

## Introduction to the New Gaza Monologues texts, 2024

The following newly written monologues represent the raw, heart-wrenching realities of Gaza people living through the ongoing genocide in Gaza Strip. These individuals, known as the Gaza Monologues Authors, are recognised worldwide; many of whom you have had a chance to connect with in a most profound way through their texts written when they were teenagers and read across the globe in more than 62 countries, in hundreds of spaces, from theatres and universities, through coffee shops and streets, to hospitals and prisons.

Each narrative is a testament to the resilience, pain, and complexity of human emotions in times of genocidal war by the Israeli occupation. These voices reflect not only the struggle for survival but also moments of profound courage, love, and even joy that persist despite the loss of loved ones, homes, and the essence of what it means to feel human. They remind us that even in the darkest times, the human soul seeks light and meaning.

In these new accounts, you will hear about lives torn apart by bombings, displacement, and the brutal hardships of living under an inhumane siege. They speak of loss, fear, hope, and the search for safety and peace in a world where an exterminating war has overshadowed the simple joys of everyday life. The authors of these stories are neither merely victims nor passive survivors. Every moment poses a life-threatening danger, and they continue to face the relentless uncertainty of today and tomorrow.

Connecting the New Monologues to the original *Gaza Monologues* provides an opportunity for historical depth and shows continuity in documenting the lived realities of those in Gaza.

The authors of these stories are brilliant thinkers and leaders full of agency and creativity in the face of oppression, and through their words, they most generously offer a glimpse into the human soul in its most vulnerable yet defiant form, despite having endured more than a year of a colonial genocide.

These monologues are not just about Gaza—they are about the universal longing for safety, dignity, and a future where peace is an international duty towards humanity.. We invite you to read these stories with the understanding that the voices you are about to encounter are real, genuine, and in urgent need of not only the world's attention, but the world's decisive and persistent action to stop this genocide.

ASHTAR Theatre, 2024



For me, the homeland is family, the homeland is safety, and the homeland is the comfort everyone needs in every material and emotional form.

That's why I am now thinking about migration to any place where my family and I can be safe, without the threat of death hanging over us at any moment.

And I don't want anyone to tell me slogans, articles, or advice. What I've seen and what happened to me is not insignificant, and I wouldn't wish for any human being to live what we are living in Gaza, a Gaza that once was beautiful.

## #2 Ashraf A Sossi

11/11/2024

Gaza, the deep wound in my heart, the land and the people being killed under the eyes of so-called advocates of humanity!

What humanity are they talking about when they watch the slaughter of innocent children, women, and elders, while hospitals, schools, culture, and arts are being destroyed?

What humanity is the world speaking of, while our dreams have vanished, our future has been destroyed, our energy dissipated, and our souls and lives drained, all without anyone lifting a finger?

I write now, on the 400th day of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the forced displacement of our people!

I write from Egypt, after I managed to seek refuge here, just as our ancestors sought refuge during the 1948 Nakba.

I recall their pain and suffering. Now I understand the secret behind that sigh and the tear that lingered in my grandfather's eye when we would recall his childhood and youth in the village from which he was displaced.

Now, history repeats itself. Yesterday, they were my ancestors, and today, it is my present. Today, I hope with all my heart that my future does not involve being forcibly displaced from my homeland, or telling my children, with a tear and a sigh, the new Nakba of Gaza!

How will I tell them of the immense joy I felt when I bought an apartment and began preparing it? How I used to finish my work and hurry to it to complete some tasks myself! How I spent hours and days thinking and designing its decor! How I visited every ceramics showroom to choose the design and type of tiles! How I imagined in my mind the paint color and the lighting design! How I was getting ready to marry and start a family, to live a happy life there?

How, how, when the occupation has wiped out the entire residential area, leveling everything to the ground with bombs of death and destruction?

The same bombs that I have suffered from before, and continue to suffer from, which took my brother away...

Now, these bombs are returning to steal the lives of many friends, relatives, and neighbors, and to rob me of my joy and positive outlook on life.

Now, for the rest of my life, I will never recover from the impact of this massacre and genocide, the effects of which will last for generations and generations.

But what matters to me now is that the details of Gaza do not fade from my memory!

