

Psychiatry and Psychological Disorders

Commentary Article

I Am A Woman from Gaza... A Story of Violence That Does Not End in 16 Days

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This article, entitled “*I am a woman from Gaza... a story of violence that does not end in 16 days*” is a reflection of the world’s celebration of, and the international campaign known as, “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence,” which is held every year from November 25 to December 10. Governments, groups, and individuals should band together to demand that violence against women and girls be prevented and eradicated. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women” marks the start of the campaign, which ends on Human Rights Day (A comment by Hilmi S. Salem, who translated the article, below, from Arabic into English).

I still have not grasped that I am a woman, seen like any other woman in the world, as I dry the rainwater dripping from my tent floor, trying to salvage just two mattresses and two blankets—all my belongings after a brutal war on the Gaza Strip that lasted for more than two years [October 2023 – October 2025] and continues. There is a world that cares about women and launches campaigns in their name, yet we are just a token number in a statistic, our voices unheard.

When I heard about the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence,” I asked some questions not for rhetoric, but accusatory ones: Does this world see me as a human being? Does the world even consider my pale face when the world started counting the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence? Does the world know that I dread the mornings, because the flies in the tent awake me up? Does the world consider that making a cup of coffee over a wood-fire has become psychological violence, as the smoke stains my hands and face before I even touch the cup?

With the first ray of sunlight, the daily violence begins with me. I carry gallons of water long distances to bathe in contaminated water, cook an unhealthy breakfast, wash my

clothes by hands amidst the tightly packed tents where there is neither privacy nor peace, and scurry about in search of a weak Internet signal, so that I can get to work which does not exist.

The scene is completed by hunger and abject poverty: women feed their children crumbs of bread when half a meal is not enough, and a woman might have to spend what she would have spent on clothes on a single kilogram (2.2 pounds) of tomatoes. This is the Gaza Strip, where two million people are suffering from famine, having miraculously survived after Israel launched its genocidal war against us. Yet, we in the Gaza Strip have stopped counting our dead and wounded, as Israel has killed and injured nearly a quarter of a million of the Strip’s inhabitants, most of them children, women, and the elderly.

There is no electricity to iron our clothes, no private bathrooms, long queues for toilets in the streets, and fear accompanying us everywhere and every time. Even food has become precarious: our bread hangs in the tent for fear of mice and rats, and we watch every movement lest they steal a morsel that will never return.

Then there are the unbearable sights. My mother, in her seventies, weeps whenever her grandchildren find a piece of clothing under the rubble of their destroyed home, and says, “Oh, poor things... how will our bedding fare under the rubble in the rain?” My mother, who moves from a tent to another tent, longs for the nights when the house sheltered us all under one roof. She dreams of returning to her stable life as it was before the war.

Other mothers bear their pain in silence. Mothers who rushed to hospitals to identify their sons’ charred bodies, and others who wait for news that their sons are prisoners, not martyrs, and still others who buried their husbands, young sons and

daughters, and children, with their own hands because they found no one to help them. Some mothers have witnessed charred bodies bearing the marks of torture, or bodies whose identities are known only by the stench of death and charred memories.

Some saw dogs tearing the remains of dead bodies, and the sound of that scene lingers. There are also female prisoners, uprooted from their homes by the occupation or during their forced displacement, held in inhumane conditions, and some of whom raped. This reality must be told frankly. Our women, tortured in the Israeli occupation's prisons, have been subjected to physical and sexual abuses that have crossed all boundaries of humanity.

I am not describing the pain in detail to recapture its shock, but to tell the world: Acknowledge this injustice, and do not be content with mere symbolic solidarity, especially when it is not accompanied by real actions and reactions.

The violence, which I and every woman in the Gaza Strip endure, is not a one-day, 16 days, one-month, or a year ordeal. It is a slow death living with us and within us every moment. We have contaminated water, food that barely covers half a meal a day, medicine that is either nonexistent or unavailable, even toilets spreading in the streets where there is no privacy, and the tent robes tighten around our necks like a noose.

I curse the world when I light a fire to cook a meager breakfast. I curse the world as I wash my clothes by hands, watching them wrinkled because there is no electricity and no iron. I curse the world as I write to you in the darkness, my senses

constantly guarding our bread hanging precariously, fearing mice and rats.

I demand of the world what is not usually asked for: not images or fleeting hashtags, but recognitions and real actions. Write in the name of every woman in the Gaza Strip, Occupied Palestine, because women here are abused, simply for trying to live. Remember the mothers of martyrs who learned the bitter fate of their sons, and consider the female prisoners, who have been subjected to body and sexual abuses as a serious issue in your campaigns, not just shocking content for publicity.

Give me, my mother, and all of us in the Gaza Strip back our humanity. Give us back a safe roof, clean water, and medicine to heal us from the injuries of the war, from illnesses of the tents, and from the lack of food and drinking water. Provide us with private bathrooms and rooms that preserve our privacy and humanity. Give us back the moment we can see our faces in a mirror without smoke, and my mother's smile as she gathers us under one roof and says, "Thanks God (Al-hamdu Lillah, in Arabic) that we are back at our homes." Sixteen days are not enough... but a single word of truth coupled with real actions can change the course of our lives, we Palestinian women, in the Gaza Strip. Do not speak of women if you do not hear the moans of my mother as she yearns for her life, the moans of every mother in the Gaza Strip, who has recognized the corpse of her son and who will never come back, and the moans of a prisoner woman from the Gaza Strip, who has lost her dignity in a prison that does not see her humanity.

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