

English: Manwa Al-Masri, “Gaza City - A Personal Account”, 24.8.2025

Introduction:

Hello everyone. Welcome to Week Ten of *Eyes on Gaza*, the daily meeting. This is a combination of protest and learning. Our first meeting nine weeks ago was with Adi Ronen Argov, who spoke about the importance of testimony, and why it is crucial to hear testimony from a first-hand source, and why it is important for us to witness the suffering of Gaza's residents, and what is committed in our name. So, we are very grateful, especially to Manwa Al-Masri, a native resident of Gaza City. She wanted to share her words with us and tell us her story and her family's story over the past two years. Manwa will speak in Arabic, accompanied by Professor Amalia Sa'ar from the University of Haifa. For those of us who do not understand Arabic, there is simultaneous translation. Amalia and Manwa will speak for seven to ten minutes and then we will also leave time for your questions. I remind you that anyone who wants to ask questions is invited to write them in the chat, and Amalia will read them and translate them for Manwa.

Lecture:

Amalia: Thank you very much. Hello. Welcome Manwa and thank you for coming to speak with us.

Manwa: And I'm also happy you're here with me.

Amalia: Thank you. Describe the situation in Gaza City today.

Manwa: The situation in Gaza City is very bleak. All day long we hear nothing but bombing or ambulances, or gunfire over martyrs or problems among people. The situation is truly bleak, the weather is hot, and there is something, you know, dust... and our conditions, and rising prices. The situation in Gaza is extremely harmful and harsh.

Amalia: Where are you? Where are you and your family currently living?

Manwa: My family, my husband and my daughter and her children are staying at the Legislative Council. This is the eighth time we've been forced to leave our home.

Amalia: The eighth time?

Manwa: Yes.

Amalia: Describe the apartment you live in.

Manwa: It is only a half of an apartment, and they closed it off for us. It's made of plaster because the owner wants to rent it, and of course the rent is high. The wall faces another wall made of cloth, so I cover it with cloth. So, if a missile or shell hits, the cloth will fall immediately. Just cloth, there's no window or door. Then the balcony where I sit and cook has no wall. So it's unclear how one can manage here. It's barely livable.

Amalia: Which floor?

Manwa: It's on the third floor. The living room and kitchen are dark, with no air or light—total darkness.

Amalia: Tell us a little about your home before coming to Gaza. Where did you live, and what happened?

Manwa: We were in Beit Hanoun. How beautiful our home was there. There was a garden outside, and I worked there, then... I had land, yes, full of fruits and vegetables. Six years I worked there, and in the end the house was lost, and the land was bulldozed, then we left.

Amalia: And how many times have you been displaced?

Manwa: Eight times, eight times.

Amalia: Tell us, how is the food and water situation? Is there enough food?

Manwa: Food... we eat to survive, not to be full. For about two weeks, we were giving everyone just one piece of bread. Of course, we don't have dinner, and the children get a little milk mixed with semolina. For lunch we eat lentils. I have issues with legumes, so I can't eat them. Of course, there is no fruit, no meat, nothing. There was never anything, and now, only when aid has started to arrive... you know, it all gets stolen; people steal it and sell it at high prices. For example, a kilo of sugar was 600 shekels, and a bottle of oil 80. Really strange things. So, we have sugar one day, and then go two or three days without it.

Amalia: And what about drinking and cooking water?

Manwa: Water... I took a photo to send to you to show how we fill water tanks, but I don't think it's healthy at all. Because we often have stomach problems, and small children get sick quickly. They bring the tanks, and people line up on top of each other to fill water, and this is when it's free, without money. We go to a place downstairs, where they sell a large bottle for two or three shekels, and we buy it for home use in the bathroom or for anything else in the house, we give the man money and he pumps salty water for us.

Amalia: Yes.

Manwa: For washing dishes and for the bathroom, and this is salty water.

Amalia: Yes, and how does this affect hygiene? Tell us a little about the family's health, and yours too.

Manwa: Well, I have diabetes, blood pressure, and chronic illnesses, and my granddaughter was also sick and had gallbladder surgery. She needs another surgery and a bypass, because her spleen must be removed. And my second granddaughter was hit by a boy in her eye, she had three operations and a lens was implanted. My husband is sick with hepatitis B and has many health problems. Of course, medications are not available. The medications aren't available. Every other day I take a pill, but I suffer all night from it; the medication I used before is unavailable. Yes, Dr. Alaa Naeem prescribed it to me because I had a heart catheterization.

Amalia: Blessings.

Manwa: God bless you, the small children... They get rashes, as you know, there's pollution in the area.

Amalia: Please describe the environment and the current situation a little.

