in Great Britain, according to the domain registration provider WhoIs.com. The Balfour 100 website’s main page shows a picture from a crowded assembly hall with the words, “3,000 from the Christian and Jewish Communities Celebrate the Balfour Centenary Together.”



Using the hashtag #Balfour100, Palestinians in Ramallah protest the one hundredth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. (2 November, Abbas Momani/AFP/Getty Images)



Israeli ambassador to the United Kingdom Mark Regev’s tweet with the #Balfour100 hashtag. (6 November, Twitter)

At the same time, the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), together with the Journal of Palestine Studies (JPS), launched Photo of the Week, a new social media feature. Each week, the IPS online content editor releases a photograph with a summary and links to academically researched articles,

facilitating access to IPS knowledge products by a wider audience. In November, the weekly photographs pertained to the Balfour Declaration and they included an image of the declaration itself, one of Balfour addressing an audience during the opening of Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem in 1925, one of the UN General Assembly during the vote to partition Palestine in 1947, and a collage of four images depicting Palestinians in a variety of settings. The pictures directed followers to an essay titled, “The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine,” by Journal editor Rashid Khalidi (JPS 47 [1]).

#StandwithIssa

Palestinian human rights defender Issa Amro of Hebron is not only fighting off trumped-up charges in an Israeli military trial, but also facing charges brought by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in September because of comments he made about free speech on social media. The PA alleges Amro violated its new electronic crimes law by criticizing the authority’s arrest of Palestinian journalist Ayman Qawasmeh. After the PA arrested Amro on 4 September 2017, the activist began a hunger strike the following day. Amro stayed in jail until 10 September, when he was released after nine members of the U.S. Congress wrote a letter to PA president Mahmoud Abbas, urging him to free Amro.

Amnesty International released a statement calling for his release on the day as he was arrested. The human rights organization relaunched the #StandwithIssa social media campaign, which was picked up by activist groups and other nongovernmental organizations, such as Hebron-based Youth against Settlements, cofounded by Amro.

The hashtag was ubiquitous on Twitter as well as Facebook and displayed by a diverse array of organizations including Amnesty International, Code Pink, IfNotNow, and Sabeel. According to a post on Palestine Square, the IPS blog, Amro was “charged by the PA under Article 20 of the law, which stipulates ‘anyone



The Institute for Palestine Studies and the *Journal of Palestine Studies*’ “Photo of the Week.” (7 November, Instagram)



Youth Against Settlements, an NGO Issa Amro cofounded, launched a global Twitter campaign on 9 September 2017. (Twitter)

who creates or manages a website or an information technology platform that aims to publish news that would endanger the integrity of the Palestinian state, the public order or the internal or external security of the State shall be punished' with a fine [of] between one thousand . . . and five thousand dinars [\$1,400–7,100], at least a year of jail time, or both.” The author of the article, IPS online content editor Dorgham Abusalim, used information provided by prisoner rights group Addameer.

The hashtag did not always refer to Amro, however. A search on Twitter reveals that #StandwithIssa was first used in May 2013 in conjunction with a campaign of support for Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), after his controversial response to the 2012 attack on U.S. embassy personnel in Benghazi, Libya, in which U.S. ambassador Christopher Stevens was killed.

The first major campaign supporting Amro appears to have been created by Amnesty International in November 2016, in response to his Israeli military trial, under the hashtag #StandwithIssaAmro

most likely because the Darrell Issa story was still populating Twitter feeds. By the spring of 2017, #StandwithIssa began applying exclusively to Issa Amro. The first usage of #StandwithIssa for the human rights activist came on 30 May, when Joe Claxton posted a link to a story by Peter Beinart in the Forward, titled, “Why Israel Should Embrace This ‘Palestinian Gandhi’—Not Jail Him.” After his release, Amro made one of his many visits to the United States, speaking publicly about his ordeal

with both the Israeli and Palestinian court systems and meeting with U.S. congressional representatives, including former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders.



Amnesty International's tweet about Issa Amro's arrest. (4 September, Amnesty International, Twitter)



#StandWithIssa hashtag, from an earlier campaign. (30 May, Twitter)



Issa Amro with U.S. senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT). (28 October, Twitter)

Tweet a Breakthrough* (#GharadBi-Infiraja)

Palestinian youth in Gaza took to social media over the weekend of 19–20 August 2017 to announce major breakthroughs using the hashtag #GharadBi-Infiraja, Arabic for “tweet a breakthrough,” first posted by Ali Bkheet, the head of Social Media Club–Palestine, a local organization that offers Palestinians training in social media reporting and campaigns.

The hashtag quickly went viral as Gazans sarcastically shared farfetched achievements that touched on the besieged region’s myriad problems: a severe energy shortage, the political standstill and rift between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, a staggeringly high unemployment rate, the lack of freedom of movement, and the stalling reconstruction effort since Israel’s last offensive in 2014.

Other tweets highlighted the absence of international attention. They pointed to the world community’s lack of interest in international competitions such as Formula One races that would soon be taking place in the city. “We are tired of hearing promises to solve Gaza’s problems, that’s what the hashtag captured,” Bkheet told Facebook followers.

Reactions to the #GharadBi-Infiraja hashtag reveal that Gaza’s youth are primarily concerned with the immediate issues they face, especially their inability to travel freely to pursue education and career opportunities. But, perhaps most tellingly, those farfetched breakthroughs are taken for granted elsewhere around the world. To say that having a dignified and decent living standard is a breakthrough for Gaza is yet another testament to the catastrophic conditions inflicted upon the region’s two million inhabitants.



Palestinians in Gaza use sarcasm to tweet about their living conditions. (21 August, Twitter)

Update: Rasmea Odeh Leaves the United States

“One [U.S.] marshal stayed close. He would be accompanying her on the flight, ensuring she reached Jordan. And when all was said and done, Odeh took one last look at the U.S., held her head up high, and walked through security.”

* This story was written by IPS online content editor Dorgham Abusalim and first appeared on *Palestine Square*. JPS reproduces it here with minor edits. —Ed.

That's how Chicago Sun-Times reporter Maudlyne Ihejirika described the last moments in the United States of beloved community organizer Rasmae Odeh, who relinquished her American citizenship and was deported on 19 September 2017 from the country she had called home for more than twenty years.

Odeh's four-year ordeal garnered international headlines and made her an icon in the Palestine solidarity community. While hundreds gathered for a farewell event featuring Angela Davis (Palestine Unbound, JPS 47 [1]), a smaller group of about one hundred friends, colleagues, and supporters gathered outside O'Hare International Airport to say goodbye. When Odeh was first arrested in 2013, supporters formed a defense committee, using the hashtag #Justice4Rasmae to raise awareness of her plight. That changed to #HonorRasmae once it became apparent that Odeh had run out of legal options and had no choice but to leave the country. Still using the hashtag, reports came out of Jordan indicating the seventy-year-old was adjusting to her new life.



Beloved community organizer Rasmae Odeh left the United States on 19 September 2017 for Jordan, where supporters report she is doing well. (3 October, Twitter)