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Far too long a wait for Palestine

YASSER Arafat has probably done everything that Washington and Tel Aviv had wanted him to, and more, in the name of securing a lasting solution to the 50-year Israel-Palestine conflict. He has attended many Camp David peace talks with various American and Israeli leaders who have come and gone in the last three decades. He was signatory to the Israeli-Palestine Peace Accord of November 1993 at the White House, a globally celebrated event because the world was made to believe that it was seeing the end of the conflict. But the freedom and independence promised to the Palestinians have evaded them still.

The Palestine President's visit to Malaysia yesterday was one of many he has made since he became chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1969. Like previous visits, he was here as part of a world tour to amass global support for the Palestinian people and state. The world, on its part, will give Arafat and his people its blessings and backing. But the truth is that after half a century Palestine's real story is on the verge of being lost forever. The United Nations, which approved the partition of Palestine in 1947, and the Western powers, which supported the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, have been determined to defend Tel Aviv, even if it means displacing Palestinians. If it was not for the intifada (uprising) against Israeli rule in Gaza and the West Bank, the peace accord of 1993 would probably never have been signed. But as Arafat has discovered, there has been very little else in terms of progress after that.

One might be tempted to speculate that the PLO, formed in 1964 as a guerilla group to fight Israel and free Palestine, would have found greater success if it had remained a guerilla group. The Al-Fatah, which dominated the PLO since 1967, inflicted great damage with its raids on Tel Aviv. Having taken the right decision to turn away from so-called terrorism, Arafat must be very disappointed with the results of the many Camp David peace talks since. It was the same with the latest round. Arafat was told to postpone plans to declare independence for Palestine.

As with his previous visits to Malaysia, Arafat must have left quite amazed at the support of the leaders and the people of this country towards Palestine. Without reservation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad declared yesterday that Malaysia will recognise Palestine as a sovereign state and send an envoy there once it declares its independence. Dr Mahathir believes that most countries will recognise Palestine as an independent state when Arafat makes the declaration on September 13.

But will the countries responsible for the suffering of the Palestinians today recognise an independent Palestine? Unlikely. Arafat will be blamed for any escalation of violence. They will put their arms around the Palestine President and walk him to several more Camp David peace talks. The Islamic countries around Palestine will busy themselves with their own conflicts and the Organisation of Islamic Conference will continue to urge for a solution. The UN has proved ineffectual where the issue of Palestine is concerned. Malaysia's support will not be enough to carry Arafat and his declaration of independence through; if he makes the declaration, that is.

The world should demand that justice is done and seen to be done for Palestine. The governments that stood up for East Timor and what they

perceived as injustice in other countries should now stand up for the Palestinians. Britain, which captured and administered Palestine and then encouraged the Zionists to form Israel through the Balfour Declaration (named after British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour who promised the World Zionist Organisation in 1917 that Britain would back the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine after World War I), must make amends. The role of the US and its Camp David should be reviewed. It's been too long a wait for an independent Palestine.

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