

Introduction

Welcome to the first gathering of the eighth week of *Eyes on Gaza*. While this is our eighth week together, the war of extermination in Gaza has already dragged on for nearly two years. Here we offer a spotlight not only on Gaza but also on the conditions in Israel that made this destruction possible, as well as its history, and the ways it shapes us as a society and as individuals.

Today we are joined by Jadir Hani, a peace activist and member of the leadership of “Standing Together” organization [<https://www.standing-together.org/en>], who will speak from this perspective. Her lecture is titled “Being Palestinian in Israel”. By a remarkable coincidence, Ghadir is with us on the same day we witnessed the stunning disruption by the young activists of “Standing Together”—many of them students at the University of Haifa—who briefly took over our screens. We are inspired and grateful for that action. So, Jadir, thank you very much for joining us today. We look forward to hearing you.

Talk

Shukran! Thank you Lior, thank you truly for the privilege, and thank you for this initiative. It is moving, and so important. I follow and read the website [<https://www.eyesongaza.net/en>] as well. You are doing excellent work. I understand I have eight minutes, so I will begin by introducing myself. I am Ghadir, almost 48 year-old, from Acre. I spent many years in the Negev. I have been a peace activist since a very young age, and I chose to speak on this subject because I have experienced, in a very real way, what it means to be a Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel. I have felt this challenge most strongly now, since the war—since October 7. I take part in many activities and demonstrations. In the past, I was deeply involved in the protests against the judicial overhaul. Back then, people kept asking: where are the Arabs? That is why I want to shine a spotlight on this issue.

I must begin by saying that I lost a dear friend, Vivian Silver. She appears here behind me [in the picture]. Vivian was from Kibbutz Be’eri, and it was there, that morning, that the complexity of it all began. I am a member of *Kol Acher* – “A Different Voice” – a group of friends from the Gaza envelope who, since the blockade of Gaza, have demanded that it be lifted and that Gaza be rebuilt. Vivian was in this group. We corresponded on that day as we slowly realized the scale of the horror. After five weeks, we received the terrible news that Vivian had been murdered in her home at Kibbutz Be’eri. This is the complexity of being friends with Israelis, of identifying with their pain, of feeling their suffering—of seeing how it can touch every one of us. I experienced it in the most personal way. Vivian and I were close friends. I had slept dozens of times in her shelter room where she was murdered. And alongside this grief, I also mourn what is happening in Gaza, to our people. From the very beginning I felt the need to speak out, to insist that we must continue to greet one another, to continue talking to one another. I was deeply afraid that once again all the traumas of the 21st century had been reopened. Living in Acre, I felt it in people’s eyes as I walked the streets—that I was not wanted there. It was painful and difficult, and I decided to bring this complexity into the open.

I am fortunate to be active in many organizations that work for shared life and peace. Standing Together is one of them, working daily for the end of the occupation, for peace and justice, for social justice and equality. I felt compelled to strengthen this work even further. Many ask me how I do not give in to despair. For me, Arab–Jewish partnership is the key. It took me weeks to find the courage to say publicly that Hamas committed a terrible act. It is not that I had not said it—I did. But to state it openly, I was afraid. I was even afraid to speak or write about Gaza in the first week—ten days after October 7, because I saw the political persecution: students suspended from

universities, people fired from their jobs. Gradually I realized how essential it is to speak. Still, most people around me remain silent, out of fear. And those who did dare, sadly, were arrested.

So, I took it upon myself to be that voice, to speak, to bring a different perspective—and also to act. For example, in “Standing Together” we launched a fundraising campaign when we saw that Arab society in Israel—the Palestinian community here—was unable to speak or do anything. The situation was dire. Even financial donations were forbidden. Many people have family in Gaza—people from Jaffa, Lod, Ramle—yet they could do nothing. We had to act. At first, we thought maybe we could send 10 or 20 trucks. In the end, it became 400. It was extraordinary. This campaign gave Palestinian society in Israel a chance to actually do something for the people of Gaza. At the same time, Alon-Lee Green, the movement’s co-director, posted a tweet expressing grief for the children of Gaza. When the post was shared and known he was dismissed, I believe, and also faced troubles. These things hurt our daily lives. But the campaign allowed people to say: We are doing something. We can succeed in doing something.

Today, what I find most pressing is the needless killing of children in Gaza. Since the war began, nearly 20,000 children have been killed. We have organized many stand-ins—public protests—that, in my view, received strong response, not only from Arab society. Just two weeks ago, the Follow-Up Committee, peace partnerships, and other civil society organizations organized a march in Sakhnin, attended by tens of thousands of people. It was powerful, moving, and deeply needed. We continue to hold stand-ins in Arab towns. This week we held four, and more are planned. Still, Arab society in Israel feels that more must be done. But fear remains. This week, in one town, we asked children to join us. They replied: No, the police will arrest us. Even children are afraid to speak. My niece told me that at the start of the war, a police or army officer came to her school, accompanied by others, to explain and speak about what was happening. It was intimidating—an attempt to find out what families were saying at home.

This is the reality of living through a war that is still ongoing, and of being expected to choose sides. Personally, I have been told more than once: “Why don’t you choose a side? You must decide. You cannot be both”. I choose the human side—the side of humanity! The side that says: I mourn what happened on October 7, and I mourn what is happening in Gaza. And we can face this together. Together, through joint resistance to the war of extermination and starvation in Gaza. At first it was very difficult to see the reactions of friends—real friends and online friends—some saying yes, Israel must go into Gaza, others saying the question was only when to leave. And yet, we see that Israel has still not left, but instead seeks to conquer Gaza.

We must continue speaking about this, continue acting together. As a Palestinian, I cannot do this alone. I am proud and grateful to have many partners in this struggle. I feel that opposition to the war is growing. In my eyes this is crucial. Perhaps a little late—but better today than tomorrow.