

Welcome Peace, Farewell Fear

By Samar Al Dreamli



Peace brings about serenity, security – and complacency.

The tiny Gaza Strip has much to tell. It teems with contradictions and uncertainties. Here we live in perpetual fear and insecurity. Serenity, peace, and security are synonyms that fail to describe the prevailing conditions in Gaza. Here every living thing that pulsates with life also trembles with fear and anguish over death. How we long for peace of mind, for tranquility, for a calm outlook on life! How we long for security when we deal with each other! For more than a decade Gaza has been a land forsaken by God and humanity. Malaise, fear, and constant vigilance pervade the atmosphere.

Gaza has been crippled because of the blockade and the resulting poverty. Here sorrow never disappears, and joy is never complete. Mourning is constant.

In Gaza we are always on edge and must be ready for sudden unexpected events. Oftentimes, we feel the strong urge to run away. But that is impossible. The people of Gaza know all too well the feeling of strangulation.

Personal freedoms are nonexistent: we have no freedom at home, we cannot choose how we want to bring up our children, and we are prevented from following fashion trends and restricted in our choice of dress. There is no freedom of expression, access, or movement.

How long can we keep our sadness pent up inside? How long can we belong to both war and peace? To what extent can we be ourselves in our unreal world? When will we be able simply to

hold the hand of our sister and walk happily and stress-free in the streets and alleys of Gaza?

What is our identity, what are the features of Gaza – our Gaza? Is it simply the place where we live and the place that lives through us? Its flag, its names, and its features change while we are slumbering. And secretly, the seeds of ISIS are being planted. Life in Gaza stabs us like a knife, and we are dying slowly.

Our daily routine of going to work and returning home is suffocating us. We go to sleep in the dark and wake up in the dark – there is no electricity. We let our children climb into an unlicensed vehicle to go to school, and we feel as if it were the vehicle of death. No one cares, no one is held accountable for the safety of vehicles that carry our children. Traffic is gruesome and accidents are many. Neither drivers nor pedestrians respect traffic rules. Both

Photo by Shareef Sarhan.

Gaza harbor. Photo by Samar Abu Elouf.





Gaza City. Photo by Samar Abu Elouf.

seem to fight over who owns the road. When I get into a taxi, noticing only the dark lashes of another passenger who is wearing a *niqab*, I wonder if this is a man or a woman? It matters. Can I sit close to him or her?

There are many threats to our health. For example, strikes are common in Gaza. They paralyze life completely, halt the collection of garbage, and interrupt the much-needed repair of sewage infrastructure. This creates pollution and the peril doubles. You want to wrap up your lungs to protect them. The sick are afraid because they know that medical equipment is in such a poor state that at any time it can stop pumping blood or oxygen into their bodies. It is a feeling that kills the soul and leaves it in limbo; it neither goes up to heaven nor sinks into the abyss of hell.

Nobody cares about the kind of food our children eat. The fruits and vegetables that fill our refrigerators are colorful

– but rotten. They rot only gradually because they have been injected with all sorts of chemicals. We buy and eat them, and our health deteriorates, but their producers get richer. I must admit that sometimes my hand trembles as I offer fruit to my daughter. She is only two years old, and I do not want her to eat sweetness and poison at the same time.

We are not able to express our rejection of the ruling authority's hegemony, its abuse of power, its lack of discretion when it takes away the few shekels we own, snatching it from our pockets. The Gaza Strip is governed by laws, legal opinions, and customs. Two visible authorities, as well as invisible authorities, control the Strip. However, it is a place ruled by nothing. A refugee who sought shelter here, coming from the hell of Yarmouk Refugee Camp in Syria, described the Gaza Strip as a place "where no one can aim for anything." Nevertheless, the extent of obstinate control over citizens makes

us feel that whatever we own is, by coercion, dedicated to the service of "good governance" and to facilitating the work of the government.

All of us in the Gaza Strip are soldiers ready for martyrdom – not by our choice but in spite of ourselves. This contradiction splits us in half and makes us almost schizophrenic. We need to conclude a long-term truce with ourselves as we confront the conditions that surround us. We have accepted this place as our homeland. Yet we have to be ready for any potential, new, or deliberate aggression against the place into which we were born. And once war strikes, we are trapped. We cannot prevent others from exercising their right to resist nor can we wave our child's white flannel shirt out the window to express our desire for peace – it does no good. So at least let us breathe the air, even if it is polluted, for a few minutes. We did not have that luxury during the 51 days when carbon melted with tears!

It is a conflict that forces us to think about emigration. I am thinking about it and am saving every single penny I can spare. I have even borrowed a carpet from my mother, instead of buying one, to keep our home warm in winter.

Gaza I love you – and I hate you, too!

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This text was translated from the Arabic by Sammy Kirreh.

The Gaza Strip is a narrow piece of land that runs along the southern Palestinian coast on the Mediterranean Sea. It becomes more congested year after year due to poverty, the blockade, and ongoing Israeli assaults. It accounts for about 1.33 percent of the area of Palestine, and has acquired its name from its largest city, Gaza City, which is the second largest Palestinian city after Jerusalem. The Strip has an area of about 360 sq. km., a length of 41 km., and a population of about 2 million.