**Speak Up-Kōrerotia**

**Human rights in Palestine**

**24 April 2024**

**Plains FM**

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Coming up next, conversations on human rights with Speak Up – Kōrerotia, here on Plains FM

**Sally**

E ngā mana,

E ngā reo,

E ngā hau e whā

Tēnā koutou katoa

Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka, Speak Up-Kōrerotia.

Tune in as our guests ‘speak up’, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to speak up when the moment is right.

**Yasser**

[*recites verse from the Qur’an*]

**Sally**

That was Yasser reciting a verse from the Qur’an for us to start our show today, thinking about human rights in Palestine. This is a huge topic, one that deserves a lot of attention, particularly at the moment. The show aims to draw attention to the human rights situation in Palestine, both as it was before the conflict and what's happening currently, more than six months, actually, since the start of the conflict. We realise that Palestine has always been a topic on which people hold very strong views, and also that the current conflict has really divided public opinion. What we hope to do today, though, is just remind people that what matters most is people: He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. The Palestinian people have faced immense challenges and inequities for so many years, and the current conflict is exacerbating and magnifying these issues and also introducing so many new ones. The United Nations and other global agencies are warning that the area is facing such a grave humanitarian crisis worsening with each day. So this show is a way of raising our voices about what's happening there. Yasser, given that you recited the verse from the Qur’an, perhaps you could introduce yourself, and if you could tell us a bit about what that verse was about, that would be lovely. Two things.

**Yasser**

Right. My name is Yasser Abdul-Aal. I am Palestinian, originally from Gaza, I born and grew up outside Palestine due to many reasons, we can discuss in details about that. Came to New Zealand five years ago with the family. Father of two boys and one girl. I'm an electrical engineer as well. That verse, it's from Qur’an. We read it as a beginning for our days before we go to bed. To start any activity. I would say it's more about blessing God, blessing Allah, who created us and created the earth and the sky.

**Sally**

Thank you so much. And Maha, how about we hear from you?

**Maha**

I'm from the West Bank, from Bethlehem originally. Like I said, I wasn't born in Palestine. Both my parents were, but emigrated for various reasons to other parts of the Arab world. And I was born in the United Arab Emirates, moved to New Zealand, Christchurch, New Zealand, very early on in my childhood and kind of grew up there. So New Zealand has formed a huge part of my identity. But on the other side, Palestine has always been in my heart and as I grew older, it's kind of that kind of connection and that problem has gotten stronger, I guess now, living in the West, I want to try and kind of amplify Palestinian voices and bring light to the Palestinian identity as much as I can, and hopefully I can do justice for my people, whatever small peace that may be.

**Tim**

My name is Tim Williams. I was born and grew up in the South Island of New Zealand. I'm a clinical psychologist, and in 2006 I first went to Palestine in that role, with Médicins sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders. And I spent a year living and working in Nablus toward the end of the First Intifada and I moved from there, sort of moved sideways into positions with UN-OCHA and UN-WRA in the West Bank doing what's called humanitarian access, negotiating access for humanitarians. And in the last six years, I was in a diplomatic development role with an organisation called the office of the Quartette Representative, and that involved working in Gaza, working in the West Bank and quite a lot of regional travel to Jordan and elsewhere. So I was in Palestine for ten years and then had five years in New York doing some work related to Palestine, but not a lot. And I came back to New Zealand in July 2022, and I've returned to my role as a clinical psychologist. I currently work with refugees from Afghanistan, where there are so many similar issues. And I think Palestinian human rights are just so neglected and so important.

**Sally**

Thank you for those introductions. It's really interesting to hear how transnational you all are and how you're kind of going in different directions, some of you coming from the Middle East and some of you going to the Middle East. So as we kick off our discussion, it would be really good to think about the human rights situation in Palestine before the conflict. And this is a huge topic – we could spend our entire show just talking about that – but what are some of the most critical issues that we should be aware of in terms of then moving our discussion to think about what's happening currently?

**Maha**

Well, I think if we're trying to look at what brought about the current situation, and also we kind of need to look at the steps or, yeah, the processes that lead to it, and for someone like me who's understood the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from the outside and from, you know, just family and friends being just a series of, I guess, injustices committed by one group against another group and all sorts of aspects of life, whether it's land confiscation or medical neglect or just the justice system to essential laws taking place within this pocket of land. And so I think one thing has led to another. That's caused the eruption. We've obviously got the First intifada, the Second Intifada, there have been pockets of uprisings and kind of like violence committed. The way I see it is that there is a group colonising another in one of the most brutal and savage ways and gone into a boiling point where there's no point of return. It's kind of, yeah, something is bound to happen that is going to either make or break, if that makes sense. But the Palestine/Israeli situation at the moment can no longer function, I think, and that's become obvious.

