

Palestinian peace activist, living in Switzerland

Gaza, my beloved city, I love you so much. Yet, I no longer recognize you, for you have turned to ashes. Al Zahra City, you gave me many beautiful moments in my childhood, despite the noise of war. But now, rockets have turned you to ashes and completely destroyed you.

I mourn the thousands of victims from the Gaza Strip and also the civilians in Israel. As of Monday, October 30, 2023, in the Gaza Strip, there are 8,306 casualties to lament, including 3,457 children, 2,136 women, and 1,800 missing persons. Many of them are presumed to be under the rubble of destroyed buildings, and there are 21,048 injured.

All people are of equal value, whether Palestinian or Israeli, whether Muslim, Jew, Christian, or Atheist. We are all humans. Therefore, I deeply regret the suffering of the civilian population, both for my people, the Palestinians, and for those in Israel.

I call for an immediate ceasefire, permanent and unhindered access for humanitarian aid, and the release of Palestinian prisoners and Israeli hostages. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" only leads to a vicious cycle of violence.

I wish that our children and the coming generations may live side by side in freedom and peace. I hope that the entire region, like in Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, becomes a village of peace where Palestinian and Israeli children grow up side by side, learn from each other, and develop friendships.

For years, my heart has cried out for a free Palestine that lives in peace. The Israeli "iron fist" has shown that it is doomed to fail, and the apartheid system and the blockade in the Gaza Strip have never brought security for Israel.

I firmly believe that the freedom of my people will allow us to live side by side with the Israelis and learn from each other. The solution to this conflict must be profound: Either an independent Palestine (an independent Palestine alongside Israel, side by side in peace and with mutual respect for full sovereignty, with East Jerusalem as our capital) or a one-state solution that views all residents as equals and provides protection and security for all.

Any violence against civilians on both sides (from the Palestinians or from the Israelis) is condemnable and cannot be justified.

Stop this mad war, wake up everyone! Hatred destroys our societies. Violence only leads to a spiral of violence. Oppression is doomed to fail.

Israeli peace activist, living in Switzerland

At 7am on Saturday October 7th I wake up to a message from my sister that she just ran out of a party in Jerusalem straight into a bomb shelter.

At 10am, while I am walking with my kids down the Elefantenbach in Zurich, Israelis are being slaughtered in their own homes.

Towards lunch time, as my husband and I sip our coffee at Stadelhofen, my 90 year-old grandma is taking refuge in her insecure hallway as rockets fall from the sky.

In the evening, as I am having dinner with my mother-in-law, Israeli peace activists I know are in underground tunnels, taken hostage by Hamas.

Slowly the gravity of the events is revealed.

Within a couple of days my social media accounts look like the obituary section of the newspaper: he lost his sister and her husband, she lost a cousin, he lost a friend; these kids were saved by their parents lying on top of them while being shot; this father and son were found burned to death while hugging each other; these children were taken hostage... and the list goes on.

The massacre Hamas committed is cruel, inhumane, and unforgiveable.

Yet, here in Zurich the Limmat continues flowing, Bahnhofstrasse is buzzing, and my German teacher rattles on about Akkusativ and Dativ as if saying 'dem' and not 'der' would make any difference to all those who just lost their entire worlds.

A few days later, while I am sitting in my office, not able to work, my Palestinian friend cannot get in touch with his mother in Gaza.

While I try to eat breakfast or lunch or dinner, who knows, another Palestinian friend shows me the rubble that is now what once used to be his neighborhood.

As I pick up my kids from Kita, another friend shares the tragedy of a Gazan acquaintance who lost dozens of his family members.

A humanitarian catastrophe and it is still going on.

I have two young children of my own. The thought that they would experience an inch of this horror on either side of the non-existent border keeps me up at night.

Some days, my sadness is so deep that I feel I will never reach the bottom of the well of grief.

And then the polarization. My Israeli peers, even in Zurich, in their deep anguish and fear, are suspicious of anyone who even knows a Palestinian. While content shared with me by Palestinian counterparts doesn't even mention the horror of the Hamas attack and finds Israel to blame for anything and everything in this region.

So now what?

A no-choice war, I'm told. But we always have a choice.

Destruction of Hamas in Gaza, if it means killing of more innocent children and elderly, cannot be a strategy. But killing innocent Jews and Israelis cannot be one either. Both peoples are

here to stay on the land between the river and the sea – in a free Israel next to a free Palestine. Free from Violence, free from oppression, free from hate.

In small moments of hope, I imagine Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco meeting Israel and representatives of the Palestinian leadership on the land of the desecrated Kibbutz Be'eri to think of a new vision for the region. Sounds crazy, I know, but actually, why not? Isn't what's *really* crazy killing innocent people in their own homes?

In the meantime, I call to free all civilian hostages immediately and without pre-conditions, and, in the words of my Palestinian friend: Stop this mad war!