

Let's Talk About Gaza

Interview about what it means to be a Parent in the Gaza Strip

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Interview with Hikmat Yousef, 33 year old father and editor, and Samia Al-Zubaidi, 35 year old mother and journalist. Questions were asked by Bessan Shehada, Project Coordinator of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine (RLS) in the Gaza Strip

How would you describe the situation in the Gaza Strip?

(Hikmat) The situation in Gaza is very hard. The daily life is exhausting, everything is very expensive, and the unemployment rate is through the roof.

(Samia) It makes me feel guilty all the time because I decided to bring two children into this world. I feel like I brought them into a dangerous life, where I cannot protect my children and I cannot provide a healthy or peaceful life for them.

Why is the situation so hard?

(Hikmat) The Israeli occupation controls all the borders since Gaza has been under siege since 2007. Since then, we cannot plan for anything, and the only gate for us to the outside world is the Rafah Crossing, which has been closed by the Egyptian government. Your life in Gaza is completely dependent on the never ending electrical power cuts. Most Gazans are living in poverty and they receive aid from international humanitarian organizations such as UNRWA. In addition to the siege and its impact on all aspects of people's social and economic life, there have been three Israeli military aggressions on Gaza in the past seven

years. This did not only destroy the buildings and the infrastructure, but it destroyed us from the inside too.

(Samia) I cannot provide healthy food for my children because the entire environment in the Strip is not clean. The minimum requirements for sustaining life are not available... no clean water, no electricity, no health care, no playgrounds, no clean sea water, nothing. Simply put, Gaza lives a non-stop life of crisis. What I see in the young generation now is that they have a very limited horizon, because they are so busy thinking about the very basic things that people outside Gaza don't even think about because for them it is typically available. There is no value for human life in Gaza. I remember when I lost my baby, while I was 8 months pregnant, and the nurses did not appreciate my deep grieving because they didn't try to save his soul.

Certainly the Israeli occupation is the event which is responsible for this miserable life that we must endure, and it is the reason why we are losing hope more and more each day.

How do people living in Gaza experience and react to the current situation?

(Hikmat) The daily difficulties and obstacles we face have caused most people here to contemplate emigration. This is not a life we are living. It is not normal that you spend your day worrying whether the electricity will be working, or how to find a job to feed your children. Or, worst of all, thinking about the next time Israel will start bombing Gaza.

UNRWA released a report recently which stated that by 2020, Gaza will be unfit for living... What are your feelings about this? Is it a proper assessment? If it is accurate, what will you do?

(Hikmat) Gaza is not fit for living now! How do you think it will be in 2020? We are living in a convoluted and irresponsible situation. Thousands of people are without houses and the winter is approaching. Many families lost their breadwinners, and thousands of children became orphans while their mothers became vulnerable widows. On the environmental level, the availability of clean drinking water is limited for most Gazans, and the sanitation infrastructure has been destroyed many times over. If we speak about healthcare in Gaza, the hospitals have limited capacities at best, and the functioning hospitals are not enough to serve 1.8 million people in the Gaza Strip.

(Samia) I see my son and daughter in their teens, living in a horrible situation while they should be enjoying growing up. The report says that there will be no life in Gaza in 2020 because the minimum requirements will not be available. This is a very disturbing fact to think about.

What do you think the future?

(Hikmat) I do my best to provide the basic things for my son, but I am afraid of what his future will be like. I cannot see any hope. There is no light at the end of the tunnel that we are living in now.

What does it mean to you to be a father in Gaza strip?

(Hikmat) It means that you will live a very complicated and nerve-racking life.

Have you ever felt that you are helpless?

(Hikmat) Always. I can never forget the last war... my wife gave birth on the first day of the war on Gaza. I couldn't stay with her because of my job, so I left her in her parents' house. After 5 days, she called me at 6:00 in the morning, while she was crying, in order to tell me that the Israeli Occupation Forces will bomb her family's house and she doesn't know where to go with our son. I left my office and took Salah al-Din Street, which was very dangerous, and I found my wife holding my son and running in the street. I lost my mind at that moment. As soon as we reached a safe place, I got a phone call telling me that her parents' house was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike. Until this very day, my wife and I are still suffering from this incident... my wife keeps having nightmares, and suffers from anxiety.

(Samia) In the last Israeli aggression on Gaza, all my sisters and their families were forced to leave their homes and come to my house in Jabalia Camp. We were 40 people living on just 60 meters of space. There was no electricity, no water, and no space to breath. My sister accidentally dropped boiling water on my 6 year old daughter. I took my daughter and had to run outside in order to find a car to go to the hospital. It was an extremely hard time. I can never forget my daughter tears and her screaming.

What are your biggest fears?

(Hikmat) I am very worried about my son's future and my wife's psychological situation after the unbearable experience that happened to us.

(Samia) I am very worried and afraid that I won't be able to get my children out of this toxic environment. I am terrified of the idea that at any moment a war could start and I would not be able to protect my children.

What are your dreams?

(Hikmat) Our basic needs and rights have become a dream in Gaza. I dream to live a normal life...to drink clean water, eat good food, travel, and to have a full day of electricity without cuts. I want to live a life without violence and political pressure. I dream of a life where I am the one who decides what to do, how, and when.

(Samia) I dream that I can bring my kids to a safe place in a healthy environment where they can practice their basic rights easily.

For more information about Gaza situation please see the following links:

<http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/publications/gaza/Gaza%20in%202020.pdf>

<http://gisha.org/gazzamap/395>