**Yasser**

Yeah, I agree with what you are saying, Maha. And when someone asked me the question about how it was in Palestine or in Gaza before 7th of October [2023], to be honest, I don't go back for the long history. I can speak for an hour about before 1948 and ‘76 and so on, but I just go back to 2002, which is my last visit to Gaza. In 2002, Israel was still occupying Gaza – and, you know, I can spend really day whole day speaking about my experience from Egypt border all the way going through Egyptian checkpoint and Israeli checkpoint and then until I reach to Gaza – and that trip took us, by the way, one-and-half days just to cross the two borders – Israel was occupying Gaza. They officially withdrawn their military from Gaza in 2005 but the reality is not that they are still occupying today. They are blockading Gaza, siege around Gaza, not allowing anything to go in and out unless they control it. So they are still occupying Gaza before this, 7th of October. And the humanitarian circumstances is really is really bad, is really bad. I've got my two sisters living in Gaza and Rafah, and my extended family is still in Gaza, and I'm well connected with them, talking to them always. So the situation was really terrible. And it's getting worse and worse time by time.

**Tim**

The Palestine problem, as it's described as being, is the Israeli government, the international community, the Western governments, and even many Arab governments have been kicking the can down the road, hoping that somehow it would go away. And what made it, if you like, not go away? What was not discussed a lot in the Western media, but all the way through, the issue has been neglect of human rights of individual people in Gaza and the West Bank.

I would broaden the argument a little bit – and Maha and Yasser, you may or may not agree with me – but a Palestinian woman I met was in Washington, D.C. she said, what about my rights? And she said, yes, as you know, Israel takes my rights. They don't let me do this. They don't let me do that. But there haven't been elections since 2004. The split between Hamas and Fatah means that the Palestinian leadership is also not meeting my rights. The Palestinian Authority arrests journalists in the West Bank, as does Hamas. And she cited a number of ways in which she wanted to step up from seeing Israel as the only offender, but seeing the international community as ignoring Palestinian rights, but also the Palestinian leadership on both sides, Hamas and Fatah, as also neglecting human rights in Gaza and in the West Bank.

And just one example, I think, would be pharmaceuticals. You know, Israel prevents the transfer into Gaza of a lot of medical equipment; it's very hard to get X-ray machines and all of those things into Gaza. Israel doesn't stop the transfer of pharmaceuticals. The shortage in pharmaceuticals is because of the Ministry of Health in Ramallah making sure that the pharmaceuticals go to the West Bank first. And so whenever there's a shortage of pharmaceuticals in Gaza, people say it's the Israelis, but in fact, it's the Ministry of Health in Ramallah. So I think if we look at just one individual person in Gaza or in the West Bank – as you say, they can't travel without Israeli approval, they can't be sure that in either place that their land is secure, they have security, that they have food, that they have water. None of those things are secure. None of those rights are secure. They don't have a right to political representation. I'm trying to draw, I guess a bigger picture. Yes, we can say that Israel's a far bigger offender than the Palestinian Authority or Hamas but, you know, the Palestinian leadership is part of this picture of neglect of human rights.

**Maha**

I think it's important also to understand that the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli government and even Hamas in Gaza, they don't all exist exclusively over each other. They're all somehow connected. The Palestinian Authority, a great reason why it still stands today, not just because, you know, they haven't had any elections, but they work very closely with the Israeli government, and they're very much on the opposite of what Hamas do. So you've got division within there and you've got Israel and the Palestinian Authority working together to kind of create that division. And then you've also got, I guess, when you think about the history of Hamas and how it was kind of established and kind of like propped up, it was in part because of the Israeli government trying to divide the Gaza Strip with the West Bank. And so, you know, Netanyahu infamously said that if you want to keep them divided, he urged Jewish Americans to donate their money to Hamas, essentially to kind of prop it up and strengthen it as a way to kind of create that division. So, yeah, they don't exist outside of each other. They're all very connected. There's definitely blame on the Palestinian Authority, but I think at the end of the day, to me it feels like it's a colonial power that is asserting its kind of dominance on this group called the Palestinian Authority, whether it has good intentions or not, but I think it's gotten to a point where they're just basically the lapdog of Israel at the moment in the West Bank, hence why pharmaceuticals, as you mentioned, Tim, rather than going to Gaza, they'll go straight to Ramallah or to the West Bank because they've got first priority, because, you know, they've got that that division and that segregation within, I guess, the Palestinian mindset of being Gaza and being from the West Bank and being from 1948 borders sort of thing.

**Tim**

You mentioned colonialism. If you look at the history of colonialism around the world, many but not all colonial powers – look at the British and India who developed an Indian middle class, not in the same way but in a similar way – as a tool to carry out the colonial project.

**Maha**

Absolutely. Yep.

