

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine

1. Until when?

Nurit Peled

Nurit Peled-Elhanan teaches at the University of Tel Aviv. She is co-founder of Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Parents for Peace. Her daughter, Smadar Elhanan, was killed in a suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem in 1997. In 2001, Dr Peled was awarded the Sakharov Prize for Human Rights and Freedom of Speech by the European Parliament.

These words are dedicated to the heroes of Gaza, the mothers and fathers and children, the teachers and doctors and nurses who are proving every day and every hour that no fortified wall can imprison the free spirit of men, women and children, and no form of violence can subdue life.

I was asked to speak here as an Israeli. As an Israeli I live in the same country the Palestinians live in, only on the other side of the wall. It is a very small country where Death has absolute dominion; where Death has had dominion for too long. And yet, the world, the whole wide world, is impotent against it. In the Jewish democratic state of Israel all human values have long been wiped away by the blood of innocent babes. Racist discourse is legitimate, and racist education is the only education allowed. Israeli children are raised on slogans such as love thy neighbour, while being trained to kill their neighbours, and their neighbours' children, demolish their houses, torture their elders, and deprive their ill and their dying of medical help and care. Jewish mothers raise their children with all the love and attention Jewish mothers have, and then rejoice when their children turn into murderers, and are proud when their children turn into corpses in uniform. In the Jewish democracy of Israel, 324 children, most of them kidnapped from their beds in the middle of the night by fully armed soldiers, are held in the inhuman conditions of Israeli prisons. In the Jewish democracy of Israel no one is ever punished for killing Palestinian children; Israeli governments trade in human life and in human blood, in a market where non-Jewish blood and bones are worth much

less than Jewish ones; Israeli candidates who wish to be elected to the office of Prime Minister have to outscore their rivals in the killing of Palestinians, and make grand promises to kill and expel more and more and more. In the Jewish democracy of Israel 20% of the citizens of the state are labelled in schoolbooks a demographic problem, threat and even a demographic nightmare; their language, their culture, their rights and their hopes are erased from the face of the earth, both physically and symbolically.

Israel's attitude towards its Palestinian non-citizens has found its most horrifying expression in the ongoing pogrom that is still being carried out by the thugs of the Occupation army against the residents of the Gaza Strip. This is known to every one, and yet the world is powerless against it. The people of Gaza are still locked up in this immense prison, hungry, unemployed, ill and poor, with no means to escape or to better their lives in any way.

As an Israeli, it is very painful to me to realize the word Israel has become the synonym of Oppression, Tyranny, ruthless Apartheid and Racism, and that the Star of David is equated in rallies all over the world to the swastika.

I wish this tribunal will encourage people to arise and go to Gaza – the city of slaughter – or to any other city of oppression in Palestine to see with their own eyes the horrifying ghettos in which these people are incarcerated, get married, have families, educate their children, and lead an impossible day to day life. I hope the free people of the world can have the courage to come to my country and defy all blockades and high walls and not give up until all barriers are broken and human dignity is restored.

But the siege of Gaza is only one of many sieges imposed today in the world by democratic powers as well as by non-democratic ones. All those sieges are meant for one purpose: to silence the voice of freedom and justice.

My co-laureate of the Sakharov Prize, Prof. Izzat Gazzawi, a man of peace in spite of the inhuman blows he suffered, who died of humiliation less than two years after receiving this prestigious award, wrote to me just before his heart surrendered, that he believed the Israeli soldiers who came to his house every night to break furniture and frighten the children wanted, in fact, to silence his voice. I have vowed then, as I believe we all should vow every day, to do everything within our power so that his and other such brave voices will not be silenced.

When the Jewish poet Bialik wrote after the Pogrom against the Jews in Kishiniev, '*Satan has not yet created Vengeance for the blood of a small*

child,' it did not occur to him that the child might be a Palestinian child from the holy land, and his slaughterers – Jewish soldiers. And when he wrote:

*Let the blood pierce
through the abyss! Let the blood seep
down into the depths of darkness, and
eat away there, in the dark, and breach
all the rotting foundations of the earth.*

he could not imagine that those foundations would be the foundations of the state of Israel, that a Jewish state would immerse all of us in the blood of little girls and boys up to our necks.

Today, when the most enlightened civilizations commit the most heinous crimes out of greed, megalomania and pure racism, Bialik's cry from a hundred years ago resonates once again:

*And I, my heart is dead, no longer is there prayer
on my lips;
All strength is gone, and
hope is no more.
Until when,
How much longer,
Until when?*