

# Discussion about the Issues of Security and Justice for the Middle East

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Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to extend my thanks to all who made my participation possible at this conference. I come from Jerusalem, Palestine where I am still able to live and work. I carry a message of peace to all of you, from a nation subjected to humiliation and torture, from men and women who sacrifice their lives every day to be free, to safeguard a piece of land for their children. This living message of peace emanates from the bleeding souls in witness to the bleeding of bodies.

We Palestinians have been living under military occupation for the last thirty-five years. Extermination, ethnic cleansing, expulsion, confiscation of land, demolishing of houses and killings are routine practices of the occupier. War crimes and torture are by far the major definition of our lives. Racism and sadism are the definition of the occupier. The quotidian life of any Palestinian is a testimony of the strong spirit of a nation, that generation after generation transcends subordination and surrender. We are not aggressive; we hate and love like everybody else. Moreover, we hate the occupation of our homeland. We do not love our oppressors. The Palestinian leadership has already surrendered the political parties as well. They try to find *modus vivendi* with the US and Israel, but they are not dignitaries to be honored by these countries. Israel and the US do not accept them, and you know why: they are unable to bring the Palestinian people on their knees with them. Therefore, punishment befalls upon them.

The road map [for peace] is finished and the only game in town is Sharon's plan: disengagement only from Gaza. The American envoys to the region market only disengagement from Gaza, leaving most of the West Bank captive to Israel. President Bush justifies ignoring the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territories captured in the war of 1967, as "unrealistic in light of new realities on the ground". Israel does not abide by international law. Israel considers itself a state above the law. Israel can live with war, without peace, but Israel cannot live with occupation because occupation implies resistance. In addition, the fortune of Palestinians, it seems, has been to resist occupation and domination for the last century. God forbid that this is the task for us Palestinians in the current century, because we want to end occupation as soon as possible.

The Geneva Accord would be a good start to end the occupation. Even though there are different schools of thought concerning it, the Geneva initiative enjoys the support of the Palestinian Authority, the elite, and all those who are tired of the ongoing conflict. The majority of Palestinians clearly oppose it, as do intellectuals and academia. The Geneva initiative is one of many such initiatives in the political bazaar. It ignores the most painful issues; it leaves them unresolved such as Jerusalem, refugees, water, boundaries, natural resources, and sovereignty.

Rather, the nonofficial group on the Israeli side seek a pure Jewish state. In light of the possibility of a binational state now in formation, with the new Zionists seeking to deter that possibility, the Geneva Accord came into being. Therefore, it became a necessity due to fear, rather than a solution to the conflict. Again, the de facto wall undermines the Geneva Accord, so that it is now merely dreaming. For some Palestinians, the Geneva Accord is an outcome of the political corruption on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

For all of the hope vested in the Palestinian Authority, its promise remains unfulfilled. We expected a real state-building process, based on equity, equality, and democracy. We faced with two major problems. First, restrictions of the Oslo Accords did not allow the Palestinian Authority to have a real sovereignty with full capacity over its citizens, resources, land and water, and import and export rights. The second major problem is that those who formed the Authority were returnees and a copy of other oppressive Arab regimes, with all of their failures in development and human rights standards. They were corrupt. Immediately after Oslo, in 1995, they formed a political and social stratum with all the privileges, not taking into account the need for state-building and respect for the individual, thus creating a big gap between the Palestinian Authority and the people. The middle class, for example, has joined the ranks of the poor. Now, according to statistics, fifty-six percent of Palestinians live on less than two dollars per day; eighty percent live under the poverty line. The responsibility lies both on the failure of the Palestinian Authority and the harassment of the Israeli occupation.

## I

We are then, at the heart of a primary dilemma, the very existence of the Palestinian people. In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, this dilemma comes to the surface. Manipulation of it distorts the core of the conflict far from its roots that are its recognition and its essence. In every war, dispute, struggle, or conflict, there is a lack of moral principles on both sides, but never ever was there a denial of the very existence of the other. The world wars were between nations; European wars were between peoples. Even the French against the Algiers, which pretended to annex Algiers to France, neither ignored the Algerian people, nor denied their right to keep living on Algeria soil. In Palestine, Israel denies the existence of the Palestinian people. Israel refuses their right to live on Palestinian soil. I refer you to declarations and statements from the beginning of Zionism up until now. You will find denial, nonrecognition of the Palestinians who have been living in Palestine for the last five thousand years. That is a declaration Golda Meir, former prime minister of Israel, still makes despite human rights edicts and common sense to the contrary. Not only do politicians call the Palestinians animals, but also the Israeli decision-maker, think tanks, intellectuals, and rabbis. Members of the Israeli parliament: the Knesset, considered the oasis of democracy in the Middle East, call Palestinians "savages, which Israel

