

Appendix C: Women and Children in Israel and Palestine

Introduction

In every conflict the world over, the most vulnerable in society face the greatest challenges and dangers. In Israel-Palestine, the spiraling violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories since 2000 has brought untold suffering to the Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations. At the beginning of 2007, more than 3,500 Palestinians, including more than 600 children and more than 150 women, have been killed by Israeli forces, and more than 1,000 Israelis, including more than 100 children and some 300 women, were killed by Palestinian armed groups. Most of the victims were unarmed civilians who were not taking part in any armed confrontations. Tens of thousands of Palestinians and thousands of Israelis have been injured, many maimed for life. Palestinians do not feel safe either in the street or in their homes, as Israeli army aircraft, helicopter gunships, and tanks frequently shell Palestinian refugee camps and densely populated residential areas. Israelis also do not feel safe when they leave their homes, as Palestinian armed groups deliberately target Israeli civilians in suicide bombings and other attacks on buses, restaurants, and other public places.

The militarization of the conflict since 2000 is primarily responsible for these realities. From the first days, the Israeli army abandoned policing and law enforcement tactics and adopted military measures generally used in armed conflict. They routinely use excessive and disproportionate force against civilians, including the above-mentioned bombings and shelling, as well as the large-scale destruction of Palestinian homes, land, and infrastructure, and the imposition of military blockades and prolonged curfews that keep the Palestinian population imprisoned in their homes. Armed Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians, which were sporadic before the *Intifada*, have become a frequent occurrence, including suicide bombings, shootings, and other attacks on buses, cafes, and public places.

—Excerpted from *Israel and the Occupied Territories: Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden* (March 31, 2005) Amnesty International Report <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde150162005>

Despite all the complexities and difficulties faced by the women and children in this land, there are many who refuse to be silent in the face of oppression, who refuse to grow hard-hearted due to their own loss and trauma, who refuse to give up hope for a better world for themselves, their children, and other's children. What follows does not communicate every story or every reality. Rather, it serves as an invitation to study and read more to discover other stories and realities.

[DS: Set the following as an excerpt:

An analogy can be drawn between the psychological experience of a nation under siege and that of a woman living in an abusive relationship.... This poses a potentially dangerous situation for women, who will fall victim to a three-tiered process of violation. At present, they are victimized by the political violence, living in perpetual fear for their safety and that of their families, while bearing the additional burdens imposed on them under harrowing conditions, such as the destruction of homes, the razing of agricultural property, the uprooting of trees, and rampant unemployment. Additionally, they are victims of heightened violence within the home but are unable to express any of their suffering or anxiety, as they are forced into silence for fear of being blamed at the public

level for being selfish and inconsiderate given the national emergency the whole society is undergoing, and at the private level from being blamed for their own victimization—a vicious circle.

—Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde150162005>

Status of Women in Israel

Since its establishment in 1948, the state of Israel has had the image of a country in which women enjoy full equality. But there are many areas in which traditions, social institutions, religious rules, and even laws have kept women at a disadvantage: in the workplace, in divorce proceedings, and as victims of violence. Changes in the political and economic climate, such as the Middle East conflict and the influx of thousands of guest workers, have created new problems. The widening economic gap in Israeli society along ethnic and geographical lines points to the entrenchment of poverty and disadvantage in particular groups. Old women, single mothers, Arab women, immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union, and foreign workers (with or without work permits) are most vulnerable to poverty, health problems, and the abuse of basic rights. Women as a group are disadvantaged in the labor market, the health system, education, the courts, and religious institutions and are subject to harassment and violence.

Social and Historical Factors

The status of women in Israel has been influenced by several social and historical factors. Though the founding fathers of the state were mostly oriented towards a secular and liberal or socialist ideology, they assigned to the religious institutions all matters concerning personal status, such as marriage, conversion, divorce, burial, and so forth. Acting in accordance to Jewish religious law, the Orthodox stream of Judaism virtually obtained a monopoly over official Jewish religious life and personal status.

