Having had the opportunity to participate in the early Oslo talks of late 1992 and 1993, and, eight years later, observing the stream of comments and analyses declaring the "death of the Oslo process", I find it necessary to propose a concise interpretation of the experience of the past and an appraisal of the present state of affairs.

I continue to believe that the principal premises of the Oslo accords remain to be correct. The over-riding concept of the Declaration of Principles (D.O.P.) was to work towards achieving political separation while developing institutional economic and social cooperation; the interim period was aimed at providing both societies and both peoples with the necessary transitional mechanisms which cumulative effects over the years of the interim period would enable them to mature towards facing the issues of the permanent status.

The Oslo process has been going through a long and tormenting death since the very beginning of the process. Once the jubilation and festivities had come to an end in 1994, the (Israeli) security establishments took over the interpretation and implementation of the accords, turning the direction from institutionalizing economic and social cooperation into the direction of full separation. The three most significant "peace dividends" for the Palestinians in the Oslo accords, the three redeployment phases, the return of the 1967 displaced persons through the quadruple committee and the two safe passages connecting Gaza Strip and the West Bank, were implemented were only implemented in a manner of 'too little too late' for the redeployments and the safe passages, and 'not at all' for the 1967 displaced persons. Most of the joint (Israeli/Palestinian) committees in the appendices of the DOP have never been set up. The main concept of the Economic (Paris Protocol), i.e., free movement of goods and people, was never fully implemented; etc. Palestinian failures at institution building and establishing a democratic and civic society contributed to worsening the situation.

The assassination of the late Prime Minister Rabin marked the beginning of the end for both societies. For the Palestinians, what was supposed to be a peace process that would have created real interests in a peaceful settlement turned into a nightmare of closures, security checks every 5 kilometers, restrictions on movement, more
settlements, an inefficient government apparatus, and, according to the IMF and WB, a decrease of more than 20% in real per capita GNP over the years of 1994 - 1999. The seven years of the peace process have worsened the socio-economic situation instead of creating political and material interests in the process.

For the Israeli society, the assassination of the late Israeli Prime Minister Rabin invoked the polarization that had divided the Israeli society since 1977 (the election of the first Likud Government): i.e., the division between the 50% or so of Israeli society that believed in the retaining of the unity of Eretz Israel at the expense of a large non-Jewish minority to be 'transferred' at a later stage on the one hand, and the other 50% or so that believe in the foremost importance of preserving the Jewish character of the State at the expense of 'sacrificing' Arab densely populated territories captured in 1967 on the other hand. This schizophrenia in Israeli society sent no clear message of peace to the Arab world as it reflected an unexpected fact: that there existed no clear and determining majority in Israeli society for a 'land for peace' and 'implementation of 242' peacefully negotiated settlement. Disillusionment in the Palestinian society accumulated frustration, resentment and antagonism - the contrary process in both societies to the one anticipated in the DOP.

This process, despite its maladies and shortcomings, could have muddled on for a longer period had it not been for the unfortunate Camp David Summit. Most of the Palestinian political elite was against the whole idea of the summit: a 100 years existential conflict could not have and cannot be dealt with in such a superficial manner; the seven years that preceded the summit did not prepare either party to reach an agreement on the permanent status issues in 2 weeks.

The so-called 'generous and far reaching offers' of Camp David, once leaked to the Palestinians, turned frustration and resentment into despair: after 52 years if the nakba, 33 years of occupation and seven years of a failed peace process, Israel still claimed control on the West bank's prime lands and control of the water aquifers, offered diminished sovereignty, imposed the settlers but rejected the refugees, etc. Sharon's provocative visit to Al-Aqsa was the last drop.