Every night, I remember Gaza's streets and its features, and I try to return to them in my mind. The details of the streets, my office, I imagine the taste of morning coffee and the breakfast dish with my coworkers! I hope this doesn't become just part of the past and memories.

And I hope that the international and so-called humanitarian community will fulfill its duties towards humanity in Gaza, and that it will muzzle this oppressive enemy, the thief of our lives, our homes, our properties, and our joy!

### #3 Alaa Hajjaj

11/11/2024

I am Alaa from Gaza, 29 years old.

I had a simple dream: to build a small family in a warm home where we would share wishes and memories, living in safety, peace, and tranquility.

I married Tarek, and after 4 years, we were blessed with a daughter as beautiful as the moon, whom we named Maryam. Together, we agreed to provide her with a positive, healthy upbringing.

Suddenly, everything changed...!

The war turned our warm home into a small tent, pitched on sand, surrounded by hunger, fear, and cold from every direction. We became displaced.

My husband and I lost our jobs!

Maryam's first birthday came during the war, and her second birthday will be in December. I never imagined that I wouldn't be able to protect her from the cold of the tent or from the hunger that was imposed on us.

With my constant fear that the flames of occupation might reach us at any moment, we were displaced more than once, fleeing death. God only knows how many more times we will be displaced.

I used to dream of living in peace, but now my dream is simply to survive!

Today, if the world continues to be deaf, mute, and blind to our suffering, our voice, which has reached with this message, will not exist tomorrow!

I do not want my family and me to become a number that everyone will forget in a second.

We are souls with dreams, hopes, and wishes, and we deserve to live!

This is my message to you, world.



The children were spread everywhere like clothes waiting to dry, but I no longer feel anxious. I was feeling calm.

All the world's leaders said, this war had to stop and I believe them all. Every time I hold a hand or a leg or see a dead body, I believe them. For a year I have been believing them all that the war has to stop and I still believe them.

It's a good thing and a bad thing to be a Palestinian. Because you know the truth about the world. Human rights and all these principles that the world has been talking about, it doesn't apply to everyone. Only the strong ones, they invite whoever they want and for us the unlucky ones we aren't invited to this feast.



## #5 Ehab Alayan

8/11/2024

"I've always spoken quietly, I scream while I'm silent, I express my feelings calmly, I don't react to either big or small things. Everything to me is easy. I love everyone, I rejoice in the happiness of others, and I feel sad when there's an earthquake, flood, hurricane, or even a tsunami in any country around the world.

But in this cursed war, I stopped accepting myself. I regretted everything positive I contributed to life because it betrayed me with all its power and violence. What's the use of the calm life I was living compared to all the noise and psychological destruction I'm going through now, along with my family?

Before the war, I had tailored my life to my own preferences. I wasn't living under anyone's mercy. Anything that bothered me, I removed it from my life completely. I loved theater, music, and I sold makeup and perfumes. I would move like a butterfly between perfume bottles, makeup, musical scales, and the stage, and I had a natural harmony. Then the war came, and time completely stopped! My ambitions in life shrank with the sound of every shell, missile, or bullet. I started moving like a butterfly between gathering firewood and water, displacement, and without any harmony.

From now on, I won't speak quietly. I will scream in everyone's face. I will expose all the people of the world. My problem is with the entire universe, with the world, with people, with the good before the bad. What good exists in this world where people are okay with their homes being bombed on top of them and their children? What humanity, what human rights, and what nonsense? It's all lies, lies, and lies. I've lost faith in everything that breathes. Even the dove, symbolizing peace, betrays and betrays, and the fish in the sea, when I needed it, I couldn't find it by my side.

You've left me with no other choice but to feel betrayed! Everyone deceived us, everyone, without exception, everyone participated in slaughtering us alive. No one left who didn't rejoice in our suffering. The goat fell, and everyone wants to make a profit from it—relatives before strangers, friends before enemies.

For the first time, I feel deceived by my enemy! I knew they were criminals, merciless, hungry for our death and torture, destroying everything without compassion for people's livelihoods, oppressing, unjustly, burning, crushing. But I didn't know they could be so harmful!!! A grudge so deep, so polished, a grudge that's thousands of years old, hell itself has fallen on our heads in Gaza. Everything evil in the world became Gaza.