Another factor influencing the status of women is the centrality of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). Though women have always served in the IDF, the army offers a predominantly male environment that spills over into civilian society by means of the “old boys’ network.” Finally, even though the Proclamation of the Establishment of the State of Israel declares equality between the sexes, so far none of the Basic Laws, which in the absence of a constitution form the country’s normative rules, incorporates this principle, due mainly to the unresolved relationship between religion and the state.

Women’s Work

In general, women work mostly in lower-paying jobs, in services, education, health, welfare, and clerical positions. They are significantly less represented in prestigious and lucrative occupations such as hi-tech, management, and engineering. For example, while 57 percent of all academic degrees are earned by women, and 46 percent of doctoral students are women, only 22 percent of senior faculty members and 7.8 percent of full professors are women.

—R. Werczberger, Research and Information Center, The Knesset
“The Advancement of the Status of Women—Israel 2001”

http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/The%20Advancement%20of%20the%20Status%20of%20Women%20-%20Israel%2020

Status of Women in Palestine

The large-scale destruction by the Israeli army of Palestinian homes, land, and properties has made tens of thousands of Palestinians homeless and destitute. The imposition by the Israeli army of curfews and blockades throughout the Occupied Territories has impeded movement and restricted access for 3,500,000 Palestinians to work, education and medical facilities, and other crucial services. The continuous expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure on occupied Palestinian land has deprived Palestinians of key resources such as land and water. As a result, the Palestinian economy has been virtually destroyed, unemployment and poverty have spiraled, and health and education have been negatively affected.

Stresses on Women

The resulting damage to the fabric of Palestinian society has deeply affected women, who have been at the receiving end of increased pressures and violence in the family and in society. They have faced increased demands as caregivers and providers while at the same time their freedom of movement and action has been curtailed, and they have borne the brunt of the anger and frustration of male relatives who feel humiliated because they cannot fulfill their traditional role as providers. The escalation of violence and the deterioration of the situation in recent years have occurred in the context of Israel's thirty-eight-year military Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which has had a serious impact on many aspects of Palestinian women's lives.

Women as Caregivers

Palestinian women have also had to shoulder most of the burden of caring for tens of thousands of men and children who have been injured in the past four and a half years. Their task has been made more difficult due to the limits of Palestinian medical facilities, Israeli army blockades which hamper access for Palestinians to hospitals in the Occupied Territories and travel abroad, and increased poverty amongst Palestinians. Similar difficulties also affect the wives and mothers of thousands of Palestinians who have been killed or who are detained in Israeli prisons. In the absence of a social security system in the Occupied Territories, thousands of women whose husbands have been killed or imprisoned are forced to depend on relatives and charity organizations for survival. In the current situation of widespread poverty and unemployment, such dependence leaves these women particularly vulnerable to pressures and control by the male relatives on whom they depend for their survival and the survival of their children.

Impact of Violence on Israelis

Israelis are tired of the violence, observed Zeev Wiener. "Most victims will recover in a couple of weeks and go back to their normal lives," he said, "but some will have post-traumatic stress disorder." The psychiatric condition provokes unwanted memories of the bombings—sometimes down to details like the smells that surrounded the scene—months or even years after an attack, he said.

Wiener said that stress disorders, anxiety, and depression are common among those who have experienced bombing attacks or who have lost loved ones in the conflict. He believes that almost half the population of Israel suffers from some post-traumatic symptoms and that 10 percent has full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder.

The effects have reverberated throughout Israeli society beyond the initial violence. “When you send an eighteen-year-old boy or girl to war and put them in impossible situations, then bounce them back to Israeli society, you have problems,” he said. “The impact [of violence] is not just because of suicide bombing but because of the whole conflict.”

Israeli society has witnessed increasing civil violence, widening social gaps, declining patriotism, and increasing distrust of Israeli leadership, he said. “Society does not trust the establishment, including the law and police,” Wiener said. “People feel helpless, and they get used to feeling that way.”

