



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

‘This is our struggle’: Palestinian activist at National Day of Mourning

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Photo: Tess Scheflan

Talk by Palestinian activist Salma Abu Ayyash at the National Day of Mourning in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on Nov. 21.

I call on my ancestors to envelope us here today with their protection and guidance. I call on my father, a Palestinian ancestor who fought for Palestine all his life, to bless my words as I take on this responsibility of speaking to you today, honoring this day of mourning.

I am grateful to be on native Wampanoag land. I am grateful to be on this stage speaking after these Indigenous women and elders.

When my sister Mahtowin asked me to speak to you, I felt my heart expand out of my ribcage. I literally stopped breathing for a few seconds. I want to start by saying that this has been one of the greatest honors given to me. I don't take this responsibility lightly and I don't take this honor for granted.

This gathering continues to be a place where we not only mourn and remember past and current genocides, but also a place where we unite in power in our belief that a different world is possible.

We gather in our conviction that we, humans of all backgrounds, will not stand for supremacy, genocide, and the continued extractive, destructive processes that Mahtowin just talked to you about, and that colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, and greed continue to destroy our planet and humanity.

This is our struggle, our children's struggle, and that of our ancestors before us, and it will be a long one, it will be a hard one, but we will never, never give up our fight for Indigenous rights for land, stewardship, and renewal.

We will never give up our right to fight for Black liberation and reparations. We will never give up fighting for all immigrants and oppressed people across the planet. And I hope you are all with me in our struggle to liberate Palestine.

We Palestinians yearn for a land where Palestinians have self-determination, liberty, sovereignty over our lands, freedom of movement, and to be free from the daily pogroms, killings and incarcerations that have been going on for 75 years and more. A land where anyone, whatever your relationship with the creator or lack thereof, is welcome to participate in building a nation with equal rights for everyone.

I say bring it on. We are a generous, loving people.

The power we need

Palestine was once such a place before the state of Israel was created on 78% of its land. One of its cities, Yafa, was called the mother of strangers because before 1948, it was a thriving Arab port on the sea that welcomed everyone; before European settler colonial invasion destroyed our societies, alienated neighbors, and turned Arab Jews and non-Jews against each other.

Yes, we have a dream, and it will come true because anything short of this dream is accepting a system of genocide and oppression, continued aggression, and settler expansion.

We Palestinians have all the power we need because of you: Indigenous people everywhere, Black and Brown people, the wretched of the Earth, people of conscience. Jewish people who shed their fears and join this mass movement. Working-class people and all people who understand their privileges and the wrongs of all their ancestors. We have all the power because we choose life for all.

Palestinians, in our pain, our disbelief, our trauma: Let us remind ourselves that we have a Native American matriarch sitting in the front seat leading the Palestinian women chanting their hearts out for Palestine on top of an old truck, pulling us forward with her love and perseverance. Let us remember that Indigenous people in our communities made visible what settler colonialism is, why landback is important.

Let us thank the young Black women and men and their elders, writers, artists, educators, who taught us about anti-Blackness and structural racism, including exposing the U.S. carceral system. These same Black young and not-so-young people are marching with us day in and day out, just like Palestinians marched with them after Ferguson, and against the prison-industrial system and police brutality everywhere. Police in many U.S. states and towns, from Boston to Cambridge, you name it, trained by the Israeli army.

Black and Indigenous people's movements made visible the frameworks that allow

us now to speak with clarity and no uncertain terms about the systemic buildup of anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and Islamophobic systems in the U.S. From think tanks and racist institutions and university programs that further imperialist goals of the U.S. and Europe in the Arab world that destroyed Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Lebanon and that continue to destroy and exploit Africa, South America and build their empires on the blood of people of the global south.

I know there is no doubt in your mind. There is no dissonance. There is no paralysis. You know that our struggles are intertwined, sourced from the same well of revolutionary spirit and determination, from the same history of colonization, and from the determination to be free.

Palestinians will acknowledge you always and hold you in our hearts in gratitude, and join you in your struggles, even during this dark cloud of carnage, because it is one struggle. It is our collective liberation, and that is our power.

And now Gaza.

15,271 in 40 days

I wonder, do we really understand what it means when 15,271 children, women, and men are killed in 40 days? Can you imagine it? Or that 4,150 people are still caught under the rubble of buildings hit by Israeli air and artillery.

Look around you. Think of these numbers. I won't recite the staggering numbers of schools, places of worship, hospitals, and civilian buildings destroyed, or the number of journalists targeted and health care workers and teachers killed.

I don't think our brains are capable of absorbing these numbers and this carnage anymore. Can you take watching another video of a child being pulled from under the rubble or a man being lynched by a mob of Israeli soldiers?

We are all watching what is happening in Gaza in horror – the world is watching – but maybe you don't know what is happening in the West Bank right at this moment.

I am a Palestinian from the village of Betar, north of Al-Khalil-Hebron. When I speak with my aunt, she describes to me a scene of terror that has intensified since Oct. 7. Settlers roam with their machine guns day and night. According to the New York Times, there are over 200 killed by settler rampages and over 2,000 injured, including over a thousand who fled from their homes due to these recent armed pogroms.

Some 2,650 Palestinians have been detained by the army in the West Bank. At least 195 Palestinians have been killed and over 2,500 others injured, according to the last update from the Palestinian Health Ministry back on Nov. 15.

