

## Writing These Words in Gaza Could Cost Me My Life

Extremists on both sides promote the idea that the other side is made up solely of enemies who deserve to die. Hamas is an exact copy of the Iranian regime, and Israel is waging a war of revenge

My name is Abdullah. I am 30 years old and live in the Gaza Strip.

I live in a house with my two elderly parents who can't walk very far, so they couldn't flee at the start of the war. Our house was destroyed in the bombing. My two nieces were killed and my mother was seriously wounded.

With bombing going on in the background, I'm writing this in a house whose windows have been blown out. We hung up sheets to keep out the cold but they don't help much. Since the first week of the war we've had no electricity and no access to hospitals or medication of any kind. I'm writing in total darkness and bitter cold while gripped with fear and anxiety.

Most of the day I'm busy trying to obtain food and water. Aid trucks enter Gaza every day, but to get some of this aid, you basically need to launch your own war. Thousands of people fall upon every truck, and many of the goods are stolen by residents or Hamas.

After more than 100 days of insanity and counter-insanity, more than 100 days of war and the Nakba we're experiencing, the war still doesn't seem close to ending.

I could die or be wounded at any moment, so I have to speak out. The voice of reason must be heard – the voice that's being silenced on both sides. So I steal an hour during the struggle for survival to write words that could cost me my life.

First, I want to make clear where I stand on the October 7 terror attack. The killing and kidnapping of children and the elderly, and of young people who were celebrating at a party, doesn't represent us at all. Nothing has hurt us, distorted our cause or damaged our just demands more than this terror attack. If we were a free people that knew its interests, we would try everyone who planned this attack.

Moreover, long before October 7, Hamas stopped representing me and many others like me.

Hamas is an oppressive ideological religious organization that steals our freedom, enslaves us, abducts us at gunpoint and suppresses any voice that opposes it. Hamas rejects the idea of the civilian state, which it sees as a desecration of everything holy and a violation of sharia law. It's a religious, totalitarian, tyrannical government that restricts freedom of expression. It's an exact copy of the Iranian regime.

Yes, Hamas won the 2006 election for a four-year term, but no election has followed in Gaza. In other words, since 2010 its rule is not legitimate, and it doesn't represent the Palestinian people. This is an important point that the world needs to keep in mind.

Hamas is not a liberation movement. A liberation movement aspires to freedom and doesn't employ tyranny and oppression. Hamas hurt our cause by stoking religious hostility toward the Jews and transforming our struggle from a just, global struggle supported by people of the free world from every religion into an Islamic religious conflict supported by tyrannical and oppressive totalitarian entities.

The problem is that Hamas is the snake that grew up in Israel's embrace. Benjamin Netanyahu and his government are the main ones responsible for the growth of its military power. Israel did nothing when Hamas seized control of Gaza, though it could have easily intervened and stopped the coup, and Hamas went on to exploit Israel's blockade on Gaza. Hamas profited from it, strengthened its presence and boosted its popularity.

But Hamas isn't the only extremist religious movement endangering us. After years of a political dead end, the extremists on both sides have strengthened. They both promote the idea that the other side is made up solely of enemies who deserve to die.

In Israel too there are people filled with hatred and racism who are hostile to the most basic human values such as freedom, equality, justice and democracy. And they use religion to ignite wars and profit from them.

The big difference is that in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar is a full-fledged despot. He controls everything and no one can oppose him. On your side, at least, there are still people who can rein in the extremists.

It's true that the Palestinians in general refuse to see the differences and diversity of Israeli society. But Israeli society, in turn, refuses to see Palestinian pluralism. Israel doesn't distinguish between the organization that's fighting it and the people. All are enemies in its eyes. All should be wiped out. The truth is, we view Israel in the same way, which is why the bloodshed will never stop without a just and comprehensive political solution.

Hamas doesn't care if half a million people in Gaza die. We're dying for the sake of its slogans and political interests. It wants to get the Israeli army operating against us in civilian neighborhoods. It wants Israel to kill as many civilians as possible to help justify its existence. It wants to tell the world that it's a legitimate resistance organization against a criminal occupier.

The odd thing is that Israel is playing right into its hands. I don't know why Israel doesn't understand that its interest lies in separating the militants from the civilians, that this is the way to weaken Hamas' standing.

I personally haven't seen any serious attempt by Israel to separate the civilian population from the militants. The number of civilian casualties attests to this. Yes, there were attempts by the army not to strike civilians, but many of them failed before they even began because they were hopeless to begin with. These attempts were mainly a way to disavow responsibility in the eyes of the world for harming civilians in Gaza.

I know that there is no such thing as a clean war. I know that Hamas uses civilian sites for terror operations and that the complex nature of Gaza and its population density make it inevitable that civilians will be harmed. But that doesn't justify the army's use of crushing force against Gaza, it doesn't justify the total destruction and deaths of so many civilians.

The army is currently waging a war of revenge in Gaza, a war with no holds barred, no mercy, no red lines, a war that has gone beyond self-defense to revenge and collective punishment. The goal appears to make Gaza City completely unlivable, and this is what has happened. The war has destroyed everything there and turned the clock back 50 years.

I am appealing to Israel because it's the stronger side. I believe that the Jews understand better than any other people what it means to suffer under oppression in danger of being killed or uprooted. It will be hard for people who have lost their loved ones or their home, or who have been uprooted or wounded, to forgive and forget.

These terrible events are pushing us far from any shred of hope we once held, and the only ones prospering from the war are the far-rightists on both sides. They are shamelessly using the war and blood for political gain.

The conflict has spawned two peoples on this land. Neither can eliminate the other. The only solution is to find a way to live side by side in partnership.

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