—Excerpted from Zeev Wiener, April 2004, *Harvard Public Health Now*
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/now/apr2/doctors.html>

The Least of the Least

Palestinian Arab women and girls account for 572,000 of Israel's citizens. They are the most disadvantaged sector of the population, facing double discrimination both as Arabs within the Israeli state, and women within Palestinian society. These combine to make Palestinian Arab women in Israel the poorest, least paid, least educated portion of the community who are subject to forms of legal abuse, with inadequate protection by the courts. Their situation is made worse by their lack of political representation and lack of access to decision-making and positions of power. As a consequence, their perspectives and needs are continually neglected.

<http://www.arabhra.org/factsheets/factsheet5.htm>

Barriers to Palestinian Family Reunification

For more than five and a half years, Israel has prevented family unification between Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories and their spouses from abroad. Israel also prohibits the foreign family members from visiting the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Since the beginning of the second Intifada, Palestinians have submitted more than 120,000 requests for family unification, which Israel has refused to process. Only in rare instances, which Israel deems “exceptional humanitarian cases,” have state authorities processed the requests.

The freeze on processing family unification requests has created a harsh reality for tens of thousands of Palestinian families: spouses are unable to live under the same roof; children are forced to grow up in single-parent families though their parents want to live together; people do not leave the Occupied Territories to go abroad for medical treatment because Israel will not issue them a new visitor's permit; tens of thousands of women live in the Occupied Territories with no legal status and thus face the constant threat of deportation, become prisoners in their homes, and are unable to live a normal life.

www.btselem.org/english/Publications/Summaries/200607_Perpetual_Limbo.asp

One Family's Story

Hassan Ribhi Hassan Yihya, 39, married and father of three, is a greengrocer and a resident of al-Bira, Rmallah district. His testimony was given to Iyad Haddad in al-Bira on 2 August 2005.

In September 1997, I got engaged to my cousin, 'Abir Mahmud Abu Nasreh. She was then seventeen and was living with her family in Amman. We were engaged for about a year, during which I went to visit her in Jordan to get to know her better, until we decided to marry. I submitted a request for a visitor's permit for her and her parents so they could enter the West Bank. They received the permits in August 1998. They stayed here for a month and we got married in September. We live in al-Bira. Her parents returned to Jordan.

Three months after we got married, 'Abir's visitor's permit expired. I did not renew the permit, and she became a "person staying illegally" in the area. About a year after we got married, I submitted a request for family unification on her behalf. I made the request to the Israeli Civil Administration via the Palestinian Ministry for Civil Affairs. The officials at the ministry told me it would take time for my request to be considered, and I knew there were thousands of such requests.

I made sure that she didn't leave Ramallah so that the soldiers would not arrest and deport her. I preferred that she stay inside the city, because if they deported her, she wouldn't be able to return. She couldn't visit her parents in Jordan, and they kept in touch only by telephone. When she spoke with them, I felt how much she suffered from not being able to see them. She was worried and sad all the time. Even if I wanted to pamper her, I couldn't take her on trips outside of town because she did not have a permit. She did not have relatives in the West Bank other than one uncle who lives in Bil'in. He came to visit her on special occasions and holidays. The visits made things easier for her and raised her spirits.

Our three children also gave her some consolation. Our eldest child, our daughter Alaa, was born on 10 June 1999. Our second child, Ribhi, a boy, was born on 22 January 2001, and our son 'Omer was born on 1 February 2004.

Every time I went to the ministry to check on the request, they told me there was still no answer or there was nothing new and that everything was awaiting decision by the Israelis.

When the second Intifada began, the Israelis froze the handling of requests for family unification. We lived our lives in the normal manner, for better or worse, like everyone else. But recently the situation became intolerable. 'Abir was in a terrible emotional state. I would come home from work at the vegetable market and see her crying or brooding. She yearned to be with her parents and was tense all the time. About three months ago, I came home and she told me that she had packed her clothes and that if I wanted to go to Amman with her, I could come. About a month later, she went to Amman. She left on 6 June 2005, without notice. I was really angry. I realized that she was hurt and things were bad for her, but what did the children do? They remained with me. The smallest child is eighteen months old, still an infant. I spoke with her by phone and told her that I was angry over what she had done. She said that she wanted to see her parents and go to the wedding of her brother, who was the only boy among ten children. She cried and felt bad that she left the children. She said she was very sorry and that it was clear to her that she had almost no chance to return to the West Bank.