must exterminate, liquidate, or send away, anywhere,” though not in Eretz Israel, which is, in fact, all the land of historical Palestine. Here then I should repeat that the white man in the U.S. did not recognize the humanity of the native people; this is why they killed two hundred million, and then kept the rest on reservations, as animals of course, to mourn them from time to time, and, thus, to save himself from the guilt syndrome.

The core of the conflict, therefore, is that eighty-six percent of Jews in Israel do not recognize the existence of the Palestinians. This is the essence and the cornerstone of the conflict. Accordingly, the structure of this is easy to understand. If you do not recognize the other, then whatever you do, you consider it acceptable, normal, natural, logical, and even legal. I would add maybe even human. Given the self-consideration that the other is a savage, you liberate him from his condition if or when you kill them. That was the condition and the case of the indigenous American Indians.

Someone might ask: What about the Oslo Accords? There was a mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinians. If you read carefully, you find recognition of Israel's right to exist. For the Palestinians, there was the recognition of the PLO as representative of the Palestinians, though not a recognition of the Palestinian people as such. The right of Palestinians to exit and to live in Palestine had no guarantee from Israel. In addition, because Israelis feared that Oslo might lead to that recognition, they assassinated Prime Minister Isaac Rabin, Arafat's partner in Oslo. Israel's leaders repeat day and night that Israel, as a democratic state cannot make peace with nondemocratic states. Look at this carefully: either they include Palestinians with Arabs or they ignore Palestinians and deny their right to have a state. They say that Palestinian can integrate into the other Arab states, which again means the expelling of Palestinians from Palestine. They forget that democratic states must not make war against sovereign peoples; when you launch war, you are antisocial and nondemocratic. Fifty-three percent of Israelis object to equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Fifty-seven percent support the so-called transfer.

## II

The Israeli claim of security and self-defence is synonymous with a crackdown on Palestinians; the aim is to break the Palestinians' independent will. Eight million Palestinians make up part of the future Palestinian nation. Israel has schizophrenic fears of the so-called other. After Oslo in 1993, Israel took the position of the imperious imperia under which the concept of the security establishment, thus, formed. For Israel, the essence of the conflict is existential: the denial of the Other. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Israeli's based strategy their on expelling Palestinians by force, a constant aim at uprooting them, and abolishing their existence from Palestine. The mainstream in Israel keeps the transfer as their

one forced objective. The majority and not the minority in Israel claim transfer as a solution to the conflict. After thirty-seven years of nonstop confrontations and one hundred years of conflict, some groups and political parties believe in a zero-sum game: they want to get rid of the Other, to liquidate the enemy. There is no place for any people but Jews in Eretz Israel. Therefore, it is useless to negotiate for a compromise. The holistic victory is achievable only with an integral land. It is a decisive, final position, as clear as that and not open to explanation or interpretation. This inflexible position lacked immunity: the facts of material existence of the Palestinians and the impossibility of surrender, made the Israelis contemplate compromise.

The question is no longer how to describe the situation on the ground or whether Israel violates international law, but how the international community could do something tangible and practical to put an end to these violations. We wonder how long the international community will treat Israel as a country above the law and Palestinians as numbers without the law. Every single victim has a name, a family, and dream. The situation is irreversible. For a decade, Palestinians showed full commitment to a negotiated, peaceful settlement, the relevant Security Council resolutions and to the Road Map. The Israeli commitment was to settlement expansion and the so-called separation wall, which is in fact a prison wall. It is high time that the international community raise its voice and adhere to the basic principle of simple human equality. There is no such thing as a chosen people over the rest of humanity. The state of violence and terrorism in Palestine emanates from the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian Territories. It is rooted in the denial of the basic right of the Palestinians to self-determination, and the establishment of their own viable independent state. This occupation is larger and more savage than any other known occupation in recent history. That is one fact; the other fact is that it is natural, and an essential component of self-respect, self-esteem, and dignity, as well as the right of self-determination that an occupied people resist and fight against that occupation. This is the case of the Palestinian people and was the case of all occupied nations. We in Palestine resist the occupation—this is to be counted in our favor; the opposite would be counted against us. We oppose the:

