

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

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#FreeAhed

Israeli soldiers entered the courtyard outside sixteen-year-old Ahed Tamimi's family home in Nabi Salih on 18 December 2017. Among them was one who had shot her cousin in the head just an hour before, the teenager said. Angry, Ahed confronted the soldiers and demanded they leave. After one of the men swatted at her, Ahed began punching and kicking while another cousin, Nur Tamimi, recorded the altercation as it unfolded. Within hours, the video went viral and, to the world, Ahed became the face of Palestinian resistance.

The #FreeAhed hashtag went viral on Twitter and Instagram and nearly six hundred people supported a campaign on Thunderclap, a social platform that allows users to amplify a campaign on Twitter or Facebook by lending their followers to the initiative. The #FreeAhed Thunderclap, which ended on 15 January 2018, reached more than 750,000 Twitter accounts in a few days. A petition calling for the young woman's release reportedly garnered over two million signatures.

Irish artist Jim FitzPatrick, the creator of the iconic 1967 image of Che Guevara, took the plaudits one step further by creating an image in which Ahed is transformed into the "real Wonder Woman." Observers noted that the portrayal was likely a swipe at Israeli actress Gal Gadot, who was cast as the comic book character in a feature film in 2017, a decision widely criticized because of Gadot's support for Israel's military and its occupation of the Palestinian territories.

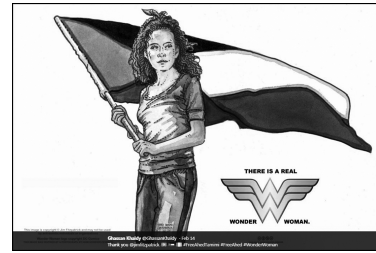


A petition purportedly garnering nearly two million signers made its round on social media. (February 2018, Twitter)

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There has been much speculation about why Ahd's plight attracted worldwide sympathy when the fate of the other three hundred Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons is met mostly with silence. Her father Bassem Tamimi told Haaretz that he believes Ahd represents the new generation of Palestinians resisting the occupation who are media- and tech-savvy and are able to push their narratives to a larger audience online.

Others point to the fact that Ahd comes from a family that has been active in nonviolent resistance to Israeli settler land expropriation in Nabi Salih for years; in fact, she has been well-known since she was first recorded shaking her fist at Israeli soldiers when she was eleven. Others, including journalist Serhan and the author Ben Ehrenreich, whom Serhan quotes in a 5 January 2018 article in The Atlantic, point to the teen's whiteness: "But in addition to Ahd's origins, what makes her particularly distinctive to Israelis and international audiences also has to do with how she looks. 'Unavoidably, she is blonde and light-skinned and light-eyed,' Ehrenreich, who profiled the Tamimi family in 2012, said. 'A great deal of work goes into "othering" Palestinians, to casting them as some really recognizable other . . . but when suddenly the kid doesn't fit into those stereotypes—when she actually looks like a European kid or an American kid—then suddenly all that work of dehumanization can't function, and she can't be "othered" in the same way. And then people freak out.'"



Ahd Tamimi depicted as the "real" Wonder Woman. (14 February, Twitter)



Activists gather in a hallway at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park hotel for a guerrilla session on Palestine. (29 January, Mondoweiss)

Guerrilla Sessions at Creating Change Conference

LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) activists used social media platforms to organize guerrilla sessions at the National LGBTQ Task Force's Creating Change Conference in Washington on 26–27 January 2018. The activists were protesting the conveners' refusal to add Israeli pinkwashing and Palestinian human rights to the program agenda, despite a promise to do so after a similar protest at the 2016 conference in Chicago. Although the protestors' efforts did not go viral, they are worth noting because of the critical role of social media in helping them organize the unofficial session in a

hallway of the Washington Marriott Wardman Park hotel. Queer anti-apartheid activists used Facebook, Twitter, and a website they created, www.cancelpinkwashing.com, to disseminate information about the protest workshops as well as a petition demanding that the national task force sever its long-term ties with Forever Tel Aviv, which hosts gay pride events in Israel as part of Israel's pinkwashing efforts to mask its continued violations of international law and human rights.



Messages like this one were posted on Twitter and Facebook, announcing unofficial sessions at the Creating Change Conference. (26 January, Twitter)

In 2016, activists disrupted the Creating Change Conference in Chicago because of the inclusion of the pro-Israel LGBTQ organization, A Wider Bridge. In response, the task force had agreed to include sessions on Palestinian rights and Israeli pinkwashing at its 2018 conference. Instead, all program proposals on that topic, including one titled “Zionism-Free Queer MENA Caucus,” and another titled “Orientalism,” were rejected.

#JerusalemIsTheCapitalofPalestine*

U.S. president Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel on 6 December 2017, and his directive to relocate the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv, caused a firestorm online. Social media users from around the world resoundingly rejected Trump's decision and instead voiced support for Palestinians using the hashtag #JerusalemIsTheCapitalofPalestine.