Most of the post-mortem comments and analyses dealing with the failed Camp David talks attempt to explain, from either point of view, the factors that contributed to the failure the Camp David talks. The Clinton proposals and Barak's 'generous' offers were symptoms of a serious and profound in gap between the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives of a permanent peacefully negotiated settlement of the 100 years conflict. The Israeli 'moderate' position represented in Barak's generosity presumed to end the conflict and put an end to all Palestinian claims through a compromise on the results of the 1967 war - hence the Camp David offer.
The Palestinian perspective was outlined in the PLO's 1988 Algiers meeting of the Palestine National Council and the declaration of the Palestine State. It defines the historical reconciliation and the end of the 100 years conflict through presenting a compromise on the *nakba* of 1948; i.e., the recognition of Israel's right to exist and the partition of Palestine into two states, of which the State of Palestine is to be established along the boarders of June 4th 1967 and the settlement of the refugees issue in accordance with the 194 UN resolution. It is this gap between the two perspectives, the fact that their existed (during the Camp David talks) in Israeli society no clear majority for a comprehensive peace settlement, and the failures of the past seven years that underlined the Palestinian resistance, at the time, to the idea of the Camp David conference.

In the past six months, the Israeli excessive use of force and collective punishments, encirclements and blockades fed more resentments and antagonisms. State terrorism was inevitably confronted by mass popular resistance as well as sporadic underground and fundamentalist armed resistance. The cumulative effects of the past six months has inflicted serious damage. The effect on both societies is deeper and more wide-spreading than the growing confrontational spirit in Palestinian society and the demise of the narrow and isolated 'peace camp' in Israeli society. It will therefor be simplistic and naïve to suppose that ordinary measures and political statements will be enough to break the current deadlock and move out of the abyss.

The situation is moving quickly from a failed peace process to a new phase in the 100 years conflict: a *South-African model of Apartheid in the Middle East*. The statements of Palestinian leaders and intellectuals in the past few weeks, the general spirit of the Arab summit which accommodates the Arab emotions, the early symptoms of - marginal so far, but spreading - European calls for anti-Israel sanctions, and, indeed, the statements and actions of the leading Israeli political and intellectual figures (including Oz et al) are strikingly reminiscent in their arrogance and inherent racism of the aura that surrounded the last white generations that governed Rhodesia and South Africa.

Among those Palestinian and Arab intellectuals who characterize the present phase of the conflict as a South African model of Apartheid, only a minority would believe this trend to be a negative one: to them, of the peoples living west of the Jordan river, 'only' 50% (due to the large number of Russian Christian emigrants) at present are Jews; it will take one, or at most two more generations for the Apartheid policy imposed by Israel to run its full course and reach its logical conclusion, an historical process that will avoid the partition of Palestine between the two peoples, and the eventual creation of a democratic and secular state for all its citizens west of the Jordan river.
The proponents of this view recognize the poetic justice in this 'let the apartheid run its course' slogan (as opposed to the 'let the IDF win' Slogan supported by the majority in Israeli society).

The South-African-Development phase of the conflict is still in its very early stage, and thus reversible. Whatever the merits, the suffering that will inflict both societies for another generation or two in the Apartheid model can - and must - be avoided, though not at all cost, but only as long as a fair and humane way out of the present deadlock is viable.

It is idle to expect to resuscitate the peace process with a Sharon- and Likud-led government, in which a Nobel Peace Prize laureate acts as a Minister for Propaganda and a Labor defense Minister needed to be restrained by the very Sharon of the Lebanon war. It is not unrealistic, however, to explore areas of joint interest in stabilizing the situation and moving it from a situation of the confrontation between state-terror and growing popular resistance to a situation of stability through ending mass punishment and blockades. Meetings between the two sides are necessary to agree on security, economic and political steps to be jointly agreed upon and implemented.

Could the presence of a Labour faction in the present government be the one factor that could act as the necessary and indispensable catalyst to organize the first of such meetings without impossible pre-conditions? Would the present situation drag on and drive the region out of the peace process era into the era of Apartheid and the Rhodesian and South African model of development? Unfortunately, very little time is available before the region enters in this decade a new, non-reversible, phase of development that is entirely different from the failed peace process of the 1990's.