



SABEEL'S REFLECTION ON GAZA

The Narrow Gate of Justice

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

On Saturday, December 27, 2008, as the children of Gaza were about to leave their schools to return home, the Israeli air force carried a massive air attack against the people of Gaza. In less than 4 hours, over 150 people were killed and 200 injured – men, women, and children. By the end of the fourth day, over 390 Palestinians were killed and almost 2,000 injured. On the Israeli side, 4 were killed and no statistics are available on the number of injured.

FACTS ABOUT THE GAZA STRIP:

Population: 1.5 million. 75% of them are refugees. 45% of them are under 14 years.
Area: 360 sq km, 139 sq miles.
Population density: 4,167 people/sq mile (The highest in the world.)

80% of Gazan households live below the poverty line, subsisting on less than \$3 per person a day. 80% of all Gazan families would literally starve without food aid from international agencies.

The Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, similar to that of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, started with the 1967 June war. In September 2005, the Israeli army pulled out of Gaza and removed its illegal settlements. However, the illegal Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip did not come to an end. Israel maintained its tight control over Gaza's borders (air, land, and sea). To make things even worse, Israel imposed a siege on Gaza in June 2007, thus tightening its border restrictions and causing the humanitarian conditions to deteriorate further. Under the brutal siege, every aspect of the lives of the people of Gaza was controlled. They were totally dependent on Israel for fuel, electricity, cooking gas, medical supplies, food supplies (even flour), building material, etc. Israel made sure that the Palestinians would remain alive at barely the survival and basic subsistence level.

On November 14, 2008, UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon issued a statement that said, “The Secretary-General is concerned that food and other life saving assistance is being denied to hundreds of thousands of people, and emphasizes that measures which increase the hardship and suffering of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip as a whole are unacceptable and should cease immediately.”

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

FIRST: A word about *tahdi'a* (the period of calm or truce). It is important to note that among the terms of *tahdi'a* was the understanding that Israel would lift the siege of the Gaza Strip, and gradually extend the truce to the West Bank. This Israel did not do. It only partially lifted the siege and allowed a trickle of vital commodities into Gaza which kept the people at the level of mere survival. Israel's raids into the West Bank continued on a daily basis and scores of Palestinians were arrested or assassinated.

The International Herald Tribune reported on December 19, 2008 that it was Hamas' understanding that after the *tahdi'a* Israel would open the crossings and allow the transfer of goods that have been banned since the siege was imposed. There was never a return to the 500 – 600 truckloads of goods shipments that used to go into the Gaza Strip before the siege. "The number of trucks increased to around 90 from around 70." The facts and figures tell the real story. Sadly, however, many western leaders have shut their ears, eyes, and mouths against the cry of the oppressed and they fell into the deceptive snares of Israel. Most of the world judges Israel by what it says and not by what it does; while they close their ears to the comprehensive and workable 2002 Peace Initiative adopted by all the Arab leaders including the Palestinians. Even Hamas has agreed to a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders as expressed to President Carter on his latest visit to Syria.

SECOND: So long as Israel holds the Palestinians in general and the Gazans in particular under occupation, they (the Palestinians) have the right, according to international law, to resist the "seemingly never ending" belligerent occupation and struggle for their liberation. Israel, therefore, cannot demand from the international community sympathy and political support and from the Palestinians calm and security, while it maintains its inhuman and illegal occupation. It is only when Israel ends its occupation that it can have a legitimate right to defend its borders. Israel stands in violation of international law and is the aggressor due to its belligerent occupation.

THIRD: The Arab leaders and governments can do more for peace. Many people accuse them of a conspiracy of silence. Most of the Arab people are ashamed of the positions of their governments because they have not used their resources collectively to end the occupation. Sabeel is not talking about the use of force although many of our Arab people do. We believe that the Arab governments could have contributed much more towards a resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict through nonviolent means. Tragically, this did not happen.

FOURTH: Although Sabeel wishes that Hamas and other Palestinian factions had chosen a nonviolent way to resist the Israeli siege, we feel that the disproportionate use of military force against the Gaza Strip and the number of casualties that it produced must be strongly condemned. It is a shame that once again many western leaders have failed to see the deeper issues that are involved. They chose to stand with the occupier rather than with the occupied, with the oppressor rather than the oppressed, and with

the powerful rather than with the weak. It is important to continue the resistance against the belligerent occupation. But we call on our Palestinian people **to abandon the armed struggle and to choose a more potent and effective way – the way of nonviolence.** We can do it and we can win. The Palestinians are capable of setting an example for the rest of the world. This is what we must do; and this is what can restore to us our human pride and dignity.

In fact, we must look to a world where wars, and weapons of violence and destruction would be banned and where oppressed nations would choose the higher moral ground and resist the evil of belligerent occupations by nonviolent means. We hope for a world where a reformed United Nations would never be held hostage by powerful nations, but would enjoy the freedom to establish justice for the oppressed of the world.

FIFTH: We believe that the real message of the Palestinians to the world is a genuine cry for freedom and liberation. The Palestinians did not initiate the violence. The prolonged illegal Israeli occupation is the real cause for the violence in our area. Israel has shut the door on justice. The only way that can guarantee a lasting resolution of the conflict is for the United States' new administration to dare and open the door of justice. We believe that it is the narrow gate of which Jesus Christ spoke. It is the gate that leads to a life of peace and security. **“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** This is the narrow gate of justice. This is the basis of international law. The way of military domination, occupation, violence, and wars is the wide gate that leads to destruction; while the gate that seems narrow and hard is the one that leads to justice, peace and security for both sides. We have tried the wide gate and it has only brought us destruction. It is high time to try the narrow gate of justice so that we might find life.

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