

Introduction

Hello everyone. It is difficult to meet here every day, day after day, but today is especially hard, in view of the devastating news about the ground invasion of Gaza, the reports of dozens of deaths, and the fear of an even darker future. On such a day, our guest, Yael Noy, the CEO of the organization *Road to Recovery* will bring a voice that recalls another era, an almost different world. *Road to Recovery* is an Israeli volunteer organization that transports Palestinian patients from the West Bank—and in the past, also from Gaza—to hospitals in Israel for life-saving treatments. In view of the destructive siege on Gaza, the annihilation of its residents, and the ongoing crushing of everyday life there, it is almost forgotten that before October 7, Palestinians from Gaza used to come to Israel for medical care. We have heard about this from Dr. Michal Feldon ([link](#)) and also in a conversation with Osnat from *Gisha*. Many times, *Road to Recovery* enabled access to treatment—but more than that, it created direct encounters between Gazans and Israelis, encounters that today many in the Israeli Jewish public can hardly even imagine. Yael will share with us the work of the organization, past and present, its challenges and difficulties. She will also offer thoughts on what can and should be done at this time. Thank you very much, Yael, for being with us today.

Talk

Thank you very much. I'm very moved, and I even recognized some of our volunteers among the participants. I also noticed that most of those here are women, so it feels very nice for me to speak to women—and I ask the men in the audience to forgive me for speaking in the feminine form. As you introduced me, Lior, I'm Yael. I've been a volunteer with *Road to Recovery* since 2016. I live in the north, in the Western Galilee, and very soon after I began volunteering, Yuval, the founder, approached me and asked me to coordinate the Erez Crossing—that is, all the patients leaving Gaza. And so, I found myself, for three and a half years, living in the Galilee but spending all my days in Gaza.

I was in touch with an organization called *Basmat al-Amal* (“Smile of Hope”), which assists cancer patients in Gaza. I worked with Muhammad Zhozho, a young man in his twenties, the son of the organization's founder, and he was my main contact. We were on the phone all day long. We spoke in broken English, which we shared as a language between us, and every day we sent out dozens of patients. He would send me lists, and every evening we would go over the next day's patients. Every morning, dozens of volunteers from all the communities of the Western Negev would be waiting at the Erez Crossing. We would pick up the patients (I saw Yael Shanker here, who used to sit there for hours waiting for them) and take them to hospitals in Israel—Sheba, Hadassah, Augusta Victoria, and also Rambam. That was my life for three and a half years, and in that time, I got to know dozens of families in Gaza who remain my friends to this day. And then came October 7.

On October 7, the Erez Crossing was destroyed. The surrounding communities were overrun. Seven of our volunteers were murdered that day. I have to admit that during the first two days I didn't dare call Gaza, even though on that very day, families of patients called to ask how we were and whether we were safe. Families from Gaza called in the middle of the massacre. It took me two or three days to recover before I could even pick up the phone and see what was going on. On my phone, from that day on, I have hundreds of saved messages documenting everything that has happened since October 7. Every day, all day, I receive messages of horror.

Yesterday, for example, as I was driving on Route 22 near the Krayot, I suddenly got a message from Muhammad—with a video showing the organization's building collapsing. That was it. Muhammad, since the beginning of the war, kept saying he would not leave Gaza, that he had a

mission to help, and even if he were to die, he would die doing what he must. But in recent days, it no longer sounds like that. He says, “If I can, I want to leave Gaza now.”

One of the families closest to my heart is the family of Nour, a girl who is now 14 years old. She spent years at Rambam Hospital. She underwent a kidney and liver transplant from her mother, and at one point, a documentary was even made about her. This dear and sweet girl won the heart of my father. I come from a religious family, from the religious Zionist community. My father used to regularly pick her up at the Erez Crossing every time she came out [of Gaza]. That family also called my father on October 7. Since then, Nour and her mother have managed to get to Egypt, in the early months of the war. I still have at home medications I brought from Schneider Hospital to deliver to her—medications we never managed to send. But I’m still in touch with Ibrahim, her father. He kept telling me, “We’re fine. We have a well” (they live in Nuseirat). “We have trees, we have food, alhamdulillah, we’re okay.” A week ago, I got a message that they can no longer go on, that it’s a walking graveyard, that they’re simply waiting for death, because life there is no longer possible. And that’s it. Every day, all day, we receive messages like that. On my phone, truly, there are hundreds of saved messages. Maybe one day I’ll do something with them. But for now, that’s our reality.

We tried to help the patients’ families we know. At the beginning of the war, we managed to get some of the children out—to Dubai, to the Emirates, to Italy. But over the last six months, we haven’t been able to help anyone. All we can do is bear witness to their suffering. That’s what we’re doing now. But, along with all the heartbreak and horror of Gaza, on October 8 we continued to transport patients from the West Bank. We didn’t stop for a single day. Every day, we transport dozens of patients through the crossings that remain open. All the worker crossings have been closed since October 7, but the settler crossings are still open, and every day, many, many patients—mostly from the Hebron area—travel to Sheba Medical Center and Rambam Health Care Campus.

So, for anyone who feels powerless today and doesn’t know what to do in this terrible time, I can simply suggest joining our volunteer network. It’s very easy, really—there’s no commitment. Everyone drives only when they can and want to, and during that hour or hour and a half in the comfort of an air-conditioned car, you feel like you’re doing something. I invite all of you to go to *Road to Recovery*. On our website –<https://www.theroadtorecovery.org.il/> – you can easily sign up as volunteers—it’s simple, it’s easy, and it’s deeply fulfilling. It helps relieve that feeling of helplessness. And one more thing I can share: last week, we marked 15 years of the organization. We held a large and very moving event at the Gan Shmuel hall. Far more people came than we expected. There, too, we brought the voices of our friends in Gaza—of Muhammad, of Amal, a girl we transported for years, a blind girl who lost her sight because of a brain tumor and is now living among the ruins of her home. We brought their voices, along with those of our partners in the West Bank and our volunteers. For a moment, we were simply together, in a kind of reality—I can hardly describe it, because I wasn’t fully there in body, out of emotion... I sort of lost it... but there was something deeply embracing, and it gave a little hope, that evening. That’s it, I think my eight minutes are up.