

FROM KONYA TO PALESTINE: SOLIDARITY MUST EVOLVE INTO JUSTICE AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Ambassador (R)
Founder & CEO
MENA CENTRA

From Konya to Palestine: Solidarity Must Evolve into Justice and Regional Leadership

During a recent visit to Konya, I stood among a diverse crowd outside the tomb of Mevlana Rumi. Young and old, locals and visitors had gathered, not merely in protest, but in an emotionally charged demonstration of connection, rooted in centuries of shared history, faith, and ethical responsibility.

That same spirit echoed weeks later in Egypt, when Turkish kickboxer Necmettin Erbakan Akyüz was questioned for raising the Palestinian flag in solidarity. In response, he threw his medal into the Nile, rejecting a global system that punishes empathy while ignoring atrocity. His act distilled a frustration felt across the region: where justice seems elusive and moral clarity is penalized rather than protected.

From Konya to Cairo, these stories highlight a crucial reality: solidarity alone is insufficient. Palestine needs a coordinated strategy, encompassing political, legal, and regional aspects, beyond mere sympathy and moral outrage.

Gaza Deserves Justice Beyond the Genocide Frame

Since October 7, 2023, Gaza has suffered one of the most devastating military campaigns in modern history. Over 55,000 Palestinians have been killed, most of them women and children. Neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble. Hospitals, schools, and cultural landmarks were systematically destroyed. More than 1.7 million people have been displaced, many for the second or third time in their lives.

In response, South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accuses Israel of genocide. While the charge resonates emotionally and morally, genocide is a legally narrow and complex term. Under the 1948 Genocide Convention, it requires proof of specific intent to destroy a group, a burden notoriously difficult to establish. Even in Rwanda and Bosnia, genocide rulings emerged only after exhaustive investigations spanning years.

This presents a dangerous risk: if genocide is not legally proven, political actors may misrepresent it as exoneration. That would be not only a legal failure but a moral catastrophe.

Crimes Already in Plain Sight

Beyond genocide, there exists a vast, well-documented array of war crimes and crimes against humanity prosecutable now:

- Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians, violating the Geneva Conventions.
- Starvation as a method of warfare, via deliberate blockades of food, water, and fuel.
- Collective punishment, prohibited under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- Targeted strikes on medical facilities, journalists, and aid workers, all protected under international law.
- Forced displacement, persecution, and extermination, which may qualify as crimes against humanity.

These violations do not require the evidentiary burden of genocide. They are clear, urgent, and prosecutable, yet remain neglected due to geopolitical obstruction and fragmented advocacy.

Justice Requires Strategy, Not Just Law

International law does not operate in isolation; it requires political coordination. The ICJ and ICC depend on state cooperation, and enforcement is never automatic. The United States and key European powers have shielded Israel diplomatically and militarily, weakening legal processes through selective engagement. The UK, for instance, has both criticized Israeli actions and pursued arms deals, revealing the contradictions defining Western policy on Palestine.

Legal victories will not come solely through the courts, but through sustained regional pressure, diplomatic alignment, and strategic coordination. This is where Türkiye and the Arab world must move beyond rhetoric and assume a leadership role.

From Symbolism to Strategy: Five Coordinated Regional Actions

The emotional solidarity seen in places like Konya and in individuals like Akyüz must evolve into coherent regional action:

1. Unified Political Messaging

Arab and Turkish capitals must synchronize diplomatic efforts for Palestine, coordinating votes, red lines, and joint initiatives across the UN, Arab League, and OIC to push for ceasefires, accountability, and Palestinian statehood recognition.

2. Legal Mobilization

Türkiye should spearhead a regional legal task force to collect evidence, support Palestinian victims, and activate universal jurisdiction cases in Spain, Belgium, and South Africa with regional backing.

3. Aid Harmonization and UNRWA Strengthening

Rather than fragmented aid, a Gaza Relief Coordination Platform should align Türkiye and Arab states under a unified structure. Establishing an UNRWA office in Türkiye would reinforce humanitarian coordination under regional oversight.

4. Humanitarian Pathways for Palestinians

A regional humanitarian visa/residency track should enable Gaza's displaced individuals to access medical treatment, education, and temporary shelter, with support from Türkiye, Jordan, Egypt, and Gulf states in collaboration with UNHCR and IOM.

5. Future Governance and Reconstruction Dialogue

With discussions emerging about a post-war Gaza, regional actors must engage, not impose. Hosting a Palestine Reconstruction and Sovereignty Forum would bring together diaspora voices, political factions, and civil society for Palestinian-led solutions.

As if the stakes weren't high enough, opportunistic actors like Iranian proxies and DAESH stand ready to exploit any chaos that may arise. Iranian-backed militias, skilled at filling power vacuums, could deepen their foothold in Syria if Türkiye and Israel were to clash. Meanwhile, DAESH, though weakened, remains a lurking threat, capable of resurging amidst turmoil. For Syrians, these forces represent yet another layer of suffering, a grim reminder that friction between nations often opens doors for the worst aspects of humanity to thrive.

History's Verdict: The Cost of Inaction

History will not only record Gaza's suffering but will ask:

- Did those closest to Palestine rise to the moment?
- Did we allow international law to be neutralized by politics?
- Did we wait on a single legal term, "genocide," before acting? Or did we pursue justice with clarity, urgency, and regional leadership?

From the streets of Konya to the waters of the Nile, the message is clear: people are ready to act. Now, governments, institutions, and regional actors must catch up, transforming moral momentum into political leverage, legal clarity, and humanitarian resolve.

Palestine does not need charity.

It requires justice, partnership, and sovereignty.

And that does not begin in The Hague.

It begins within our region, with leaders bold enough to see solidarity not as performance, but as responsibility.