**Yasser**

I do agree. There is a big split between Palestinians leaders. But if we go back a bit, I guess it's a consequences of Israel especially and America influence in and Arab countries around Palestine. If you go back to Oslo Accords 1993, that was the biggest split between Palestinians, because not all Palestinian agreed to what has been, you know, agreed. And Oslo especially so when the Palestinian Authority went there and made that agreement and sign up the document, many Palestinians knew Palestinians will never get anything from this agreement. And I would say today, after 30 years, it was right. And I guess that created big, big splits between Palestinians because some of the Palestinians still, you know, wanted to go ahead with Oslo Accords.

Which I mean, since 7th October, to be honest, U.S. leaders talking about two-state solution – lies, I would say lies – because the minute Palestinian requested to be a permanent observer [at the United Nations] and they use the veto to block that, just like few days ago. And again, it will never happen since Israel and us doing the same strategy and Palestine. And that definitely will lead to more split. And that's what they wanted. The other thing I would say the Arab countries unfortunately put some condition in Palestinian Authority, which means they should after I mean, what happened in Gaza election and Hamas won the election. So because many of them not to agree with Hamas, what has happened, they told clearly to PLO, we are stopping funding you if you are giving the money to Gaza.

And that's why I can tell you, my sister and her husband are a teacher in Gaza. So since I can't remember five years or so, they are just getting 50% of their salary because the money is not coming from Ramallah. That's a big issue. And that's not happening, by the way, in West Bank, it's happening all in Gaza. To be honest, for for someone like my sister and her husband, they are just teachers and it has happened to be in Gaza. They are not part of Fatah or Hamas or anyone, you know, they're just teacher normal teachers so I don't think they should be affected with anything like that. But again, that split and that, you know, issue between Palestinians, I guess it has it's human. Human. It's not something, just it's happened.

**Tim**

And it's interesting, Yasser, that you talk about the Arab states because you know under the Trump administration we had the so-called Abraham Accords – which if you're going to be kind to Trump and his son in law were very naïve, but I don't think that's true and I don't need to be that kind – I think the Abraham Accords were designed to ‘park’ the Palestine problem forever. And you saw Morocco and Sudan – I can't remember the others that signed up – and the temptation for the Saudis to sign up and the temptation is still there. I think the last six months has made it much harder for the Arab states to ignore the Palestine problem. Just a reminder, too, that Qatar was funding Hamas, with Israeli consent. The money was going through Israel to go into Gaza from Qatar, millions and millions of dollars in cash. It didn't go to your sister and her husband. I think the Oslo Accords and the siege on Gaza created monopolies. You know, if you're in the West Bank and you want to get raw materials for your business, you have to go through the PA. If you're in Gaza until until the change of government in Egypt, you had to go through the tunnels from Egypt that were controlled and taxed by Hamas, or you got it through the Israelis, which was slow and difficult. And yeah.

**Yasser**

Yeah, sometimes it's not happening if we speak about what's coming in and out of not out in Gaza. Yeah. I mean, it is it's really, you know, before 7th of October, the Palestinian in Gaza got electricity for 4 to 6 hours only. You know, that's their norm. Like they don't get power more than that. And they have always issues with water. They have always issues with, you know, the main material to build construction, especially the steel and the cement. Yeah, they don't want them to build anything. They don't want them to live. I mean, more than 70% of the people in Gaza unemployed. So there is so many factors, I guess, encouraging people to do more and more in Gaza.

**Sally**

For those who aren't aware, could you just briefly explain what were the Oslo Accords and the Abraham Accords?

**Tim**

The Oslo Accords were initially negotiated in Oslo in a secret process between Israeli and Palestinian representatives, sort of senior figures, not political figures. And the Oslo Accords were in two stages, and they were intended to be temporary. So there was to be a period of five years in which this entity, called the Palestinian Authority, would be developed, which would have governance in areas A and B and some aspects of area B in the West Bank – the West Bank is divided into A, B and C and a complicated patchwork of areas – and in Gaza. And then at the end of the five years, there were going to be elections, and there was going to be a Palestinian state or a Palestinian state-like entity. It never happened. It was blocked. But the PA remained as this element of governance, to try to run this territory, of which they didn't have military autonomy, they had no, no, no monopoly on the use of force. That was the Israelis.

And lots of organisations, including the one that I worked for, it tried to develop good rule of law and good policing and good economic systems and so on. And I can say now I think that what we did was perpetuate the problem. And then, as Yasser mentioned, in 2005, after the elections which Hamas won, the international community, the PA and Mahmoud Abbas [President] wouldn't recognise the outcome of the election. And, in 2006, Hamas took over Gaza by force. And so since that time, there's been two entities of governance – not government, but governance – one in the West Bank, the PA, and one in Gaza: Hamas.