- Occupation with all its expressions, settlements, and settlers alike.
- Racist separation wall, which separates Palestinian continuity and contiguity, separates Palestinians from other Palestinians, and from their land and facility centers
- Confiscation of our land
- Killing of our people
- Uprooting our trees
- Demolition of our homes and
- Transfer and ethnic cleansing.

Is there anybody in the world who asks us for something different? Is there anybody who prefers that we throw roses in the face of armed settlers and heavily equipped soldiers. We resist with the means available. We want to put an end to the occupation. This is the concern of the absolute majority of Palestinians. Others opted for armed confrontations: they confront soldiers and settlers. What is wrong with that when you recognize that all occupied peoples will conduct such action?

In addition, we have radical movements such as Ḥamaṣ and Jihād. They believe it is an open confrontation and do not see as zero-sum conflict, at least. Still, Hamas and Jihad are a minority with an argument based on the following: Israel is launching a zero-sum war; Israel kills civilians, children, women; Israel demolishes houses. Then Palestinian resistance should do the same. Hamas considers all Israelis alike – all are either soldiers or settlers. Israel kills civilians; Hamas kills civilians. Hamas adds: Palestinians have no military arsenal, no aircraft, no helicopters, no way to achieve military balance, so why not create a state of fear on both sides? We Palestinians live in a state of fear; why shouldn't Israelis live in a state of fear? Thus, they explain why civilians have become the target of Israeli aggression.

My position is that the Palestinians have the full right to fight against occupation using all means available to a civilian society [self-determination]. Our aim is to put an end to the occupation. The popular resistance is a civilian confrontation against soldiers and settler, as well as against Israeli atrocities, walls, checkpoints, confiscation of land, killings, and house demolitions. However, civilians should be out of the battlefield, out of the confrontation on both sides. Israel must stop killing civilians on the Palestinians side, and Hamas must stop killing civilians on the Israeli side. The easy way to accomplish that is for Israel to pull out of the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel occupied Southern Lebanon in three weeks; it pulled out from there in ten hours.

### III

Israel has benefited from the blowing up of buses and restaurants, in order to label the Palestinian resistance as terrorists; thus, Israel succeeded. The USA launched its war against terrorism and allowed Israel to join, spinning its war upon Palestine as an integral part of that war. Sharon addressed Bush: "You have Osama bin Laden; we have Yassir Arafat". Bravo! When Bush failed to define the terrorist people, Sharon helped by categorizing Palestinian as terrorists. Israel won. Palestinians lost. When Hamas suicide bombers kill Israelis, media and politicians all over the world denounce the act; they make solidarity with Israel. Arafat himself denounces the act. Therefore, I do, as well. When Israel kills civilian Palestinians, no one protests. We remain alone as Hamas gains popularity.

To be labelled a terrorist is horrifying. To be the victim of terrorism and then suffer the consequences of being labelled a terrorist is outrageous! I personally was detained for political activities thirteen times, and I was tortured. Moreover, Amnesty International has adopted me as a victim of torture, and as a prisoner of conscience. Yet, because my physical appearance is Arab, I am perceived as a terrorist.

You will not find an Israeli who points out the soldiers' atrocities and settlers' vandalism as terrorist acts, but all of them say that Palestinian resistance is terrorism. It is high time to settle things and to make them clear: The following constitute terrorism:

- The Zionist occupation of Palestine,
- The Zionist denial of the existence of the Palestinian people
- The Zionist denial of our right to self-determination
- The Zionist killing of children, women, and unarmed people
- The wall built and enforced by the Zionist regime
- The humiliation of a nation that is Palestine, and
- The killing of Israeli civilians by Hamas.

I dare to ask whether any Israelis would make a joint statement with me to say that the invasion of Rafah and the killing of people there is terrorism. That is the equation: we on the Palestinian side have a majority of people with rational and open minds, people with conscience. We hear your voice and we listen to you. On the Israeli side, unfortunately they hear only their own voices.

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