

Voice of Women
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It belongs to us

“Palestine belongs to us: you can think I’m an extremist, you can think I’m a Sufi, you can think I’m retarded; but it belongs to us...”

These are the words written by a Syrian poet years ago, and the message was repeated on by Palestinians on the Day of the Land a few days ago. Iraqis have expressed it as well, through their blood and the tender bodies of their children.

There are still Israelis in Palestine who are dreaming and planning to confiscate the rest of Palestine in any way possible, whether through occupation, the apartheid wall or through uprooting trees. But as long as the occupation remains, nothing will be able to prevent Palestinian attacks. In reality, the many terrible forms that the occupation takes, such as settlements, closures and demolition of houses among so many others, are all designed to force Palestinians to emigrate. Fortunately, this wish of the Israelis has not come true, and the Palestinian people cling to their homeland with even greater determination. The Iraqi people provide a powerful example of such tenacity. War was waged on Iraq supposedly to 'liberate it'. This preposterous lie was not even convincing to those who invented it. The rejection and resistance of the Iraqis to their 'liberation' confirms the absurdity of the lie.

On the other hand, the undeclared reason for this war is to gain control of Iraqi oil after the 1991 seizure of the gulf's oil. Those seeking to steal the resources of the Iraqi people imposed sanctions as well on their land, the birthplace of civilization, in an attempt to send it back to the age before economic development, well aware of the deadly impact of depriving the nation of food and medicine.

Their claim that this is a 'clean' war -- in which they kill militants but not civilians -- is a lie. Their 'smart' missiles have already been shown for what they really are in Afghanistan, where they killed hundreds of civilians. Such words are just a mind game.

The invaders don't understand the ancient civilization of the Iraqi people. Iraq has had contact with many cultures throughout history and learned from them. But the bottom line is that the people will stand united when it comes to aggression against their land. When will the invaders finally understand? Palestinians and Iraqis will always repeat the phrase: “It belongs to us!”

Moments of chaos

Monday, 2:00pm. Another bomb; half an hour of fear and anxiety. Chaos takes over and everyone in the office is looking from the windows, trying to see what's happening outside on the street! I stop writing, and some girls start screaming. We think of our families and wonder where they are at this moment?! We've tried over and over to call them but the networks are all busy.

We've seen much worse, but every time the Israeli soldiers invade Ramallah to arrest someone chaos ensues only in our office but everywhere. The counselors who work with us try to calm us down but it doesn't last long because then another bomb explodes.

Finally, it seems that things have cooled down and are returning back to normal. It is a relief to hear our families' voices on the phone and know that they're all fine.

And then, it's time to get back to work.

What they need most is protection

Palestinian children are enduring great hardship as a result of the aggressive and oppressive Israeli occupation of Palestine, particularly over the past two years. According to Dr. Kairo Arafat, general manager of the National Plan for Children in Palestine, 400 children have been murdered in addition to the thousands wounded and disabled. But the most basic problem facing them is poverty, Dr. Arafat says. Most families are no longer able to afford medical care for their children even for essentials such as inoculation. Moreover, many children are suffering from malnutrition as a result of several factors, which negatively affects their growth.

Despite the challenging conditions that schools and education in general are facing, the Ministry of Education has worked hard to keep the educational system intact. Many schools have been destroyed or closed by the Israeli forces. Some have been used as military barracks or checkpoints, along with the many other terrible aspects of the occupation that prevent the educational process from continuing smoothly. This of course affects the students' comprehension, focus and stability.

Speaking of a recent study conducted by the secretariat on the needs and status of the Palestinian children, Dr. Arafat says that most children have a negative view of their lives and do not expect things to improve in the future. But the study also commented on the ability of children to play a role in improving their situation with the support of adults. A sense of belonging and connectedness is essential for them to be able to interpret what's going on around them. It is important for parents to encourage a sense of partnership with their children, and share together all the moments of sorrow and hope that they experience. They also need to be honest with them about the realities of the overall situation.

On April 5th, 1995, a national conference was held in Gaza to discuss children's issues in Palestine. During the conference, President Yaser Arafat declared that day, the 5th of April, the Day of the Palestinian Child.

This national holiday provides a reminder of the importance of our children and the need to provide them with more care and attention, says Dr. Arafat. This year many activities are planned for the Day of the Palestinian Child, in 60 different Palestinian villages and refugee camps. Various ministries and associations in Palestine will cooperate together on this.

We asked Dr. Arafat what he considers to be our children's greatest need. Protection, she said. Children are not safe anymore, not even inside their homes. In the eyes of a child in Palestine, his or her parents are not capable of protecting them from the Israeli rockets and attack. For this reason, government agencies and NGOs should work to provide more recreational activities for children. This is where the secretariat can play a role, Dr. Arafat says. We are working with the ministries and foundations concerning children's needs. For example, we help families with enrollment in schools. We obtain medical equipment, medication and treatment for children in need. We rebuild damaged houses as well. Recently we have been working with the Legislative Council in an attempt to draft a law that would provide children with more solid support for his needs and rights, she adds. Moreover, we have cooperated with NGOs and government agencies to develop a comprehensive plan addressing the needs of the Palestinian child through the year 2010.