



GAZA

FORM: SPEECH

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Peaceful protesting is legal in many parts of the world, and the right to peacefully protest is protected under the European Convention of Human Rights, and under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I want you to take a moment, to think about how fortunate you are to be able to make use of this right, and about all the causes you could peacefully protest for, from racial issues to foreign policy to climate change, and to think about how you are able to attend and take part in these peaceful protests without any hindrance or harm.

Now, imagine you are protesting against a brutal occupation. Do you know what an occupation is? Or what it's like to live under one?

Let me tell you a story, a story of a man who paid too high a price for the mere crime of protesting against a cruel occupation that was killing his people, and responded to any act of civil disobedience against the state with violence, cruelty and sheer disregard for human life. An innocent man, shot in the foot, his bones shattered, suffering from torn ligaments, nerve damage, crippled indefinitely, because those that occupy his homeland will not let him leave, not even to receive medical treatment that he can't receive in his homeland, and if he doesn't receive, may result in the amputation of his foot. Situations like these aren't uncommon in the Gaza Strip. If you are a Gazan and are diagnosed with breast cancer, you only have a 30% chance of survival, compared to an 86% chance if you were an Israeli. For Muhammad al-Sha'rawi, from Beit Lahia, it isn't likely that he will ever be allowed to receive external medical treatment, due to the fact that year by year, the amount of permits being given to leave the Strip is decreasing.

Let me tell you another story, of a brave and strong woman, who you may have heard of before. She was a paramedic, who volunteered her services during the 2018 Gaza border protests, tending and giving vital immediate medical aid to injured protesters. On the first of June, the third Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, Rouzan al-Najjar went to a protest. She and the group of medics she was with took many precautions so that the Israeli soldiers didn't mistake them for protestors. They wore their usual uniform of a white medics coat with high visibility stripes, medics vests with bandages and Rouzan even wore surgical gloves. They moved in groups towards the direction of casualties, and when in the vicinity of the border, and within speaking range of the troops, they shout "Don't shoot, there are wounded" in unison.

She was clearly marked as a medic, yet she was still intentionally shot dead by an Israeli sniper, although she posed no threat. When the IDF was questioned about this, instead of apologising, they released an edited video which according to them, was Rouzan admitting to acting as a human shield for Hamas. In reality, it was an interview which she had with a Lebanese TV station, in which she described her job. She had said "I'm here on the line being a protective human shield saving the injured" and added she was at the protests to "save the wounded at the front lines", however the IDF released video cut out everything past "human shield".

These are just a few of many examples of Israel depriving Gazans of their human rights, and incidents like these aren't abnormal.

The Gaza Strip is a small piece of land, part of the State of Palestine, approximately 25 miles long and 5 miles wide. One of the most densely populated places in the world, it's home to 2 million people, referred to by many as the "worlds biggest open air prison" as for the most part, Palestinians in Gaza are forbidden from leaving Gaza, a clear violation of the International Covenant of Civil and Human Rights. A chokehold of poverty is forced upon Gaza, due to an economic land, sea and air blockade being imposed on it by Israel, which according to the UN, is a denial of basic human rights in contravention of international law and amounts to collective punishment. It has an unemployment rate of 52%, significantly higher than that of South Africa, which is the country with the highest unemployment rate at 31.1%. 97% of freshwater in Gaza is toxic, and Israeli officials "put Gaza on





a diet” by controlling the amount of food that enters Gaza daily, based on the bare minimum caloric intake required to avoid malnutrition. 54% of Gazans are food insecure and a whopping 80% are forced to rely on foreign aid. This cruel and inhumane blockade doesn't even allow Gazan fishermen to travel more than three nautical miles from the shoreline, or else they risk being blown out of the water by Israeli warships, which is also the reason why Gazans cannot escape by boat.

Now I want to pose a question to you all. What would you do if you were a Gazan? How would you feel, living in a place where “innocent before proven guilty” doesn’t exist, where all sense of humanity, and preservation of human rights is thrown out the window? Completely disregarded? Viewed as suggestions rather than obligations? Where you being alive is sufficient justification to label you as a terrorist? Now I humbly ask you, before my work is bathed in “what went wells” and “even better ifs”, to put yourselves in their shoes. Just for a short moment.

And now I want you to at least try. Try to make a change. Sign petitions, educate your friends and family, make donations - just do something. We must be united in our condemnation for oppression, genocide and hatred everywhere, whether it’s in Palestine, East Turkestan, Sudan, Myanmar, or anywhere else. And as the famous proverb states, “charity starts at home”. We must make sure we also deal with the problems here in Europe too. Together as a community we can do this, so our children's children feel safe in a world where everyone is accepted, so a young black man can feel safe around a police officer, so a Muslim woman can feel safe in her neighbourhood whilst wearing her hijab or niqab, and so all the minorities globally know they are not alone.

Or will we just ignore? Pretend that it doesn’t exist? Let another Gazan woman or child suffer. Let oppression continue under your nose, as if it doesn’t affect you too? As if it’s not your business?

The choice is yours.

