

As attention focuses on renewed battle with Hamas, Israel and its supporters risk forgetting that the key to security is not the suppression of Palestinian militants. It is a just peace with the Palestinian people themselves.

Palestinians embraced the Oslo peace process 10 years ago, but lost faith as negotiations brought checkpoints and settlements rather than an end to occupation. If the new road map for peace is to have a chance, it must give Palestinians reason to believe that negotiations will lead to a viable sovereign state. Promises are insufficient. Changes on the ground are necessary to inspire trust before the glimmer of hope is eclipsed.

During the past two years, I spent many months in the Palestinian territories collecting interviews for a book (to be published this month). The Palestinians I met were not driven by hatred of Jews. They were ordinary people who simply wanted ordinary lives. They were struggling for the right to live with freedom and dignity in their own land, as their words, excerpted here, illustrate.

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You should watch Palestinian Candid Camera ... they did a Palestinian one on Palestinian TV. They want to be funny, but it is about Palestinians and Israelis. One of the episodes is about a Palestinian guy who is running from the soldiers and he goes from house to house and says, "Can you hide me?" And this is supposed to be funny! The point is that Candid Camera is supposed to be about day-to-day life, and this is day-to-day life for us.

- Azza El-Hassan, filmmaker

We have children who come to the theater to do ballet ... Palestinians have debka, a traditional folkdance. We don't have ballet. But people see ballet on TV, and they see that it is something beautiful. So we brought in a ballet instructor, and people loved it. This is culture. It's learning about other people and other ways of life. So one day, the children were at the theater practicing when they started bombing outside. My co-workers took the girls to take cover in the kitchen during the shelling. Another time, they started bombing when we were in the middle of a drama class. Now children are scared to come to the theater. We have to think of alternative ways to encourage them to come again.

So you see that Israel is not only bombing buildings and the outside of things. They are destroying our insides, too. They are destroying how we work and the strategies we use to go about our lives.

- Khaled Massao, actor

The Israelis piled up two mountains of sand on the road. Cars could not cross, but people could go by on foot. The [Israeli military] could have stopped people from going altogether, but it didn't. Its aim was simply to make things more difficult for people.

At first people were very angry. But after a few days, they adjusted and dealt with the mountains as if it were just another part of ordinary life. People would talk and students would tell jokes as they climbed across. Other people started selling things there, and it became a regular free-market zone.

- Ahmed Abu-Tawahina, psychologist

We're really scared when we get trapped in the school and there is all this shooting going on outside. The principal will go try to reach an agreement with the Israelis so they let us go home. She'll ask them to stop shooting for long enough for us to be able to go out and cross the street. If they don't let us pass, then we end up trapped at school for a long time. If they do agree to let us go, then they won't shoot at us while we're crossing the street. But as soon as we get to the other side, they start shooting again. So then we all just have to run.

- Sana Wazwaz, ninth-grader

I was in the fourth grade when the first intifada started. My school was in an area where there were confrontations, so the Israelis set up barriers to block the road that led to the school. We were able to move the lower barrier but we couldn't move the top one. This made a little open space, sort of like a tunnel.

So everyday, we got down on our hands and knees and crawled through the little tunnel. This was the only way to pass through and reach the school. It was so humiliating. Can you imagine? You and your teacher and your classmates - everyone that has to get to school - crouching on their knees. Our hands and knees would get dirty. Our uniforms and socks would get dirty.

This is something I'll never forget as long as I live. I had to get on my hands and knees every day ... in order to go to school. What more can I tell you than that?

- Suzanne Jarrar, TV reporter

TV is filled with news about funerals and bombings, so I don't watch it anymore. I don't even listen to the radio because they just play nationalistic songs and news about those who've been killed....

But, I also have to live.... One day a student brought a cake to the university to celebrate his birthday. Those days the news was filled with stories about all the Palestinians who were being killed. The students couldn't believe that he wanted to celebrate at a time like this.

We were all talking about it, but then one of the professors told us to stop. He said that this person was committed to carrying on with life, and we should respect that.

- Iman Ashour, college student

Why should Americans care about what is happening here in Palestine? Why do I care about what's going on when people die in Africa, for example? Why? I have enough problems in my country. But I care because I am a human being and I have feelings.

When you suffer, you know what it means. You care about other people who suffer, too.

- Ossama Asad, financial adviser

It is the loss of human dignity that is the worst part of occupation.... It is very sad. Because we are destined to live side by side. We're not going to throw Jews into the sea, and they're not going to get rid of us. I always say that it is like a Catholic marriage: no divorce possible.

So, the earlier this occupation comes to an end, the more lives will be spared. And then there might still be a possibility for reconciliation.

- Samia Khoury, community volunteer

* **Wendy Pearlman** is a PhD candidate in government at Harvard University. This article is excerpted from her new book 'Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intifada.'

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