I checked again about the request for family unification at the ministry in Ramallah and they told me the same thing—that it depended on the political situation, and that family unification would be possible when the Jews allowed it. They said that I also didn't have any chance in obtaining a permit for her to enter the West Bank for a visit.

Now I live alone with the children. I didn't even know how to prepare bread or milk for the infant. I didn't know how to change diapers or to do other things one has to do when taking care of infants. My wife did everything. I had to take the children to my mother to live, even though she is sixty years old and has arthritis in her legs. She can

barely take care of herself, but we have no choice. I went to live with my parents to be with the children. My life changed completely. In the past, I would come home from work, shower, and eat with my wife and children. Then I would play with them, or we would go out to do something and have fun in all kinds of places. I got into a routine of “from home to work and from work to home.” I am frustrated and depressed. When I return home at night, the children are sleeping, and when I get up in the morning, I barely see them. When I look at the children, I feel sad, especially when one of the children wakes up at night and asks for his mother.

Also, I don't have a wife to share my problems with, or who can help me. When I talk with 'Abir by telephone, she begins to cry. She regrets that she left and wants me to do everything I can to enable her to see our children. Her sister told me that she holes up in the house and cries when she sees small children. I don't have the words to describe how bad the situation is. I also worry about my mother's condition, and what would happen if she were unable to continue to take care of the children. What would I do in that case? Stop work and take care of them? And how would I support them?

www.btselem.org/english/Testimonies/20050802_Hassan_Yihya_Family_Separation.asp

A Different Voice from Sderot

Early last week, I threw open the metal cover of my “security room,” which had been sealed shut for many months. The room, which is both my work area and my “protected space,” filled up with sunlight at once. It was a huge relief. Within minutes and over the next two days, Qassam missiles landed around us, but something in our consciousness was already more calm and optimistic. Thus began the ceasefire.

For most of you here tonight, the ceasefire is an important political event. For us, adults and children in Sderot and the adjacent villages, and for those in the Gaza Strip as well, it is the simple human act of opening a window (if you have one at all), and a release, if only for a moment, from the chronic fear and oppressed uncertainty that have become our constant companions. It is called: normal life.

Allow me to share with you some personal insights and feelings of the past year. I have been living in Sderot for almost twenty years. For five and a half years I have been “breathing” Qassams. Some of them fell a few meters from my home, and for the first time in my life I comprehended the emotional meaning of the expression “victims of shock and anxiety.” All the daily worries that were generously exported to the public are familiar to me too. All the rituals that emerged around the anxieties: to jump in response to any unusual noise, to watch the sky while walking in the city, to bolt out of bed like an automaton at three in the morning and run to the security room, to tensely wait for the boom, to verify that everybody is okay, and so on again.

Nevertheless, I want to sound a slightly different voice. Let me start by saying that the repeated calls “to destroy Beit Hannon,” “to raze Gaza,” “to black out cities,” and to “turn off the water” horrify me when they are uttered by a frustrated public. They are even more horrifying when they are stated by public figures, ministers, and journalists who are expressing empathy with the people of Sderot. These are calls for which there cannot be empathy! When one repeats the same call so many times, it inadvertently becomes legitimate, part of the daily agenda. What singed the ear five years ago is suddenly transformed into acceptable music and then to sweet music. One gets habituated. This process of habituation scares me even more than the Qassams.

Sderot is a multicultural city, multi-tribal. Journalists must be extra cautious when they presume to reflect the “Feelings of the Residents.” Not all the residents of Sderot seek revenge. Not all the residents of Sderot wish to “Raze Beit Hannon.” Not all wish to

be rejuvenated by rivers of Palestinian blood. We have enough on this account—too many years, too much blood.