I never imagined I would live through a war like this, or that my life would be messed up in such a crazy way. I knew there was hatred, hypocrisy, deceit, and betrayal in the world, but never to this extent! Still, I wouldn't wish anyone in this world to live a quarter of what we lived in this war on Gaza.

After a year of war, I'd rather stay silent because no one will listen, and no one will feel anything. I've become more inclined to speak nonsense, just like this world I'm part of. I even prefer that if we want to speak to the world, we should only speak nonsense, because I believe this is the language that must be used to deal with such a world! We saw what happened when we spoke to the world in all languages—what was the result? A shameful silence!

After this war, don't tell me to respect such and such a president or minister. They're all cowards, and I don't find it honorable to talk to cowards. Period. End of story."\*\*

## #6 Tamer Najem

11/11/2024

### A Mess, a Dizziness, and an Endless Headache

I don't know where I am, or even who I am. I feel like I'm in a whirlpool spinning me around, and I'm completely surrendered to it. Sweet things mix with painful things, moments that make me cry and others that make me lose myself. Oh God, where was I, and where have I become? Why? How? And for whose sake is all this happening?

Life has become this equation: me, and only me. I wake up and sleep, unable to tell night from day, and the days seem the same, like a repeated version of one another. The rain comes and goes, the wind carries me wherever it wants, hoping that it's to a safe place. But the safe place is far away now, we are tired, and the roads have worn us down, to the point that we have become a burden to ourselves and to those around us.

I have burdened myself, embarrassed myself, disturbed people without meaning to, and hurt those I love. What I've learned is that the tighter the circle gets, the purer it becomes. Having more is just a burden, and sometimes, being alone is better. But I wonder: Am I dreaming? Or is it an endless April Fool's joke? It feels like I'm living in a hidden camera show... for God's sake, enough! We die in silence, we are oppressed, and no one hears or feels. And even those who feel cannot do anything. We are exhausted by grief, and it no longer matters to think about the small details.

Do you know what a tent means? I don't think you do. Let me tell you: a tent means cold, it means slow death and continuous hunger. A tent means you and ten others sleep in a cramped space, half of you inside, the other half outside, like the remnants of life on the edge of nothingness. You wake up with the morning sun that scorches you with its heat, or with flies biting your body. At night, the cold stings you and makes you forget the warmth of life.

In the tent, there are no secrets; everyone is exposed to everyone else, and families here have no choice but to share as if we are one family. Every morning starts with a new struggle for survival, to secure bread and a little water. We don't know rest here, and we have become like an entire people sharing one bitter dream. Every day is a new story, a new loss, a renewed longing and pain.

This is a whirlwind taking us between places and circumstances, and every place brings with it a new shock, to the point that we can no longer comprehend it. Every day we live with a new hope, but it vanishes like a mirage. We have become like near-naked bodies, empty stomachs, tired minds, and wounded hearts.

As time passed, hope died... and left us alone...

## #7 Rawand Ja'rour

11/11/2024

Every morning begins with a strange pain—the pain of distance and helplessness. It feels as though I am a prisoner, even though I am free, as if my soul lives in a place I cannot reach. Each morning, I wake up to news that shakes me, explosions whose sounds reach me through the screens. But the hardest was Saturday, December 16, 2023.

As usual, I called my family to check on them, to hear their voices and calm my heart a little. But what reached me was far from reassuring. I heard cries, sobbing, and chaos filled with fear. I tried to understand what was happening until I heard my mother's voice, choked with tears: *"They bombed us, my dear, and your father... he's not waking up. May God save him."*

The injury to his head was severe. It left him unable to move, unable to speak, and it stole his memory. My father, whom I had always known as strong, had become imprisoned in a body that no longer responded, his mind absent from the details of his life and the faces of his loved ones.

My daily calls have become heavy; I call to check on them, but I know no one is truly okay.

Remember, what's happening isn't just news. It's the lives of people, the dreams of children, the hopes of fathers and mothers longing for a day of peace. War is not an inevitable fate, and peace is not an impossible dream. We believe there are hearts that feel our pain.

Let there be a share of your hope and prayers for us and our families. Perhaps the world can become a more just and humane place.