Manwa: The waste and sanitation... The environment is really a loss. Al-Nasser Street in Gaza was one of the most beautiful streets, but now it's all trash. Firas Market, which was one of Gaza's landmarks, is now all piles of garbage. Of course, the sewers wherever the tents are located, block the streets here in Al-Nasser, and everyone makes their own sewer in the road, and the garbage is thrown into the street, so you walk not knowing how to live. And of course, forget about the dust, and...

Amalia: With all this, they want to issue you an order to go south. How does this affect you?

Manwa: From that day until today, I want to tell you: everything that happened in the war is one thing, and what happened now weighs on me. It's very difficult, as there is no ability to go out, really one cannot... I wish for death before that day comes when I am forced to flee to the south.

Amalia: God forbid.

Manwa: I tell you, it's exactly a really bad feeling. Being displaced again, I mean the ninth or tenth time, really...

Amalia: And tell me: how is the internet there? And do you have electricity regularly?

Manwa: Yes, that's right. We have batteries and a solar panel. We charge the solar panel, then connect the internet and charge the phone.

Amalia: And what did you do about the extreme heat? It was very intense.

Manwa: Well, I asked Amira to bring an air conditioner, but it didn't work. I only have a cardboard box that I fan myself with all night, and all...

Q&A:

Amalia: Certainly, there are many questions. I'll invite Amira to ask the first question, then I'll read the people's questions that came in. Go ahead, Amira.

Amira: Yes, Manwa, my dear. If you had to leave your home now, what would you do?

Manwa: Well, I have a tent, and honestly, in the worst-case scenario... Say: "we have a tent," my daughters have tents, and I have a tent I took from Beit Hanoun, and I kept just one because I couldn't carry more than one. I packed my belongings in my bags, I mean... In the worst-case scenario, if we are forced to leave, we'll take ourselves and go near Deir al-Balah, anywhere there. To complete the tragedy for us, it really is a tragedy that is about to be completed upon us.

Amalia: Yes, and now they're asking about schools: How is the education of young children? What's the situation? And is there a possibility... Do they receive lessons?

Manwa: There was a period before when lessons were held online from the West Bank, they were teaching the children. For example, Bessan's daughter, Narra was following the lessons and was promoted to second grade, but... As for children going to schools, camps, or any other activity, that doesn't exist at all. The children understand nothing; even those in fifth grade don't know anything, and sixth grade is the same, nothing, nothing. Everything that was... has vanished from their minds, meaning they lost two full school years. Two years, yes, and of course with the COVID-19 year, it becomes more than two years, yes. Our education situation is sad. The whole situation, honestly, all of it is extremely bad, completely.

Amalia: Here's a question about the bombing: Is the army bombing close to you?

Manwa: Well, there are strikes that shake the house from their intensity and break the windows, and it's not necessary that the bombing is very close; it could be at Al-Shifa hospital, or at a Patient's Friends Society, or below at the Legislative Council, or it could be in the tunnel, but the strike, I mean the bombing, really shakes us wherever it happens. Because there are no insulated floors, so the world is like this... and the sound reaches us.

Amalia: Here's a question: First, they thank you for sharing with us. Why did you choose to speak with a group of Israelis? Were you afraid to talk to us? And what do you hope comes out of this conversation?

Manwa: No, really, the opportunity was offered to me and I liked the idea of speaking, and maybe my voice will have some impact... And I thank you, you who listen to me and want to convey my voice. Thank you for your efforts, if it could possibly, God willing, stop the war.

Amalia: Okay... And there are also many people here writing: Thank you for your important testimony. And if possible, tell us a little: How do you see the future after the war?

Manwa: As for me, I imagine that I don't want Gaza; I want to leave Gaza, even though from the beginning they were telling me... and I was telling them: I love Gaza, it's my home, my garden, my land, and I love Gaza, because since I was seventeen I got married here. My children are in Germany, in Berlin, and other countries abroad, and my family is in Lod, while I and my daughters are here. I couldn't leave and abandon my daughters, can I leave my daughters?! Therefore, now, God willing, when the war ends, I... God willing, I hope by morning the war ends, so we can leave Gaza, because I don't think it would allow a person with a conscience to live here. This place... As

for me, I cannot steal or loot just to be able to live? Ten thousand shekels a month... isn't enough to live a decent life.

Amalia: And how is the economy really? How do people, for example, get money to buy food?

Manwa: Most people get these aid packages, many die because of them, and then they come to sell them to us at high prices. And of course, there are no bank commissions, for example, when my children send me money, I go to the person who handles the commission, he transfers the money under his name at the bank. As for my money, he takes fifty or fifty-two percent from me, I mean he takes more than half the amount.

Amalia: Who takes that? Who are they?

Manwa: There are people here who impose such commissions, they tell you... I receive the money through an app... He gives me the amount in cash, and I transfer it to him...