—“A Different Voice from Sderot / Nomika Zion”
<http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/articles>

Children and Youth in Palestine

The Palestinian society is a very young one. Children and youth under twenty-five make up 66.7 percent of the population in the Occupied Palestinian territory. Adolescents whose ages range between ten and nineteen constitute 23 percent of the total Palestinian population. The psychosocial situation among adolescents worsened during the past five years of conflict. Children and adolescents are suffering from emotional problems such as headaches, sleeping disorders, violent acts, loss of appetite. Adolescents (aged thirteen to eighteen) are becoming more vulnerable than other children to aggression, rebellion, risk-taking behavior, helplessness, frustration, and withdrawal.

Many schoolchildren witnessed their school besieged by Israeli troops and had seen their school exposed to firing or shelling. A considerable number of children had been witnesses to a killing by Israeli troops of a student from their school or seen the killing of a teacher in school.

As a result, many schoolchildren were exposed to physical violence and had even used physical violence against their schoolmates. Teachers also reported that they had used physical punishment against students; with 77 percent of them having used verbal punishment. Domestic violence is another challenge faced by Palestinian children. The initial results of the study of domestic violence notes that fathers and mothers resort to physical punishment of their children.

At Sharja primary school in Qalqilya, a town in the northern West Bank entirely encircled by the barrier separating Israel from the occupied Palestinian territory, the students said they wanted to do something about the way the ongoing violence was making itself felt in their schools and on their education. According to a 2006 study, almost half (45 percent) of Palestinian students are exposed to violence in schools.

“The external violence is affecting relationships in schools, between teachers and students and between students themselves,” said Hasem Alshair, a trainer and former school counselor. Teachers themselves were overwhelmed by conflict-induced stress, and were behaving aggressively with students. “It’s hurting children,” Alshair said.

Ibrahim Jameel said up to a third of students at his school in the nearby town of Khalet Yaseem were dropping out, with violence as the key cause, after poverty.

“Even verbal violence” could really damage children, said Lamees Moeen, sixteen. “Are we here to learn or to be insulted?”

Dana Smeek, seventeen and in her final year, said a number of students had lost their fathers in the fighting. Many more parents were unemployed, and some families could not afford the cost of school fees and supplies, particularly if there was more than one child. Poorer students were often excluded or marginalized, which hurt their grades, she said.

“New graduates are having a hard time finding jobs—but that doesn’t change the importance of getting an education,” Smeek said.

http://www.unicef.org/oPt/voices_children_2823.html

Impact on Palestinian Children

Constituting over half the population, and as the most vulnerable and dependent sector of society, Palestinian children are disproportionately affected by Israeli policies. Inability to access medical care, poverty levels that affect nutritional intake, and interruptions in some immunization programs have all led to an overall decrease in the status of children's health and an increase in malnutrition and anemia rates. Spiraling poverty, curfews and closures, the devastation of basic infrastructure, the ever-present threat of violence, and the deliberate destruction of homes and schools have provoked a serious decline in the quality of education and the loss of school days.

—Defense for Children International, September 28, 2004
http://www.palestinemonitor.org/nueva_web

Impact on School Children of Israel: One Story

To the children of Sderot (Israel) and the western Negev, life in the shadow of Qassams (rockets) has been a traumatic experience for a long time; so much so that some of them even say that they don't remember life without them. The Committee for Children's Rights heard testimonies Tuesday from the mouths of some of those kids who have been under constant threat of rocket attacks.

"We have no normal life. We never know what will happen the next hour when Qassams fall; we are not only afraid for ourselves, but also for our families. It's traumatic to think that someone close to us will get hurt. It's just terrible," said Bar, one of the children who testified before the committee.

The children said that because of the Qassams they have problems in studying, concentrating, and they are lagging behind compared to other children of the country. "I have a hard time concentrating in school, and the Qassams affect my entire life," said Niv. "Every time I want to do something, I give up because I think that the alarm will go off at any moment. I can't study and I can't even play soccer," he added.