## #8 Riham Hejjaj

13/11/2024

"With displacement, the longing and nostalgia for the simplest of rights increases. I have been displaced to nearly all the areas in the south, and each time I try to adapt, memories, longing, and nostalgia let me down. Every time I am displaced, I meet new people, new characters, and we share our daily lives as if we were one family, for there is no such thing as privacy.

The occupation refuses to leave us alone and fights us through food and drink. I long for the simplest of foods! I, who was once called 'the coach,' used to carry weights and iron, but now I carry buckets of water and bread trays to the baker, and still, I try to adapt!

Has the time not come, O world, to stand against this ruthless occupation? Where is humanity? Where is conscience? Where is Arabism?

Is there anyone who will answer?"

## #9 Sami Al-Jarjawi

12/11/2024

I am Sami Al-Jarjawi, a father from Gaza, struggling to survive with my family, seeking safety and stability.

I am a young man from the heart of the beloved Gaza Strip, thirty years old. My life was moving slowly, like anyone dreaming of building a secure future, until the last war came and completely changed the course of my life.

On the 9th of October 2023, at the height of this crisis, I was blessed with my little daughter. She was born to the sound of rockets, bombardment, destruction, and ruin, in a time when even the simplest elements of life were missing. It was as if she was born to tell us that hope does not die, even in the harshest of circumstances. We didn't celebrate her arrival as we had once dreamed.

Our home, which we had spent years building with love, was completely destroyed and turned into rubble. The only shelter we had left was a tent—one that offered no protection from the winter's cold or the summer's heat. We were forced to live in this makeshift tent under harsh conditions unfit for survival, with a severe shortage of food, medicine, and basic needs.

Every day we face a new challenge in this tent, struggling to stay alive, waiting for hope to return our lives and offer my little daughter a better future.

My wife, Thuraya, had been working hard to earn her master's degree, but she had to abandon her dream due to the war and the loss of stability. As for me, I became unemployed, with no source of income, at a time when we desperately need all the help we can get.

Today, I carry the story of my family, a story filled with pain and hope, and I hope to find a hand that will reach out to help us, and that we will regain the safety and stability we have lost.

## #10 Sujoud Hussein

11/11/2024

The fate of the Gazan was exhaustion and suffering, living out long days of hardship. Despite it all, they tried to craft a semblance of a normal day, hoping for a peaceful moment at its end, only to have it shattered by a brutal war that made no distinction between stone and human. In mid-October 2023, most Gazans left their homes, heading towards areas labeled as "safe zones" by the occupation army. My family and I, along with my uncles and aunts, went to Khan Younis in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, gambling with our lives amid airstrikes, the advance of military vehicles, the roar of planes, and even the bombing of shelters.

We had no means of survival, merely seeking safety. In those early days, we kept telling ourselves, "Tomorrow, we'll return." When we needed something essential—clothes, food, bedding—we'd say, "The house is full of these things; tomorrow, we'll go back." But between fear, insecurity, and the cold, we spent long nights—nearly two months—sleeping on the ground, using blankets as makeshift mattresses, thinking this was only temporary.

More than a hundred members of my extended family shared the same harsh reality. We'd wake up in the morning, light fires, cook food darkened with soot, and bake in clay ovens. The first time I got the chance to sleep on a foam mattress, it felt like I had only truly discovered sleep that day. I forgot what peace and quiet felt like and had no private moments to grieve all that we had lost. We didn't have the luxury of protesting our circumstances. We lived through what our grandparents had narrated about their Nakba, tasting the bitterness of existence. We consoled ourselves with the thought that this suffering would pass.

But then, just days later, the occupation ordered all displaced people in the shelter to leave Khan Younis for Rafah, declaring it a dangerous combat zone. We crossed through what they called "safe corridors," enduring indescribable humiliation. The terror of walking between tanks, the mocking glances of soldiers, the fear of being separated from your family, or losing what little you carried—it was a moment of utter despair. We left Khan Younis with nothing but our tears. I cried until grief consumed my heart. We moved to live in a tent. Words cannot describe the first night. The weather was rainy, and I spent the night imagining the tent flooding and wondering what we would do.