There are 171 healthcare facilities destroyed.

My cousin, my aunt's son, is detained. The last time she was able to speak to him was almost three weeks ago. He spoke of torture, of stripping prisoners of their clothes, of taking everything away from them. Not allowing enough food and no access to sun or sanitation. Indeed, this was corroborated by their vile leaders describing the scene with pride.

What's happening in Palestine today is a condensed, horrible version of what's been happening to us on a daily basis for over 75 years.

Mainstream media coverup

I have yet to hear one mainstream media outlet report fully on what's happening, let alone put this carnage in context. Did you hear anywhere that 22 hospitals were attacked, bombed, and rendered nonfunctional or that 66 mosques have been completely destroyed?

Every report from the media should remind you that the Palestinians are a people that have been living under a brutal occupation and that our land has been and continues to be colonized for 75 years. They should also remind you that people under conditions of occupation, transfer, and continued colonization have the right to resist by any means possible and that an occupying power has no right to “defend itself” against the people it occupies. Certainly not with collective punishment of the whole Gaza population that has already been under siege for 16 years.

We reject a state that has no constitution or defined borders, and that has been deemed an apartheid state by two international organizations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and two Israeli human rights organizations. A state that has 65 racist laws discriminating against non-Jews, including a nation-state law that declares the right to exercise national self-determination to be unique only to the Jewish people. And that declares Jewish settlement as the national value and mandates that the state will labor to encourage and promote the establishment and development of Jewish settlement. We all know what that means.

We reject the notion that anti-zionists are antisemites because we oppose and resist a settler colonial state. Palestinians have lived with peaceful Arab Jewish people for centuries. Our fight is against the white European settler project, not against our Jewish brothers and sisters.

We mourn the death of all innocent lives and stand with Jewish people fighting white supremacy and antisemitism in Europe, the U.S., and anywhere on the globe.

Let me remind you that there are 7,000 Palestinian hostages that are now being held in Israeli jails, including 172 children. We know this is not just about hostages. These human losses did not happen in a vacuum. Seventy-five years of dispossession, 56 years of continued murderous military occupation and settlement, and 16 years of siege of the population in Gaza is the root cause of this carnage.

If the U.S. really cared about the Jewish people and their safety, it would have worked to resolve the root causes.

When Biden said, “If Israel didn’t exist, we would create it,” what do you think he meant by that?

Without 34 United Nations Security Council vetoes that the U.S. threw in the face of peace since 1954, making a mockery of the global institution that was created to ensure we preserve our humanity, none of this would have happened.

Without the military aid the U.S. lent this terror machine, including the recent \$14.8 billion, none of this would have happened. Without the U.S. lobby AIPAC that funnels millions into the pockets of our representatives, none of this would have happened. Without U.S. institutions, businesses, and universities that silence Palestinian voices, none of this would have happened.

The true face of Zionism has been on display for decades, but it can’t get any clearer after the past 40 days. Just Google statements by Israeli leaders, starting with Netanyahu, likening us to animals and calling for ethnic cleansing.

The true antisemites

How could the same people whose parents and grandparents suffered so much in their own history turn around and use genocidal fascist tools on another population? How is this good for Jewish people on this planet?

I would go as far as saying that the governments of Israel, Europe, and the U.S. are the antisemites themselves, not those of us who call for liberation and equality for all.

Do not tell me about peace before you recognize that the system of apartheid and supremacy has to be dismantled, just like the South African settler apartheid state

was dismantled. Once that happens, Palestinians and Jewish people can live in peace on the historic land of Palestine.

Anything short of this is blind to the nature of this settler state and its racist laws against non-Jews that have been causing Palestinians great harm for 75 years. Not even a two-state solution is possible before the foundations of the state of Israel that are built on supremacy and colonization are challenged.

I have no faith in any of our senators in office who need to be told to stop this genocide, but we need to keep pressure on them, not let them off the hook. So tell them that you don't support this racist settler colonial state, that a brief ceasefire, even if it gives a few days of respite to the terrorized population, is not going to protect Gazans after that period is over.

Ask them why the sanctity of the lives of our children is any less important than white children. Tell them your tax money, your hard-earned pennies, should not go into war machines. Not in your name. That they should go first for reparations for Black and Indigenous people.

The United States spends more on national defense than China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, Britain, Germany, France, South and North Korea, Japan, and Ukraine combined. What kind of a country is this but a criminal imperial one - criminal outwards towards other nations and criminal inwards towards its citizens who desperately need care?

Shut it down!

Speak of Palestine everywhere because, believe me, our numbers matter. When you speak up, others will, too, and those in power will have to reckon with our voices. Exercise your right of boycott and divestment, even if 35 states have passed laws against this peaceful method of resistance that started with South Africa.

This violence is meant to break us all and make us accept it. How do you put an end to this energy of destruction and rescue what is left of our humanity?

I urge you to take power from this gathering and other gatherings of people of conscience. Our solidarity is everything.

To our oppressors, I say, you can build your dreams on our bones; you can imagine your safety guaranteed through the violence you inflict on us, but we will not stand by. We will resist you until our last word and our last breath.

And to my people in Palestine, I call out to you. I hold your hands firmly, and I kiss the Earth beneath your souls. And I say I am prepared to die for you.

Long live Palestine!



Photo: Rachel Jones

