

GREENFIELD RECORDER

My Turn: ‘A nonviolent solution is possible if we refuse to pay for violence’



Israeli airstrikes destroyed a large apartment complex in Beit Lahia, Gaza on May 13. HABBOUB RAMEZ/ABACA PRESS/TNS

By SHERRILL HOGEN

Published: 6/7/2021 3:40:46 PM

I have been to Palestine — many times. I have witnessed a home being demolished by a bulldozer that looks like a huge insect. I have seen the home’s contents dumped and broken on the ground beside the now crumbled building. I have seen a father’s eyes when he is unable to protect his children from the loss of their home, their toys and books, and the children’s eyes when they comprehend that their parents can’t keep them safe. I have heard the roar of an APC (armored personnel carrier) pass by my friends’ home in a refugee camp, at midnight, as we inside wondered if it was coming to take this house down. I have walked the narrow alleys between the cement block buildings of refugee camps and visited the windowless apartments. Children crowd the alleys because there are no playgrounds.

I have been teargassed for joining a nonviolent protest against the Israeli (apartheid) wall that had been built on the village’s land. Whole families join these protests, and whole families get teargassed. Some are small children. You will say the parents should not bring the children, but the children refuse to stay home. They know what is at stake.

I have waited at checkpoints with workers late for work, mothers with crying children, elderly who need to get to the doctor to renew medications. Whether the checkpoint is a militarized tunnel or just soldiers with guns at a cement block barrier, the wait and humiliation are the same: give me your I.D., open your bags, wait, and wait. Wait in the rain, in the blistering sun, no matter.

I keep going back to Palestine to learn what Palestinians want: what they want from Israel; what they want from the U.S.. From Israel they want an end to the military occupation. They are not asking to go back to 1948 when Israel became a state and expelled two-thirds of the indigenous population. But they want freedom of movement in and out of historic Palestine and the right of return: Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem. What Palestinians want from the U.S. is to stop funding the occupation. The U.S. sends \$3.8 billion a year to arm Israel. Without this aid, Israel could not maintain its vast “security” system of walls, checkpoints, prisons and periodic bombing of Gaza.

The occupation can only be maintained by military force. The impact on daily life is too extensive to describe here, but the trauma suffered by the children will go on into the next generations. The children of Gaza, those who survived the 11 days of bombing, cannot be consoled. (Sixty-seven died. Their photos were on the front page of the New York Times last week.) The children of the West Bank and East Jerusalem are too often victims of midnight raids when soldiers arrest them from their beds, charge them with throwing stones, and take them to jails for interrogation. Parents are not allowed to go with them.

Is this system of oppression “apartheid” or “settler colonialism”? That has been disputed on these pages. Palestinians would say yes, it is, because it involves using violence to take their land, homes and children. It is tragic that Jews who sought a safe place to live chose a land already inhabited by people. It is tragic that the Jewish leaders who negotiated with the British empire back in 1917 to allow them to settle in Palestine, which was then a protectorate of Britain, believed that it was all right to expel the native population to make way for a Jewish homeland. It was tragic then and is tragic now because it translates into the violence we see today.

And what about Hamas? Everyone asks. Hamas is exercising their right to resist. When they were part of the nonviolent Great March for Return, 2018-2019, I applauded. I do not applaud now when their rockets kill Israeli citizens including two children. But this is not a battle between equals; there is an oppressor state and an oppressed Gaza, and the losses in Gaza far outweigh the losses in Israel. Did it take all of that violence and death to get the international community to respond at all?

There is no peaceful way to take someone’s home, land, olive trees and children. There is a peaceful way to end the occupation and dismantle the oppressive systems, whether we call them “apartheid” or “settler colonialism” or simply “unjust.” It is to stop paying for them. The United States must stop sending military aid to Israel until Israel ends the occupation. A nonviolent solution is possible if we refuse to pay for violence.

Sherrill Hogen is a resident of Charlemont.