The Abraham Accords were the project of Jared Kushner, the son-in-law of Donald Trump. And when Donald Trump was the president, he negotiated with regional governments to sign an agreement with the Israelis; basically, you could call it a peace agreement. And so Morocco signed, but it was a deal: the US acknowledged Morocco's claim to the Western Sahara – which many people would see as a colonial project, too – and in exchange, they signed up this deal with Israel. They did the same in Sudan. There were four countries, right. And UAE. And then they were trying to get in the big fish like the Saudis, to get closer to Israel, sign this agreement and to block the Iranians. That was the big picture. If you get the Israelis and the Arabs together, they can block the Iranians. You have these political processes, the Oslo Accords, that just were never implemented fully. And they covered 14 different topics: water, the electronic medium, land, a whole range of different things that was supposed to lead to a functioning governance in the West Bank and Gaza. It was never completed, but at least the PA was a monopoly. You know, if you're in the West Bank and you want to go to Jordan, you have to start with the PA, and then that goes to the Israelis, and then you cross the bridge and then hopefully the Jordanians let you in. So they have a monopoly on control.

The Abraham Accords are in the background. If Gaza would simply disappear, then I think the Saudis would sign the Abraham Accords. But right at the moment, they can't. And that's one of Hamas's strategic goals, I'm sure, was to stop the Abraham Accords. And I think they succeeded in that strategic goal. Maha and Yasser, did I do a reasonable job of describing that?

**Yasser**

Definitely. You did a great job describing that. I would just add two things. I can't remember if it was part of first Oslo Accord or the second, but there was two main items for me. One is the Palestinian Authority to drop their weapons and stop any resisting or fighting against Israeli occupation forces. And the second, to stop the settler expanding in West Bank. Palestinian Authority dropped their weapons, so no more, I guess, confrontation with Israeli occupation forces. And the other side, Israel never stopped their expansion, settler expansion, everywhere and West Bank and even in Jerusalem. So I guess – and that's really a main point for us as a Palestinian – I mean, we have got nothing. I mean, maybe for some of the Palestinians, recognising Palestine as a state is not that, you know, it's not that hope because we know you UN from the first, you know, UN the first recognised Israel as a state earlier. So we are not, I guess, as Palestinian, having much hope from the UN, to be honest. Yeah, but I guess at least that's something to show everyone that Israel just does not respect the UN ruling.

**Maha**

And I think also, it just goes to show that this concept of a two-state solution was never part of Israel's plan, considering that they pushed for the US to veto the UN's recognition of the Palestinian state.

**Tim**

I don't know how hard they had to push it. Yeah. I would ask you both a question – I mean, I have my opinion on this – but do you think if there was a two-state solution, that Palestinian human rights would be met?

**Maha**

Well to me, under the current situation – and if we're talking about all of the 76, 75 years of occupation and the trauma and all of the baggage, the costs – human rights, I don't think, would be met in the current situation. I think there is a long journey ahead if they want a two-state solution for Palestinians to find proper leadership that, I guess, represents all Palestinians. You know, you've got the Christians, you've got the Muslims, you've got the secular Palestinians. It's not as simple as “we've got our state, hey, let's hit the ground running”. There's a lot of trauma, I feel, that goes into it. And you've got Palestinians who are Palestinian, like me, by identity – we don't have anything that proves that we're Palestinian, yet we would argue that we have a right to return. You have refugees who have refugee status who are also fighting for their right to return. So it's kind of, I think it's more complex than that.

But Palestinians, we have definitely proven in terms of living in the diaspora and obviously pockets within Palestine and within Gaza, we want to live, we want our nation, and we definitely have the potential to live like any other nation state. We just need to find the right, the right leadership, I feel.

**Yasser**

I agree with what Maha said, but for me, I guess it depends on how those two-state solution going to be. I mean, if it is full state for Palestinians, you know, with their right to defend themselves, with the right as an independent country and build their relationship with other countries and do whatever they want as a country, I would say maybe yes. But I don't see that practical solution, to be honest, when we are seeing how America and most of the Western countries leaders are dealing with the situation, I don't think that's going to happen at all.

**Maha**

And I think it's also difficult, like how do you pose this question to a Palestinian who comes from Haifa or Yafa, who's now a refugee living God knows where in Lebanon or in a Western country, how do you tell them that there's a two-state solution now but you have to pick whether it's you live under an Israeli system or under a Palestinian system? Like, I just don't understand, like, I guess where is the justice in that if they had to pick and choose? You know, how do we get around the fact that there were people living in this land before 1948 and then within that period of time there's a new country that's been established over it? So it's like, how do you get around that? I don't understand, like, how do you tell the people of Gaza who are, what, 70% not from Gaza are from the 1948 borders? How do you tell them, if you want to live in Palestine, you might not be able to return to your actual homeland?

**Yasser**

Adding to that, my father-in-law is 80, 80 plus. Now whenever I sit with him, he always show me his photo with his father – he is from Akka, near Tibriya – he always show me the registration of his father’s shops and land, you know, which is part of like the occupied part and or 1948 area, I would say. So, yeah. How to tell someone like that, you know, you have no right to go to that area. It's not for you anymore. Two-state solution. And yeah, you're right. I totally agree with you. It's really, I mean, I don't know, I don't know how it will be, but it's not acceptable, I guess. Yeah.