Niv's classmate Gon explained their learning conditions in recent times: "Because not all of our classrooms are protected, we have to study in shifts. We have no gym class because there is no safe place to practice, and the Yitzhak Rabin ceremony was also not conducted as planned. During the night we can't fall asleep because of the drones and helicopters flying overhead, and during the day we can't concentrate because we are too tired."

Liza from Sderot said that she can't remember life without Qassams, but she remembers the day she started being afraid that something will happen to her or one of her friends. It was the day a girl she knew was killed by a Qassam rocket.

"Sderot Kids: Can't Remember Life without Qassams"

Children of Sderot, western Negev, speak in front of Children's Rights Committee in Knesset.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3325250,00.html>

Declaration from Israeli Women in War

A war is being waged in the north and south of Israel—a war that invades our private as well as public space. Our homes are no longer protected, but exposed to risk on many levels—national, economic, social, family, and emotional. In this war, hundreds of thousands of civilians, including children, are under attack in Israel, Lebanon, and Gaza.

This war mixes a "military" with a "civilian" reality, breaking down the distinctions between army and society, political and personal, strength and weakness, military and

social allocations. In this war, the home front is being asked to show strength, but not asked its opinion. In the media, the masculine-military discourse is the only one heard. This language does not express our lives.

As activists in feminist organizations, we call attention to the population that has been abandoned at the home front—many of them women and children who lack all protection. These include Mizrahi, Arab, and immigrant women with no resources and support networks, many of them single mothers, some whose lives were already troubled by violence. This war has had a special impact on women.

Decisions are being made about military and political measures that bring massive harm to the civilian population, but there is no real examination of non-military alternatives, no representation of women, no attention to the civilian and gender considerations, and no discussion of the ethical and humanitarian implications of war policies on civilians in Israel and beyond its borders.

We call upon the Israeli authorities:

Regarding compensation for loss of income: To recognize that most women who remain in the war zone are those lacking the means to leave and struggling with difficult circumstances. These women need immediate and ongoing assistance and should be included in all decisions regarding compensation for their loss of income as a direct and indirect result of the war. This compensation must be accomplished rapidly, without undue bureaucracy, and with dignity.

Regarding violence against women during war: To recognize that war situations increase the incidence of gender violence against women and girls, and to undertake to prevent and deal with this violence. The security of women is jeopardized by a discourse of national security that fails to include the security of women.

Regarding assistance to families: To provide material and emotional support to women and families in their shelters and homes—food, medical attention, emotional support, communication tools, police responsiveness.

Regarding Arab citizens of Israel: The state of Israel must provide equal services to its Arab citizens—accessible help, infrastructure, and information—to create physical, social, and economic security to all its citizens. Arab women are particularly vulnerable to the economic and social repercussions of war, which should be addressed.

—*Declaration from Israeli Women in War*
August 16, 2006

http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/articles/declaration_from_israeli/

Not In My Son's Name

[A]ll women on the roundtable discussion, including the Israeli women, some of whom were having their first visit to Ramallah, started fantasizing about a different role women can forge: Gilad's mother mobilizing other Israeli mothers to march in the streets of Israel with one major slogan: "Not in the name of my son."

Like all mothers of the world, we recognize Aviva Gilad's agony and feelings, and fully understand her desire for his safe return. We imagine that, like all mothers, she won't accept that her son's liberty be on the account of Palestinian blood, mainly the blood of the children in the Gaza Strip.

Therefore, I decided to write my appeal to Aviva Shalit. "Can we appeal to you today to get your moral voice for the sake of humanity? Do you accept the collective punishment policies your government is executing in the name of your son?"

"Your son's name will be remembered by all Palestinian children for generations to come as a curse for the bloodshed. I am sure you want a different remembrance of

your son's name. A happy ending story with his safe return and, with him, the return of all children and women imprisoned in Israeli jails. Like a mother waiting impatiently for the safe return of her son, hundreds of Palestinian mothers are waiting for the moment to hug their children released from Israeli prisons."

