

**Nomika Zion, *Kol Akher*-“A Different Voice”, “The Split Screen of the soul in Sderot”,
24.7.2025**

Introduction

Today we host Naomi, Nomika Zion, who for years has sought how not to normalize the recurring wars on Gaza, among other things as a member of *Kol Akher* (“A Different Voice”) from Sderot and the Gaza border communities. Nomika, thank you for joining us. Nomika will speak for eight minutes, and afterward we will leave time for a short discussion. Anyone who wishes to ask a question is invited to write it in the chat, and I will read it aloud later. Thank you, Nomika — the floor is yours.

Talk

Thank you to the organizers for inviting me. I want to clarify that I am not a researcher of Gaza, I am a Gaza’s neighbor. I have been a political activist my entire life. I speak to you from that place, from the depths of a bleeding heart. I also wrote down my remarks, both to fit into the tight schedule and because these subjects overwhelm me.

To live in Sderot today is to live with a split screen of the soul. On one side, there is the deep desire to cling to normalcy: there is a daily routine, work, tasks that must be completed, small joys of ordinary life. After all, we chose to live here. On the other side there is the paralyzing soundtrack of war, that leaves nowhere to escape. It is present constantly, like a burning wound. Gaza is being pounded 24/7, and the houses of Sderot and the border region shake from the force of the bombardments — on weekdays, Sabbaths, and holidays alike. The terror infrastructure that are being destroyed overnight reveals itself at dawn in the images of infants with severed limbs, or children pulled for hours from beneath the rubble of their homes, not to survive the day. How do we live with this? How do we reconcile this split screen of the soul — the stubborn inner struggle between not losing the fragments of our humanity and the temptation to harden the heart, between the moral imperative to see and hear, and the alluring call to block it all out?

In 2008, after seven searing years of Qassam rocket attacks, a group of us from Sderot and the Gaza border founded *Kol Akher* (“A Different Voice”). It was a political call to resolve the bloody conflict solely through nonviolent means and long-term agreements, while simultaneously extending a hand and opening a human channel of dialogue with the people beyond the fence. The friendships and deep connections we built over the years with residents of Gaza have withstood the test of wars and escalations. No one can terrify us with the chilling claim that “there are no innocents in Gaza.” We know dozens, if not hundreds, of Gazans who yearn for peace, who expressed empathy for us during each escalation, some of whom paid heavy prices for choosing to stay in contact with us.

In the 2014 Gaza War, we stood in the center of Sderot holding signs calling to end the war and begin dialogue. At the last moment, the police had to rescue us from a lynch mob of enraged residents. In 2015 and 2016, we stood for two years at the Yad Mordechai junction, calling attention to Gaza, suffocating under siege — with only three hours of electricity a day and shortages of drinking water. Words cannot capture the continuous violence we experienced there. In 2021, I was among the organizers of a major peace conference in Sderot, a project we worked on for months. An Arab pediatrician had been invited to describe the dire condition of Gaza’s children. The rumor spread instantly. We were expelled from the city in disgrace.

All the attempts to raise a different voice, to demand a political solution, failed — and ultimately led us to the monstrous encounter with the unbridled evil of October 7. But that evil did not emerge from the sea, nor is it encoded in the DNA of an entire people. It is the product of despair, displacement, brutal repression, ongoing siege and closures, lack of any way out, and the absence of

even a glimmer of hope for a different life. Yes, there is historical context. We do not have the privilege of deleting it for the sake of a one-sided narrative of victimhood. And yet Israeli society — which knowingly chose to make war a way of life and occupation a second nature — is now trapped in a psychosis of killing and destruction, without limits, reaching dystopian proportions. It will take decades to process, investigate, and comprehend the scale of the horrors inflicted — and being inflicted daily — in Gaza. And over the past year Israel has been exporting this “accelerated Gaza” to the West Bank as well.

As the poet Yona Wallach once wrote: “Jonathan, Jonathan — more blood, just a little more blood with the honey.” All the elements characteristic of history’s darkest chapters are before us: repression, denial, blindness, the silence of the majority, the indifference, the denial, the numbness — or, conversely, malignant arrogance and the intoxication with power. “Jews happily burning villages” was the actual slogan of a WhatsApp group of Jewish extremists, sanitized under the name “Hilltop Youth.” One day, all this will require reckoning. Meanwhile, 24/7 of unimaginable bombings of Gaza shake the houses of Sderot and the border, unhinging minds and deepening anxiety for the fate of the abandoned hostages, for the soldiers sacrificing their lives in a futile war, and for the horrifying daily question: what is today’s quota of infants, children, and innocent Gazan civilians to be killed?

I try to make sense of this bipolar syndrome in my own head. How do lofty expressions of solidarity, resilience, sensitivity, generosity, and heroic mobilization — so evident since October 7 — coexist with absolute indifference to the people just beyond the fence? What happens to a society addicted to unrestrained war of vengeance that cannot be sated? What happens to a society unable to lift its gaze and recognize another’s suffering? What happens to a society that long ago lost its capacity for empathy? How much of an anomaly is a society in which the word “peace” inspires more fear than the prospect of another war — where longing for peace is immediately branded treason? How much of an anomaly is a society in deep mourning that frames its central question not as how to prevent the next war, but how to recruit more manpower, more cannon fodder for it? And how does an absurd, unthinkable idea — like a second *Nakba* for two million people — become, in an instant, a legitimate and “natural” proposal, an “strategic plan” backed by opinion polls? Where are those who will shout: “Stop this sick discourse, now!” And then, the surreal plan for a so-called “humanitarian city.” This literally scorches the soul. Because we must choose what kind of society we want to be: one that writes *Mein Kampf* — to borrow Wisława Szymborska’s metaphor — or one that writes *Winnie the Pooh*. A society that strips others of their humanity will, in the end, strip itself of its own. And then — what will remain of us?

“The unimaginable simply exists,” wrote the poet Israel Eliraz. Yes, the unimaginable simply exists. And therefore, all that remains for those who still believe another life is possible here is to struggle, to resist! To halt the banality of evil that has enveloped us for so many years, to prevent the next “Gazan Dresden,” to stop this cursed war, to bring the hostages home, to end the occupation, and to begin the work of healing and rebuilding — ours and our neighbors’. Nothing will protect us — not in Sderot, not anywhere else in this land — except a commitment to long-term agreements, and an outline of a political horizon, backed and guaranteed by an international coalition of states.