**Maha**

Tim, what are your thoughts?

**Tim**

I think of the 1948 Arabs, as well as who are Palestinian Israelis or Arab Israelis, depending on who you are and how you describe those people, but something like 20% of the citizens of Israel who are of Palestinian descent, and the people in East Jerusalem who are residents of East Jerusalem, Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem, who are Palestinian and not given Israeli citizenship even if they wanted it. That adds to the complexity as well, that you have these people who are living within the recognised borders of Israel.

I think something you said, Yasser, and it's really interesting, though, and that is, you know, what makes up a state. Two very significant things that you mentioned that make up a state: recognised borders, and a monopoly on the use of force; and then the ability for governance and the ability to have relationships with other states. And the recognised borders and the monopoly on the use of force, which are rights of a state, and people within a state have a right to be protected by that state. And I think that's very, very difficult. And again, just touching on it, you know, Hamas have said that it's not their duty to protect the people of Gaza; it's the duty of the UN to protect the people of Gaza. Hamas has been operating Gaza, as much as they can, as a state-like entity. You know, if you want to start a business in Gaza, you would go to the Hamas Ministry of Economy. If you want medical treatment, you go to the Hamas Ministry of Health. They've been running a state-like entity in Gaza, and it's the right of people in a state or a state-like entity to be protected by the state. Now, obviously, Hamas can't do that with the might that Israel has, but you can't say it's not our problem. If you're attempting to be a state-like entity, one of the rights people have in your, in your patch – and I agree with you, Yasser, whether Israel had boots on the ground or not, they still occupied Gaza, and I think that's recognised in international law – but you can't pick and choose. You can't cherry-pick the functions that you have as a state-like entity, and one of the functions you have as a state-like entity is to protect your people. Now, you can say we can't do that because of the activities of Israel – and it's obviously the case – but you can't say not our problem.

**Yasser**

Correct me if I'm wrong. I guess it's part of the international law, if occupying a land, then it's their duty to protect the people there. And I think that's the case simply in Gaza, I mean, Gaza still occupied. Even like if there is no IDF [Israeli Defence Force] presence inside Gaza, but they are around Gaza, located in Gaza. So I guess it's coming from that point, which is as better than international law. It is the duty of the occupation or occupier to protect the people in, you know, in the occupied land. And my understanding, this is what they were saying – I'm not defending Hamas or anyone here – but that's my understanding to to that statement.

**Tim**

Okay, I guess maybe I misunderstood it because what you say is exactly right. And under international humanitarian law, it is the duty, the legal duty, of the occupying power. And one of the outcomes of the six-month war has been Israel can no longer argue they are not occupying [Palestine]. They controlled the borders. They controlled who came in, who came out, what material went in, what material went out. They controlled the electromagnetic space. Yeah, right. You can have 3G in Gaza. You couldn't have 4G or 5G. But now they have boots on the ground. There's no argument.

And I think, Sally, you were saying before about, you know, what does the current conflict mean in terms of human rights? Yasser made a very good point that Israel's responsibility for the human rights of Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank is much more visible, unarguable, undeniable. Now that there are, you know, boots on the ground in Gaza, that it's undeniable that the protection of human rights in Gaza is the responsibility of Israel.

**Sally**

Something that's really struck me in the last few months is that I feel like I've seen so much more public awareness of what even is Palestine, but also what's happening in Palestine. What's the role of Israel and international community in what's happening in Palestine? We are seeing protests and we're seeing celebrities speaking out publicly and these sorts of things that we haven't had before. There's a terrible reason that's prompted this, but…. there must be some positive, maybe, in that people are starting to take notice. Do you think?

**Yasser**

To be honest, for me, I guess it's all about Western media because I believe that the mainstream media is biased to the Israeli narrative. What's going on now in Gaza, people started watching, you know, not the mainstream media, but people on ground like normal Palestinian guy in Gaza filming himself, filming the destruction happening, you know, without editing, without anything, just normal filming. And people started realising, no, you know, what we have been taught for a long time is wrong. The majority, I would say, is wrong. And we've been, we've been lied to. You know, and I guess it's kind of created a shock for many people. You know, I've been told this and this and this and all mainstream media or the majority of mainstream media, which is not right, which is wrong. And that's why it's great anger for people. It's not only awareness, it’s awareness plus anger, because they felt like they are still under colonisation. And, you know, all information coming to the people is just controlled. They want them to know a specific narrative, which is not in line with how those mainstream media advertising themselves to be independent, not picking any, any side. I guess that's created a big issue and that makes people moving toward liberation.

**Tim**

You mean people in the West like New Zealand?

