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Palestine Liberation Week Makes Debut at Seattle University

Isabella Purnadi, Staff Reporter

Many Palestinians continue to advocate for full enfranchisement under the law as legal confrontations over the evictions of Palestinian families and violence continue. Due to the 2014 clash between the Israeli military and Hamas in Gaza, the conflict is still a major source of disagreement around the world. Local protests and continuous headlines of the conflict encouraged Seattle University's Student for Justice in Palestine Club (SJP) to spread awareness of the struggle from a Palestinian perspective.

SJP organized Palestine Liberation Week (PLW), a one-week educational and cultural event dedicated to the struggle for Palestinian liberation. The event took place from May 2 to May 6 at Seattle U and May 7 at the University of Washington.



Jake Nelson

Just days after the event, Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed by an Israeli sniper during a military raid in the West Bank, showing the continued relevance of Palestinian human rights advocacy, and the deadly nature of covering abuses in the region.

Some of the PLW activities included an event entitled "Proletarian Feminist Resistance from Palestine to the Philippines," a film screening of "1948: Creation & Catastrophe," a silent vigil and the Palestinian Cultural Resistance Festival with Seattle U SJP and Students United for Palestinian Equal Rights (SUPER UW).

Philip Barclift, an associate professor for the Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies department at Seattle U, provided some background on the history of the Palestinian struggle for liberation. He emphasized that Israeli aggression incited the conflict, and continues to pattern the struggle today.

"It began during the rise of terrorism in Palestine in the 1940s when the Jewish Federation launched preemptive attacks on Palestinian territories for a future Jewish state when the British mandate ended in May 1948," Barclift said in a lecture he shared with The Spectator.

The lifting of the mandate sparked violence between the two parties. The liberation movement continued when Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, announced his new policy that Arabs, including the Palestinian Arabs, had to go in order to make room for Jewish populations in Eretz, Israel.

After the speech, the Irgun and Stern Gang joined forces, killing almost everyone around the perimeter of Jerusalem and depopulating the rest.

"The idea is to attack them where they are weakest. It does two things: firstly, it enables you to cut off their supply lines; second, it scares the snot out of them and makes them want to go," Barclift said.

Aisha Mansour, a grassroots organizer for Falastiniyat and a panelist for the Proletarian Feminist Resistance event, argued that militant resistance is a necessity.

“When you look at the difference between Gaza and the West Bank, you can clearly see why militant resistance is important—why that is the only way that we will ever be able to liberate ourselves,” Mansour said.

SJP’s programming sought to highlight lost Palestinian lives over the course of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Club members organized a “Silent Vigil for Palestinian Martyrs” in which students and community members gathered at the Chapel of St. Ignatius Reflection Pool.

Abigail Dean, a third-year international studies major and SJP member, explained that the vigil was an opportunity to honor the Palestinians who would otherwise be easily overlooked or forgotten in the West. She argued that the families of those lost due to political violence merit recognition and support.

“At SJP, we believe that existence is resistance, and the martyrs who lost their lives in the conflict are examples of the people who remain on their traditional land and who embody the spirit of the right of return. It’s a small way that we can spiritually connect to them and take on some of the responsibility to continue advocating for them,” Dean said.

To spread awareness on Palestinian culture and history, SJP club members partnered with SUPER UW to organize “Culture Fest,” where students could learn more about Palestinian history and culture as well as enjoy traditional foods.

Dean explained the importance of informing students and community members about what is going on in Palestine.

“I am still clinging to the anger and energy that was built up a year ago after the illegal forced evictions from Sheikh Jarrah last May and the ongoing attacks on Palestinians since then. But honestly, it’s always a good time to advocate for human rights and fight against apartheid and settler colonialism,” Dean wrote to *The Spectator*.

Several guests who were new to Palestinian culture as well as the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region were grateful for the opportunity to learn more.

Eyas Rashid, a family member of a UW student, expressed that he learned a lot about his Palestinian Heritage.

“Being a first-generation Palestinian American, the lecture on the Palestinian textile history helped me learn more about the traditional clothing that they wear,” Rashid said.

Having a space showcasing the artwork made by Palestinian was another method SJP employed to create engagement between community members and Palestinian culture.

Mubina Sabir, a second-year student at the University of Washington, explained that she was surprised to know that there was a museum of Palestinian arts.

“I was really intrigued when one of the guest speakers, Wafa Ghnaim, who is a Palestinian researcher and educator, showed four different photos of the history of Palestinian embroidery from different time periods and how it evolved over time,” Sabir said.

For those who could not make it to the culture fest event, a livestream on the SUPER UW Instagram page was available for people to watch.

Abem Fekade-Tessema, a fourth-year business economics major, explained that he wished he could have accommodated the events into his schedule, but was grateful for the way the programming brought a human element to the controversy, which is often drawn along purely political lines.

“The vast majority of us get our news through social media, and as human beings, that’s just not the most efficient way for us to connect with different issues and topics. The SJP was able to humanize a lot of the things we see online and it was moving to see people that I know work so hard for something this important and present it to us in such a meaningful way,” Fekade-Tessema said.

Besides organizing PLW, SJP also proposed a resolution to the Student Government of Seattle University (SGSU) to encourage Seattle U to divest from what advocates describe as illegal occupation and apartheid.

Fekade-Tessema, who is also the senior class representative at SGSU, elaborated that the resolution is still in the works, but it will ask the university to utilize its purchasing power to take a financial stance, which he argues is in line with the university's social justice mission.

"While it's easy to express sympathy for people who are being oppressed and to support them with our thoughts, wishes and prayers, we need to accompany and reaffirm those sentiments with action, which SJP understands," Fekade-Tessema said.

Dean hopes that more Seattle U students, faculty and staff as well as the broader community become aware of the state of conflict that has rocked the Israeli-Palestinian region for decades.

"I am hoping that this will encourage people to get more involved in other anti-apartheid and anti-imperial campaigns, whether it is for Palestine, the Philippines or any other nation facing unlawful and immoral oppression," Dean said.

Dean also wishes to continue her advocacy efforts through more events like PLW and the Cultural Resistance Festival to spread the word about anti-imperialism movements, but she would also like to expand her role in organizing and political outreach for eventual institutional change.

"For example, the U.S. is the largest contributor of Israeli military aid, and if we can limit that contribution even slightly through protests, lobbying and voting out supporters of Zionism, we can use our advocacy in the U.S. to alleviate some of the conditions faced by Palestinians," Dean said.

Barclift advocated for students to engage in direct action and dialogue.

"The primary function of advocacy is recruitment to build that legion so we can create enough pressure on our adversaries that they seek negotiated pathways to resolve the problem together with us. Used effectively, our advocacy can help us build such a wall of support that we create a swell of momentum for our cause," Barclift said.

With most students receiving their news through the media, it is sometimes hard to connect on a human level with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially due to the drawn-out nature of the engagement. The SJP was able to present those issues, spread awareness and foster deeper dialogue from an advocacy perspective.

As the conflict continues, SJP hopes that their advocacy will represent the Palestinian community faithfully and effectively.

A previous version of this article contained a misquotation from an event that was changed on 5/20/22.