

The People of Palestine Have Been Terrorized

“And If You Face All of this Death and Indifference and Keep Your Humanity, and Your Love and Your dignity and You Refuse to Surrender to Their Terror, Then You Know Something of the Courage that Is Palestine.” — Suheir Hammad

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Global Research, May 24, 2021

[Samos Chronicles](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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For a moment we can breathe and we can try to sleep. How long this moment will last we don't know.

For 10 days the people of Palestine have been terrorised. Over 200 people including over 60 children have been murdered in Gaza. Over a dozen murdered on the West Bank. Injuries run into thousands across the whole of Palestine.

Yet again mobile phones and WhatsApp and other messaging systems have proved their value. But what a double edged knife. Yasser, explains;

“As the electricity system was damaged and cut back to 4 hours each day it was not always easy to contact my wife and my 3 young daughters from Belgium where I have just got asylum and now organising our family unification here. I cannot describe my feelings of fear. I knew from the calls that our neighbourhood was being bombarded. I saw our neighbour's homes smashed to pieces; I saw young guys I hung around with crawling wounded along the street. For 10 nights my family were in such danger. My children screamed for hours every night as the Israeli bombs and rockets poured down. Whenever my mobile rang my heart rate soared to new heights. Was this going to be the call to tell me what I dreaded every breathing moment.

During these days I would meet with my friends in one house in Antwerp and we would stay together. We came from different parts of Gaza so we would open our phones to the different news channels so we could hear all the news coming out. When we slept, two or three would stay awake so we would miss nothing. If the bombs were falling in northern Gaza they would wake me so I could check on my family. If the attacks were in southern Gaza my friend from Rafa was awakened to listen to the news, and so ten nights passed. I was often shivering and trembling because of what was happening next to my family and I would imagine that they had died because of what I was watching; hearing the screams here and there; seeing people dying with their children under the

rubble of their bombed buildings and streets. I hope this war will never return again. Thanks to God, my family have survived. So far.....”

Without exception, every refugee on Samos from Gaza has faced the same horrors these past 10 days. Yasser speaks for many. He continues:

“We have been disgusted by the position taken by many countries in the West where governments such as Greece have shouted their support for Israel’s violence and have presented it as conflict between two equal partners. Israel has one of the most powerful, modern armies in the world.

We, the Palestinians have no chance in a conflict with this sort of power.

But we are not without hope. Over recent days we have seen more people in more countries coming out to protest against the violence and cruelties of the Israeli state. More and more are seeing and rightly describing Israel as an apartheid state. Yet again I find it difficult to express how much that this international solidarity of people has meant for us over these past days. We don’t feel so lonely.

Never let us be lonely. Please. We will not be freed by wars and armies. “

The ceasefire means there are no bombs today. But we now must face the huge damage done which has to be confronted now. Without delay if the horror is to be controlled.

Yasser again:

“More than 45,000 refugees fled their homes and the places where they live and went to UNRWA schools to protect them from the shells, rockets and inevitable death or injury. There are huge numbers of children now homeless, without food, without clothes, without blankets. They are still terrified. These children are innocent of what is happening in Gaza. Young children want to play, laugh and have fun. Now we must stand by them as much as we possibly can.”

On Samos this led to the refugees from Gaza working closely with Sofiane from *Open Doors* to raise money and to get it through to Gaza without delay. In less than a day money was raised and sent and used to provide food parcels for those with nothing. No NGOs or the like, just ordinary people using their networks and local knowledge to get help to where it is most needed. The feedback from Gaza was humbling. It was the solidarity which brought joy as much as the food.

These initiatives must continue. The ceasefire has done nothing to change the incredible challenges to life that the people of Gaza in particular now face. Over the years we have developed wide range of survival skills including the ability to transfer money in and out of Gaza. So there is no need only to think of channeling funds through big NGOs but to use local networks that exist throughout Gaza and Palestine as a whole. If you are not able to connect to such a network then please feel free to contact Yasser who will with his friends do all they can to help you. This is the way of solidarity and not charity.

Please dig deep. Your help is needed. Your solidarity is yearned for.

Thank you.

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