**Yasser**

Yes. Yes.

**Maha**

Yeah, I think Gaza has really opened up the world's eyes to the reality of what Palestinians are going through, what the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is to the fact that it's not a conflict, it's colonisation happening in the 21st century in its most savage way. And it's not just the media. It hasn't just brought to light the fact that the media has been complicit, or western media has, but it's just it's just made it obvious how the international community has been so complicit and so silent for so long. The US has historically backed Israel in everything that they do. Americans now within the United States are waking up to the fact that their government is complicit in the genocide efforts are taking place and before the events of October 7th. Same thing for citizens of Europe, they're realising that their governments are enabling this occupation and colonisation to happen. While the media is trying to suppress and silence, you've got this, what I would say is kind of like a grassroots uprising happening, which is really great to see: ordinary people in Gaza resorting to have to televise their most vulnerable and kind of horrific moments. But people on social media, for better or worse, they're starting to realise the horrific situation that's happening in Gaza and they're starting to read up about Palestine and the history of Palestine and what Israel stands for. And I think because we've kind of had this kind of like, rude awakening, it's caused people who previously realised that there were injustices happening but were maybe silenced or, or reluctant to speak out, now have become more vocal about it. You know, you've got celebrities coming out more and more. You've got companies that are starting to divest away from Israel. It's kind of created a global movement. But until, I think, the international justice system i.e. the United Nations and the International Court of Justice can actually force change, I don't know what ordinary people like us can do physically for the people of Gaza. I hate to say this like, it feels like there's only so much we can do with the protesting, but we really need action from higher up. Otherwise, you know, if what's happening in Gaza right now is to be swept under the rug, then that just gives us a ticket to commit any injustice to any minority or indigenous community moving forward. And it feels like the Wild West, which is scary. There's positives and negatives that have come out of it, but I wish, and I pray, that the wins are going to be the turning point for justice internationally, for people to wake up and to realise that the status quo cannot function.

**Tim**

To add to that: I think what it's revealed is the hypocrisy of not only the United States, Germany, the UK, a whole range of different Western countries, you know, and I think it's just so typified by this completely bizarre idea that there are US planes dropping food into Gaza, and there are Israeli planes supplied by the US dropping bombs. I mean, that's the most bizarre thing.

And it was interesting. I read recently a suggestion that Biden might be the first American president – you know, this doesn't just come from the leadership in the US; it's a belief in that population – he might be the first US president to lose an election because he wasn't supportive *enough* of Israel. You know, that's bizarre. The German population and the German government. Spain is different. But, you know, they've been propping up the PA and giving humanitarian support to Palestine for years, and at the same time giving Israel pretty much a free ride.

You mentioned about international justice. I did read recently that Netanyahu is having conversations with sympathetic governments in Europe to ensure that the ICC doesn't come out with an arrest warrant. They did that with Bashir. In Sudan. It's not uncommon for leaders to have ICC warrants against them, and Netanyahu is obviously a bit anxious about that, as he should be.

**Maha**

And I also think the hypocrisy also stands within the Arab community and within Arab nations as well. This has been a very in-your-face moment for countries such as Jordan and the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, who claim to be the voice or representative of the Palestinians. But in reality, they're very much lapdogs of Israel, which is very shameful and disgraceful. But it's, I think, also kind of a turning point for Arabs to realise that, you know, we've got a hand in this and we can't blame just the West and the United States.

**Tim**

Demonstrations in Morocco. Remarkable.

**Yasser**

I'm well well-connected with people in Jordan, especially, and I would say yes, the people, just ordinary people, ot happy at all with how their government lying and to them saying something in the media but on the ground doing something different. And that's why we have those, you know, very big protests and Jordan is – again, unfortunately, most of the Arab leaders, especially those countries around Palestine influenced by America and controlled by America – so they are not doing what the majority of their people want.

**Tim**

I might ask a slightly provocative question. When I was in New York, I had an interesting confrontation with a young man who had a T-shirt with tick boxes on it and said, Gaza: tick. Pro-choice: tick. And he had all of these issues with a tick box and pro-choice, meaning pro-choice for abortion. And I asked him, you know, you you're in favour of support for Gaza. Good on you. What's the abortion law in Gaza? And he didn't have an answer. And my, my question to bring in now is there not just human rights; there are rights for particular people. What do you think Palestine, Palestinians, Palestinian leadership have to do for the rights of women?

**Maha**

There's a lot to, there's a lot within that. Yes. Yeah. There's no arguing that Palestine is any other Arab state. Unfortunately, women take a backseat within society. I think that goes back to the idea of what kind of leadership do we have and what leadership do we want in a Palestinian state. And yes, it needs to encompass all aspects of Palestinian, society. So it's, women's rights, it's queer rights, it's minority rights; there's a bigger conversation that needs to happen. I can't speak for what's happening at the moment in Palestine, in Gaza or in the West Bank, because I haven't lived there, but think I'm educated enough to know that there's definitely more that could be done for women's rights. Let's just take Israel out of the equation. Definitely, from the standpoint of Hamas and the Fatah or the PA.