Amalia: Yes, I understand. And there's a question: Does Hamas still run things?

Manwa: Yes, I had agreed with you that I don't want to touch on this.

Amalia: Okay, don't worry, don't worry.

Manwa: I think Hamas has no influence here, because if it existed, they would have stopped people from shooting each other, or stealing from each other, or killing each other, or imposing commissions... everyone does whatever they want here, and no... I don't think anyone is behind them...

Amalia: Here's another question: You told us before, when we spoke, that your daughter works in an association to combat violence against women. Are the associations still operating? Are they still active?

Manwa: Yes, the associations are still active. There was an association in the south, its place was bombed, and they all came here to this area.

Amalia: Yes, and what other associations are still working in Gaza?

Manwa: There is also the Tamer Institute, which trains young children and provides recreational activities and things like that.

Amalia: Many people here thank you for your words and ask: What can we do?

Manwa: Well, just intensify your efforts, and do good for us by stopping the war on us, and not displacing us to the south. Really, not being forced to flee to the south. I cannot imagine being forced to go to the south. What a tragedy, what sorrow, what oppression will strike us! I am an old woman, and after all this age... I worked hard in my life to rest in old age, and here I am, still exhausted, and we will remain exhausted...

Amalia: Tell us about your daughter, God willing, when she gives birth: How will she give birth? In a hospital or at home, or what?

Manwa: No, she will have a C-section and wants to give birth at Jerusalem Hospital in Tel al-Hawa. But these days, most women undergo C-sections because they don't have the strength for natural birth due to... lack of food, lack of everything. Yesterday my grandson said to me: "Oh God, the smell of meat!" I said to him: "No, grandma... there is no meat." He said, "I swear I smell meat," he meant canned processed meat. Wow... I told him, God willing, tomorrow I'll bring you meat.

Amalia: This means there are hospitals still working?

Manwa: Yes, at Al-Shifa Hospital behind us is still working, and in Jerusalem in Tel al-Hawa, and there's another called Ahmed...

Amalia: Although we heard a lot that they bombed and destroyed it.

Manwa: It is destroyed, and they set up temporary tents, as happened today at Al-Wafa Hospital. I was in the physical therapy department, and across was a place full of tents, tents, tents, as first aid. If someone is injured or martyred [i.e. killed], they wrap them like this with the simplest means... with the least resources.

Amalia: And what about transportation, for example, your daughter...? If she wants to reach the hospital, how does she get there?

Manwa: Yes, after we said she might go on foot, it's about an hour of walking. They guided us to a place where cars are available, but when you request a car, yesterday it was five shekels, today it's fifty shekels, and still... she goes on foot.

Amalia: Is there some transportation, or...?

Manwa: Yes, there's little transportation. Today I rode in an old van, I used to sell vegetables on it in the past. These types of car have a small cart behind them, and they fill it and people sit tightly together; some standing, some sitting. I mean, suffocatingly crowded in every sense of the word.

Amalia: We only have one minute left. There's a question about orphans: who takes care of the orphaned children?

Manwa: Honestly, I haven't seen anyone so far among those who died from the family—they died while walking on the street, and it's not necessarily the case that they are often from Hamas. Most of those who died are not from Hamas. So I see them here with me. The same goes: the gentleman or lady, or uncle, is the one who supports them financially. And until now, there's nothing else.

Amalia: There's no organization?

Manwa: No, there isn't. All the aid that has arrived has been stored in warehouses, and nothing has been given to anyone yet. We only go and buy a kilo of flour, which I used to get for 140 shekels.

Amalia: Today, a kilo of flour costs 140 shekels?

Manwa: No, no, now flour is cheaper, and a kilo is 12 or 15 shekels. Yes. But sugar has become 18 or 20 shekels. And this cooking oil has become 25. And as you know, the price differs from person to person; everyone sells as they wish. Because there's no oversight, everyone does as they please.

Amalia: In the chat, they ask: is your situation better than others?

Manwa: Yes, thank God, our situation is better than others. And thank God, our children are doctors in Germany. They send us aid and help us, and my sisters also send me support. Thank God, we are very well. And we also help people if they are in need. And of course, I take care of all my daughters, I mean all my daughters are my responsibility, and I cannot leave them.

Amalia: May God protect them for you. Our time is almost up. Many people here are writing you, thanking you very much, and they are very grateful to you, and they sympathize with you a lot, a lot. And we all sympathize with you, and we wish we could live together in peace.

Manwa: God willing, may it end.

Amalia: And we hope you won't have to evacuate to the south. If only that could happen.

Manwa: God willing, God willing. Thank you, professor, thank you very much.

Amalia: Thank you. Thank you to everyone and to all attendees. Goodbye, Amira.