

The Cost of Freedom

By Majed Bamyra



Come on Majed, we do criticize Israeli behavior and ask for proportionate response and inquiries into allegations of misbehavior by Israeli soldiers and into settlers' violence, but you know that when it comes to Israel's right to security, our position will always be firm."



We are all presumed guilty and await a sentence of death or arrest that will require no justification except Israel's right to security. Nobody has stopped to think that by proclaiming over and over again Israel's right to security, as an occupying power, one is entrenching the impunity and immunity offered to occupying forces, settlers, and a political and military leadership dedicated to a colonial and criminal agenda.

This is what a diplomat said to me as I was telling him about extra-judicial killings of Palestinians, these repeated filmed murders in the streets, and the collective punishment, including home demolitions and the massive arbitrary arrests. I had asked him why his country does not condemn such actions. I tried to control my nerves after hearing his response and continued: "Most Palestinians who have been killed are killed while participating in demonstrations. No Israeli has been killed during these demonstrations. I personally witnessed such killing by an Israeli sniper as I took part in one of the demonstrations, and I saw dozens wounded by live ammunition. Others are killed, often shot dozens of times, for allegedly attacking trigger-happy Israelis who don't need to provide any justification for their actions. One thousand Palestinians are wounded every week. Israel is trying to break this Palestinian generation by killing hundreds, wounding thousands, and arresting tens of thousands. They even kidnap our martyrs' corpses—even our martyrs are prisoners! How can you justify that, this horrific and inhumane collective punishment?"

My interlocutor had a look of despair in his eyes. He had heard that story so many times before. He knows the

situation well, does not need me to tell him. He doesn't try to respond. We both know there is not much to say. As he left my office, I felt once again how abandoned we were as a nation, left to face our fate, left to face this occupation and its crimes.

How can one explain why so many countries dare to express their support of a colonial power's right to security while completely ignoring the right to security of the occupied people? Why is it that Israel can bomb entire neighborhoods, shoot at demonstrators, arrest children, women, members of parliament, and academics under the pretext of ensuring its security, and we are not allowed to throw a stone to ensure ours? Over 800,000 Palestinians have been imprisoned in the last 47 years. And virtually no Israelis. We are all presumed guilty awaiting a sentence of death or arrest that will require no justification except



Palestinian prisoners.

Israel's right to security. Nobody has stopped to think that by proclaiming over and over again Israel's right to security, as an occupying power, one is entrenching the impunity and immunity offered to occupying forces, settlers, and a political and military leadership dedicated to a colonial and criminal agenda. By allowing Israel to be above the law, the world has encouraged it to continue to act as an outlaw. The Dawabsheh family and Mohammed Abu Khudair, who were brutally burned to death, the more than 150 Palestinians killed since October throughout historical Palestine, and the more than 2,200 Palestinians killed in Gaza during the summer of 2014 are the natural offspring of Israel's right to security.

I think of Ahmad Manasra, bleeding on the floor and being insulted and screamed at by an Israeli settler, and then his scared face while the Israeli interrogator yelled at him. These images will haunt us forever as we feel powerless, unable to protect our own. The 500 children bombed in Gaza, those killed in the streets in Al-Khalil and Jerusalem, or arrested and humiliated and ill-treated. The leader Marwan Barghout, in a message

from behind bars, wrote "Dear Ahmad Manasra, I suffered and spent over 20 years in Israeli jails, I was deported from the country and spent years in exile, I was hunted down and experienced ill-treatment to spare you and your generation such suffering, but unfortunately my dream of seeing you play freely and go to school safely as other children around the world did not materialize. I apologize to you, to the martyrs and prisoners among our children, for whom I sacrificed my freedom and many years of my life." I read these words over and over again and wonder at the cost of freedom for us, and why the occupation costs Israel nothing.

What is the role of a Palestinian diplomat in these circumstances? Is it to fight back on the international front and try to make sure to "besiege the siege" as we used to say when Israeli forces besieged the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon? Is it to spread the truth about what is going on here? Can't the world see the truth? Or does it just choose not to act? And how can we make it act? I always believed and continue to believe that each one of us should pursue the struggle on the front that he/she is closest to and do what's possible to

move us closer to freedom and dignity, independence and return. And I stand on this international front, remembering those who were killed because they were representatives abroad of a people Israel wanted to erase. We are one of those rare nations that have diplomat-martyrs. I wonder how we can honor them. I wonder whether I should be in international fora or take to the streets, or both. I wonder whether I should speak or stay silent to force them to hear the sounds of the massacres that speak louder than any words. All of this injustice should suffice to make people open their eyes.