**Tim**

It's a little bit of a diversion, but I think I'm just trying to make the point too, that if the human rights is our focus this evening, you know, what we've talked about is really important but there's, as you say, there are very many other issues that are a part of Palestinian society and culture.

**Sally**

And actually, one of my questions was around the rights of children, too, because there's a really large percentage of Palestinian population that's under the age of 18, am I correct?

**Tim**

Absolutely. Yes, I said before about unemployed people, you know, in Gaza, the people are well-educated. Young people get educated, they get college qualifications and bachelor's degrees in a whole range of different skills. And the unemployment in young Gazans, and that's primarily in the young in that population is just immense. Most of the young people in Gaza have never been out of the Strip. And those who do well enough to get things like scholarships to European universities or even American universities are prevented from travelling. And some of that prevention from travelling is obviously by Israel, some of it's by Egypt – much less, Egyptians are a little more kind – but you have a bright young person, they've worked hard at university (those that are still standing), and they've got this opportunity to travel to Italy or somewhere to study, and they're prevented from travelling. And what I find so illogical and tragic about that is that, you know, if you want to radicalise people, treat them like that and they'll become radicalised.

It's just. It's, you know, the words on how children are being treated, especially right now in Gaza… just... Yeah, I don't have words for it. But even before the last six months, even before October… I met a group of young people in Gaza and in their early 20s, university students – this is in about 2011 or ‘12, something like that – and they had been protesting about Hamas, and they'd been taken into custody by Hamas police and beaten up. And one of the young men said to me, when they arrest me – and they will rest me again – they will beat me again. And I thought, the courage of the young man to say that… I found it so moving that there were people in Gaza and in the West Bank, young people, who are prepared to take on Israel, take on, you know, the Fatah security apparatus of Hamas and get beaten and know they'll get beaten or tortured or put in prison or whatever by the Israelis, by the PA, whoever. You're right. The young people who don't have their rights met, but some of them at least are passionate about the need for justice, and they'll risk harm from one authority or the other to try and have their rights met.

**Maha**

Palestinian resilience.

**Tim**

Yeah, but Palestinian resilience in the face of, you know, Palestinian authorities or Israeli authorities. Yeah. It's just tragic.

**Yasser**

I don't know if we shall speak about the current situation in Gaza, that is too many to speak about. I'll speak about my conversation with my sister to start with, because I know everyone knew about no electricity in Gaza, not enough water in Gaza, starvation especially for the people in North. Yeah, I think those are well known. But there is some other stuff happening on the ground which not getting pretty much focus from the media, especially like I do remember after maybe two months of this genocide, I talked to my sister and she told me, you know, we have no more sweet water and we can't get water anymore. So we are getting salty water from the sea and, you know, filling gallons and stuff and bring it over to the house just so we can we can clean our house, we can do the small kind of cleaning or stuff like that. And that's just if you if you stop for a while and imagine how you are dealing with a salty water, how you can clean or how you can do anything, but this is what they have, you know. So that's one of the things I just never forget.

When I talk to my sister, the other, the other situation I do remember when there was a temporary ceasefire where they were swapping hostages. So I talked to my sister and she said yesterday we couldn't sleep. When I asked why, she said because there was less drones in top of our heads, buzzing drones, and we realise we can't sleep unless we have that continuously, that noise. Just imagine, like they are sick to the level that they can't sleep without that buzzing. And those two things I just can't stop thinking about.

**Sally**

So you mentioned that it's quite well known about the starvation and the lack of water and the lack of medicine and the targeting of hospitals and media personnel and those sorts of things, and given this conversation is around human rights, it would be really interesting to get your perspectives on the humanitarian law angle. The US has come out very categorically and said they don't see any evidence of war crimes, but other people are also saying that actually, international humanitarian law says that you should not be targeting civilian safe places. You should not be targeting aid workers. Starvation of civilians is not a method of warfare. Those sorts of things.

**Yasser**

That is a failure. And all humanitarian rights for people of Gaza, especially nowadays. Big failure from all, even from humanitarian organisations on the ground, to deliver the right message and to deliver the right information. And I guess three crimes or war crimes happening now in Gaza: the genocide, the ethnic cleansing, collective punishment. It's caused really big, big issues for the hospitals, for the people, for the children, for everyone in Gaza.

**Tim**

Disproportionate use of force. I mean, we could go on about the breaches of international humanitarian law – I would defend the humanitarian organisations on the ground, I think they are trying to speak and I think they are speaking – but I would add just one other issue of human rights, which is second-rate to survival and second-rate to food and so on. But the occupying power and powers in times of war are supposed to protect cultural valued items universities, schools, churches and mosques and other culturally important buildings. And I have a friend in Gaza who's a businessman, but also loves antiquities. He built a hotel, the ground floor is a museum. His house had a whole lot of antiquities, a beautiful garden with antiquities in it and his house is being bulldozed. The garden is gone. Al-Mashat [hotel] has had a lot of damage.

