

“Our Genocide – the B’Tselem Report”, Dr. Shmuel Lederman, University of Haifa & Open University, ??, ??, 7.2025

Introduction

Hello everyone, and welcome to *Eyes on Gaza*, our daily gathering which is a combination of protest and learning. Some of us were today at a solidarity visit to the symbolic hunger strike of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel in Jaffa, and we were asked there to raise our voices. For us, these meetings are one of the important ways, and perhaps also the only way in which we can raise our voices. So, thank you for joining us here. We are very grateful to Dr. Shmuel Lederman from the University of Haifa and the Open University, who at the last moment volunteered to come. Shmuel Lederman is an expert in genocide studies and in political theory, and also—and most important today—one of the co-authors of the B’Tselem report that was published yesterday and is called *Our Genocide*. Thank you very much, Shmuel, for joining us. You will speak for eight minutes, as we already know. And afterwards we will leave time for a short discussion. I remind you that whoever wants to ask a question is invited to write it in the chat, and then I will read it to our speaker. Thank you very much for joining us. The floor is yours.

Talk

Thank you very much to everyone who is here. I will share a presentation for a moment. So, as you all know, B’Tselem came out with this report that basically says: what Israel is doing in Gaza is genocide. And this report, like every discussion of genocide, has two parts. I will recall here for a moment the legal definition in its Hebrew translation of what genocide is. Because many times we hear “genocide,” and we immediately have the image of the Holocaust, or other famous cases, like the genocide in Rwanda, the Armenian genocide. We have all kinds of assumptions based on this image. So, I will just remind that when we talk about genocide, we are talking about the value of a group *as a group*. That is, genocide has two parts according to the legal definition:

The first is the intent to destroy such a group. I am using the original word “to destroy, intent to destroy”—the intent to destroy a group as a group. And the second is the various practices, the means, the genocidal practices to achieve this. And note also that it does not have to be the destruction of the group in its entirety. It can be part of it. In legal interpretation this is what is called a “substantial part.” In this sense the Gazans are a substantial part, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and I can expand on this in questions afterwards—what this means for the Palestinians as a group protected under the Convention.

There are different ways to destroy a group. Mass killing is one way, and another way can be to place them in life-threatening conditions, that is conditions that can bring about death or severe harm to members of the group. And this can be severe harm to body and mind. It can include widespread injury. Part of this is also the psychological trauma to members of the group, and we have other ways, other means of genocide. For this matter the B’Tselem report focuses on these two elements, that is the question of intent—though even less the question of intent, rather the assumption that such an intent exists to destroy the Gazans as a group, as this is expressed in the declarations of decision-makers all along the way. And we have in addition genocidal practices, at least the first three, if not more, as it is formulated in the report.

So, as can be seen in the wording of the report, right at the beginning, there is the assumption that since October 7, 2023, following Hamas’s horrific attack, Israel has shifted from a regime that was certainly already a regime of oppression, a lethal regime in various ways toward Palestinians, to a regime that carries out a genocide of the Gazans. And this is done in various ways: both the mass killing in Gaza through bombings and other ways; also by creating catastrophic living conditions that in themselves bring about significant mortality in the Gaza Strip, and also contribute to making

it impossible to live in Gaza anymore; also by causing severe physical and mental harm to all Gaza residents, in terms of injuries and disabilities and also in terms of trauma, especially to children in Gaza; the destruction of hospitals, things of this sort. And one can add also the destruction of cultural and educational institutions. In addition, the prisons in Israel that are turning into actual torture camps for Palestinians from Gaza and not from Gaza.

We have declarations of ethnic cleansing which the Israeli government has effectively turned into an official aim of the war, in the form of the implementation of the Trump plan for “voluntary migration.” So, we also have ethnic cleansing as a war aim. All of these things together with the statements of various senior Israeli officials, especially decision-makers, about how they see the war or what the mindset is behind this war, as it is expressed also in the way it echoes among commanders and soldiers in the field—the combination of these two things, the statements of intent and the intent as expressed in the pattern of actions on the ground, meaning these practices—this brings B’Tselem – and thus the report argues – that what we are seeing in the Gaza Strip is in fact genocide of the Gazans.

This report, I will add, does not deal only with Gaza. It also says that there is a great danger in the West Bank, as well as in other areas where Israel controls Palestinians. We see the spillover of genocidal practices from Gaza into the West Bank in particular. But this is part of the logic of genocide as an attack on a group. Indeed, the genocidal practices are happening in Gaza, but in the end there is extreme violence against all members of the group, violence that expands.

I will just say a word in this context as an example, an example of the practices we are talking about now. There is extensive discussion of the practices that the report deals with—not all the practices, but a central part of them. Take starvation, which there is much discussion about, starvation itself as an example of a genocidal practice. Regarding the goals of starvation that did not begin only in recent months, we must refer to the use of starvation as a weapon of war and as a tool of ethnic cleansing. After all, this whole story is part of the idea of transferring, moving, the Palestinian population in Gaza mainly to the south, from where it will be easier to remove them outside of it. And we can see this in the explicit statements of decision-makers and in reports.

Ethnic cleansing, legally speaking, is not genocide. But when this comes in the context of all the other things Israel is doing, and against the background of the statements of the various officials, then part of B’Tselem’s conclusion is that this is yet another indication of intent—one of the intentions behind this whole war: the destruction of the Gazans, Gazan society as a group. In other words: genocide.