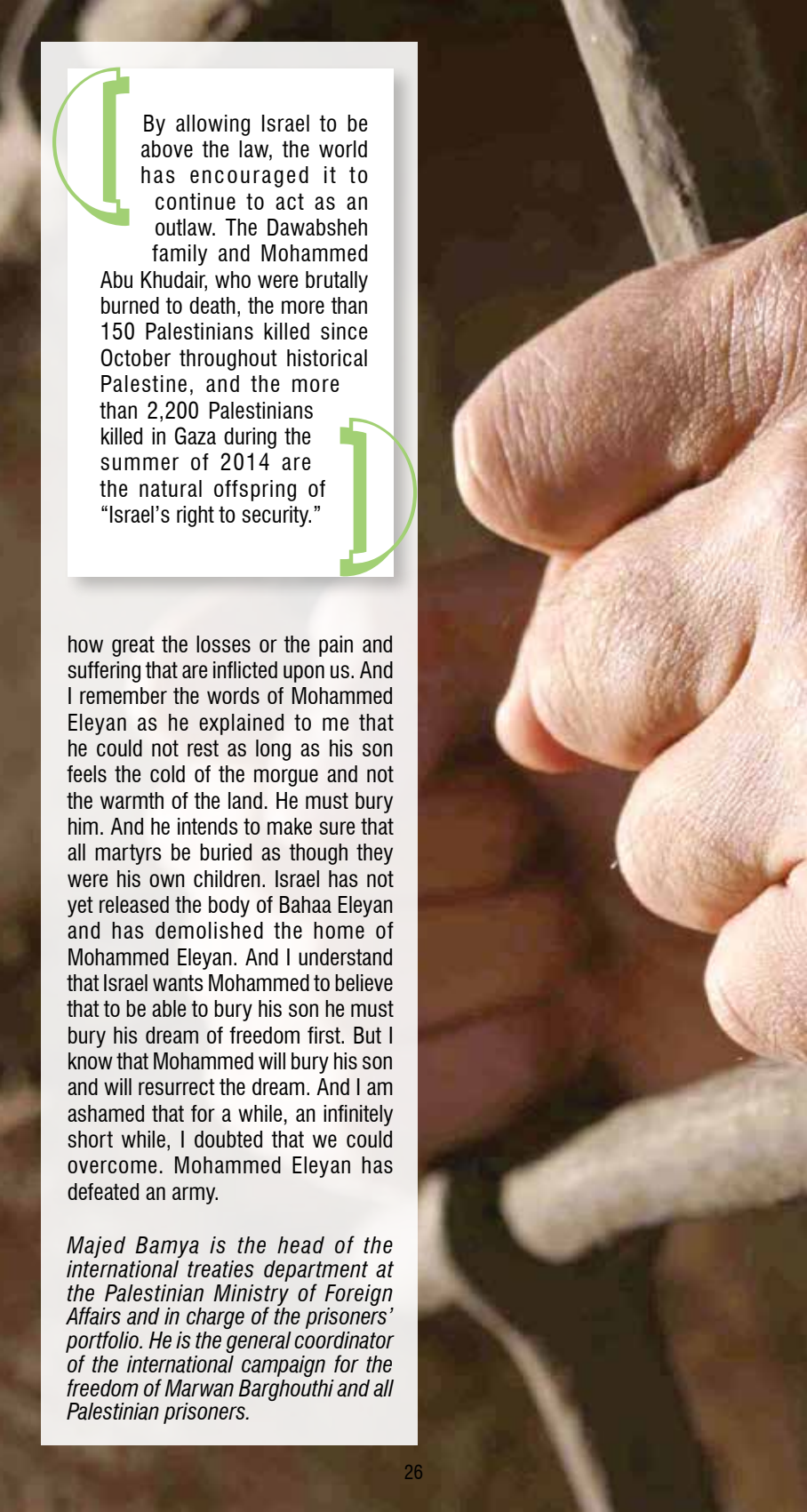
Support for Palestine across the globe is overwhelming. Why is it that we feel so alone? I often tell my colleagues that their being here allows them to understand what is going on and that they do their best to make sure their capitals understand as well. But they should do more. There is a need to intervene, to confront Israel's colonial policies and impunity and to support Palestinian rights. They explain to me what I already know: it is not easy, especially now, as there are so many

pressing issues, Syria, Iraq, Libya, the refugee crisis, terrorism. I look at them, pause, and inevitably repeat, "Does this mean that there will always be a pretext for not taking action?"

Seventy years of injustice, dispossession, and occupation. One generation after the other, we have marched along this long, too long, path to freedom. We have buried too many of the sons and daughters of this land. And we have carried the dream over our shoulders, hoping to allow it to reach the shores of safety. Time and time again the waves were too strong, and we thought that all was lost. But somehow, resurrection awaited and greeted us. I look at the region today, and at the world, and I cannot help but think that a national struggle like ours, deeply committed to reflecting the essence of the Holy Land – liberty in diversity, respect for minorities, and coexistence – in the face of a racist Zionist ideology, distorting history and religion, I cannot help but think that we are not allowed to surrender or be defeated; we are destined to prevail no matter how heavy the burden or



Separation Wall, Bethlehem.



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how great the losses or the pain and suffering that are inflicted upon us. And I remember the words of Mohammed Eleyan as he explained to me that he could not rest as long as his son feels the cold of the morgue and not the warmth of the land. He must bury him. And he intends to make sure that all martyrs be buried as though they were his own children. Israel has not yet released the body of Bahaa Eleyan and has demolished the home of Mohammed Eleyan. And I understand that Israel wants Mohammed to believe that to be able to bury his son he must bury his dream of freedom first. But I know that Mohammed will bury his son and will resurrect the dream. And I am ashamed that for a while, an infinitely short while, I doubted that we could overcome. Mohammed Eleyan has defeated an army.

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