I know it seems secondary to whether the children will live and die – and I think it is – but it's an attack on Palestinian culture. Gaza's such an old place with so much history and it's just been, you know, bulldozed and bombed and destroyed. And it's another aspect of international humanitarian law which has been just overlooked. Can you rebuild Ghali? Yes, maybe you can. Can you rebuild those mosques and churches and other culturally important places? No you can't. The Sultan's baths that have been there since about 600 A.D. or something, just gone. I know it's a small issue in terms of survival, but I think when you think of the longer term meaning of Palestinian culture, those places are gone.

**Maha**

Yeah, no, that's very valid, I think. In comparison to the children and the women and the men there that are dying and the constant bombing, it might seem insignificant, but yes, I agree, Tim, that in the long run, it's just another tactic to erase Palestinian culture and identity. And I would argue also, it's another way for the occupation to culturally appropriate some of our traditions and our histories and reclaim them as their own, which is just as problematic. It's just all part of that cycle.

**Sally**

We've had this long discussion about the human rights situation, pre-conflict and also what's happening now – and it's just horrifying what is happening now, we could have spoken for so long about the statistics and the all the stories from the ground, and Yasser, I thank you for providing us with some of those – what do we think is going to happen at some point? This conflict will end somehow, but how do we think it might end? And what's going to happen to Palestine afterwards?

**Tim**

I'll speak as a psychologist. This is a protracted conflict. It's like Myanmar. It's like the protracted conflict between Morocco and Western Sahara. It's a protracted conflict. And when conflicts are protracted, they get their own economy, they get their own culture, they get their own psychology. And an important part of the psychology is dehumanisation of the other, and that happens both ways. And when people are dehumanised – the Israeli minister of Defence called the people in Gaza human animals – when you dehumanise people, I think what's going to happen is more protracted conflict. There will be an attempt to meet the rights of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank – just as the might be, you know, in the forgotten, protracted conflicts like Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, there might be an attempt to meet the human rights of those people – but I don't have any hope that in the long term, anything significant will change because so much is invested. Israeli economy runs on conflict. People like Palestinian Authority and Hamas get money out of conflict, out of corruption. I have no hope.

**Yasser**

If I want to answer the question, what should happen, I guess, America and most of the Western countries leaders should stop giving the green light to Israel to kill more people and giving them as, a shield, you know, to cover their war crime and to cover dehumanisation. The Palestinian… One of the outcome of dehumanisation or dehumanising Palestinian is killing them and doing more war crime, targeting the hospitals, targeting the mosque, church and all of those things which nobody should, you know, target. So it's all interlinked. So for me that a green light should be stopped somehow. I don't know, there will be a solution for that. And for Palestinians, from the Palestinian perspective, I guess no Palestinian willing to forget his land or forget his people. And, you know, the people who have been killed and getting killed every hour, every day. So nobody willing to forget that. And we are always dreaming on returning to our land. We will just not disappear.

**Maha**

We definitely won't disappear. So long as there's an occupation and there's a land that we're fighting for, we're going to continue fighting, whether it's on struggle or peaceful protest or discussion and dialogue such as this one. I think I agree with the assertion, so long as the West keeps interfering, especially the US, so long as they keep backing Israel and providing them with billions of dollars’ worth of weaponry, then this conflict is going to continue. The colonisation is going to continue. As I also mentioned before: grassroots, we’re protesting, we’re speaking out, we’re boycotting, we’re divesting, but I think there needs to be some major change on the governmental level, internationally speaking. I think that's where the huge letdown is. And I think if we continue as we are, with our governments not representing us in the way that they should, not listening to our voices and to our demands, that what's happening in Gaza is just wrong and cannot happen, so long as they don't listen to that, then we're just going to see the genocide probably go on for another six months where it's just going to be status quo and it's going to keep going, which would be very unfortunate. And considering all the lives that have been lost and Gaza, it would be a shame for those lives to have gone for no solution.

**Sally**

Thank you, all of you. I know it's not easy to gaze into the crystal ball, but it's not easy to hear your predictions either. They're not very inspiring or hopeful, actually. But thank you very much to all of you. This is a conversation that is overdue, I'm really glad we've managed to have it now. I hope that this has brought some more awareness to people who might not have been so familiar with the context, particularly in terms of that human rights angle. Hopefully has provided people with more of a sense of what has led to where we are now. Tēnā koutou, thank you very much.

**Yasser**

Thank you.

**Maha**

That's been a really great discussion. That's been really healing for me personally. But yeah, it's necessary conversation that had to happen.