I know many will say that, as women, we cannot have an impact on the current military madness. I do not believe that. On the contrary, we women can make a real difference. Didn't the Four Mothers' movement in Israel make a huge difference in the Israeli public during the Lebanon war? Why don't we women, who are often portrayed as victims, start receiving some recognition for our actual and potential roles in attaining peace and promoting security?"

I am a woman and a mother who believes in the politics of small things. I believe that we women and mothers can make a difference in the lives of our countries even with small initiatives. So let us not wait. Let our voice of reason be heard. Let our voice of passion for humanity be heard. We women, give life...we'd better protect it!

I assure you, the day you march calling for the safe return of your son, the day you march to call for an end to the Israeli collective punishment against the Palestinian people living under brutal occupation of your government, the day you cry out to your government that their attacks in the Gaza Strip will not bring them closer to gaining your son's safe release...we women in the Occupied Territories will be marching to support your call for a safe return of your son...we will be calling for the respect of international law...we will be calling for the respect of the human rights of both peoples in the Holy Land....

Together we can make a difference in our countries. Together we can push forward a different peace agenda that is based on a negotiated and just settlement, and not on unilateralism or convergence. Peace can never be imposed by one party of the conflict. Peace can only be negotiated by both parties.

Together we can raise our voices against the Israeli occupation that has brought insecurity and instability to both Palestinians and Israelis. Together, we can make difference in the lives of our children and grandchildren.

—"Not In My Son's Name: An Appeal to Aviva Shalit,"

Terry Boullata, Occupied East Jerusalem, a mother of two children

December 7, 2006

http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/articles/120706_e/

Yali Hashash

My name is Yali Hashash. I represent today the women's Coalition for Peace in Israel, of which the feminist organization I belong to is a member. My organization is called Ahoti, sister, and it stands for social justice, peace, and ethnic equality for women.

Previous attempts to achieve stability in the region, whether in the north through peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, or whether through peace settlements with the Palestinians, have all failed so far. It is my belief that one of the main reasons for that failure is that these attempts have failed to take into account any considerations of economic security for the vast population on all sides of the conflict. In Ahoti—my organization—we strongly believe that any discussion of peace in the Middle East is futile unless it gives people a sense of future prospects, both of physical safety, but also of economic stability.

Peace agreement attempts seem to fail in gaining large supporters from all sides partly because they seem to deteriorate rather [than improve] the economic security of large populations. Factories at the periphery in Israel have been shut and moved to

Jordan and Egypt for low-cost labor, making the periphery pay for the peace costs. The Oslo Agreement suggested solving most territorial issues, yet offered no economic future prospects for Palestinians. Thus, support for militaristic action at least gives a sense of belonging and solidarity, and perhaps a hope for social mobility to people, which peace as practiced so far has failed to do.

So today, while opposing the aggression against civilians in northern Israel and southern Lebanon, and Israel's disproportionate retaliation against the civilian population, I wish to remind you that a temporary ceasefire or even a peace agreement is not enough. Only massive investments in local economy throughout the Middle East, while opposing a neo-liberal economy, can recruit people once again into believing that peace holds any future for them and their children. Indeed, only a strong alternative to the American "new order" policy, an alternative that promotes coexistence rather than constant forcing of a neocolonial order, can bring true peace to the region.

Unfortunately, some leaders in my country have adopted the "evil axis" rhetoric promoted by Bush. It is a rhetoric that leads to a dead end and goes against all that we know about true negotiation. Jews and Arabs have long rich traditions of negotiating. Both have been the carriers of goods, knowledge, and culture to the whole world, using negotiation as a skill that is crucial for survival in a heterogeneous reality, and developed it to an art. Given the right economic terms, I am confident that negotiating peace in the Middle East is not beyond us.

—Yali Hashash

Excerpted from an address to a rally for peace in Copenhagen on August 7, 2006.

<http://coalitionofwomen.org/home/english/articles/070806>