Social media users turn anger over Trump's plans into jokes. (Twitter)

* An earlier version of this story, written by Khelil Bouarrouj, appeared on *Palestine Square*, the blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies, on 8 December 2017. —Ed.



A humorous social media post about Trump's Jerusalem declaration. (Twitter)



A man names his triplets after Jerusalem in protest of Trump's declaration. (Twitter)

Many ridiculed the U.S. decision, pointing out the flawed logic of Trump's reasoning, which they traced back to nearly a century of U.S. support for the Zionist settler-colonial project. Many social media users sought to make that history clear to readers around the world, and took aim at the racist undercurrents inherent to Zionism. Others chose to highlight the centuries-long harmonious history of Jerusalem, which has been eviscerated by Israeli policies.

As the quarter continued, Trump's declaration had far-reaching implications, especially at the United Nations where a vast majority of member states passed a resolution upholding Jerusalem's special status. Ignoring the Trump administration's threats to cut funding to those critical of the U.S. position, 128 countries voted in an emergency session of the General Assembly for draft resolution ES-10/L.22 expressing "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem," and declaring "null and void" any actions that altered the character, status, or demographic makeup of the city. Nine countries—including the United States—voted against the resolution.

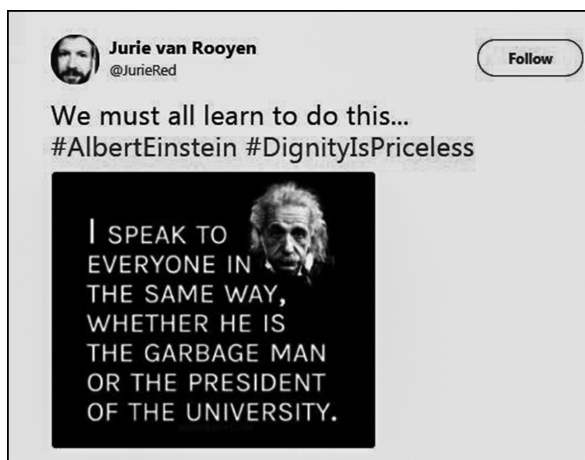
Within weeks, the Trump administration announced it would be slashing aid to UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) by more than half (see below), two weeks after the president tweeted that the Palestinians "don't even want to negotiate" even though the United States pays them "HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year." As Harvard University senior research scholar Sara Roy wrote on Palestine Square on 25 January 2018: "The PA's refusal to engage in negotiations stems entirely from Trump's own actions—specifically, his formal recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital; this move not only dismissed Palestinian claims to the city but effectively predetermined the outcome of future negotiations."

#DignityIsPriceless

As global protests and social media campaigns condemning U.S. president Trump's proclamation of Jerusalem as Israel's capital entered their second week, the U.S. State Department announced a massive decrease in funding to UNWRA, ramping up online reactions to the new U.S. position on Jerusalem, which were already quite heated. With two statements issued on 16 January and 19 January 2018, the State Department announced \$110 million in cuts to education and food aid benefiting Palestinian refugees served by the UN agency. According to UNWRA spokesman Chris Gunness, "This dramatically reduced contribution results in the most severe funding crisis in the history of the agency." The United States is the largest contributor to UNWRA, providing about 25 percent of UNWRA's budget. In 2015, the U.S. contribution totaled about \$360 million.

In response to the news, UNWRA launched an emergency appeal for \$500 million and began a social media campaign with the hashtag #DignityIsPriceless across several platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Worldwide response was swift: using the hashtag in coordination with the Hoping Foundation, twenty-five celebrities and public figures, including Hugh Grant, Tilda Swinton, and Olivia Wilde, signed a statement in support of the Palestinian people: "So the real target of this lethal attack is the Palestinian people themselves. It has been launched with the clear aim of dismantling their rights, by dismantling the institution that is charged with protecting them. . . . It is repellent to us that such tactics are being used in the twenty-first century, in direct contradiction of international law, and to human decency. Demanding the surrender of basic human rights, and from a people without a country to protect them, is truly shocking to witness."

Others, including the Norwegian Refugee Council, offered swift condemnation: "Cutting aid to innocent refugee children due to political disagreements among well-fed grown men and women is a really bad politicization of humanitarian aid," the council's secretary general, Jan Egeland, told Al Jazeera. Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, said on Twitter that the funding decrease amounted to holding Palestinian children hostage for political reasons, while the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs pledged to increase its donation to UNWRA while also suggesting Trump's decision could impact regional stability. The Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) posted a statement on Facebook condemning the change in U.S. policy on Jerusalem.



The UNWRA fundraising campaign was promoted on social media with the hashtag #DignityIsPriceless. (15 February, Twitter)