I didn't sleep a wink. I had yearned for restful sleep after so many exhausting days, but my thoughts didn't spare me, nor did my sorrow.

My mind was torn between two equally bitter options: should I save myself and leave, or stay with my family in the midst of this war and postpone my wedding until it was over? I thought leaving would bring salvation because everything seemed to signal doom.

After many long months, in March 2024, I left Gaza, my cheeks still wet with tears. I bid farewell to my mother, that giving and kind woman who spent her youth raising us after my father's death, defying life's hardships to see us become better people. Just as her eyes began to shine with pride at our achievements, the war extinguished that light, devouring her body and etching lines of struggle on her face that will never fade. I said goodbye to her, wishing I could melt into her arms and never return to this cruel world.

I made my way to Egypt, carrying in my memory the Gaza I had loved all my life. As I entered Egypt with a driver playing Umm Kulthum's songs and saw the brightly lit streets of Cairo, images of Gaza flashed in my mind—Gaza, more beautiful and splendid than any city. How did it become so gray? The voice of Umm Kulthum brought tears to my eyes as memories flooded back. Her songs had always been part of my conversations with friends—replacing music with stories about her songs, listening to my friends' tales, and sharing my own.

I left Gaza without saying goodbye to my friends, those I used to see so often. The war became an obstacle to my planned departure, one we had envisioned for years. My friends and I had wondered how we would say goodbye and how we would meet again. The war obliterated these visions, making them impossible. Now, I think about how much I need my friends, how much I long to see them. Does the world understand the longing for a mother, sisters, friends—for memories?

I cry looking at pictures on my phone, and then I laugh. These pictures are all I have now—photos stored in a phone's memory. I recall the details of each picture: why I met my friend there, what we laughed or cried about, and how life dealt us a share of hardships that seemed insurmountable to the world. Why couldn't we face trivial crises instead of wearing the oversized garment of war? Why were we denied the choice to refuse?

I tell myself that I am still young and that I have lived and known life. But there are children who opened their eyes to war, who never knew beautiful Gaza or a life filled with opportunity. At least I experienced it, I mock myself—what a "blessing" life has granted me to boast off!

The whole world lives with more than what we had, yet the world found even our little too much for us to have. These children have a right to a dignified life, to education, health, joy, travel. They are no less than children elsewhere—they are, in fact, the essence of this generation, standing firm against all odds. To me, Gaza, with its youth, children, and women, remains the queen of the world, beautiful despite everything.

Now I live alone with my questions, my fears, my anxiety, and my loneliness, far from my family and friends. I've learned that survival is an illusion because fear is a monster no less terrifying than war. I fear the news, the sounds, the inability to reach my family's phone, or an urgent report of a bombing near them. I dread the long hours when my friends are offline, which is the norm in Gaza given the lack of communication tools. These difficult and distressing circumstances are unknown to the world. I sometimes think I've experienced little of it compared to what my mother tells me they endure. Anger consumes me, my heart trembles, imagining how my mother endures such hardship.

These fears and the memories of hard nights in Gaza have shaped me into an angry person, sharp-tongued, intolerant of opposing views. I can't bear to hear the word "Gaza" unless it's spoken with pride and admiration. I ignore and reject dissenting voices, a stark contrast to the person I was before—the one who embraced all opinions and welcomed every perspective. The war changed me; it took away the person I once knew.

What we have lived, thought about, and witnessed is hard to explain, no matter how much we speak of it. It is the unique experience of a Gazan, thrown by the world to face the monstrous occupation, molded into a myth to satisfy the inhumanity within others. One day, the Gazan will cry out to the whole world and care for nothing but reclaiming peace. On that day, the world must prepare itself and not blame the Gazan for the results of his prolonged solitude.

## #11 Mohammad Qasem

15/11/2024

"No one cares, and no one feels anything." That was the last line I said in my monologue back in 2010.

I used to believe that hearts could soften, or that people could care. But the present reality was enough to expose the ugly truths of a cowardly world, full of lies, hypocrisy, and pretense.

I used to wish I could write something beautiful... Beautiful words after suffering... The suffering my country has endured from oppression, racism, and persecution. Our lives are filled with black dates... migration, catastrophe, setback, and starvation.

We don't have the right to live a single moment, to feel that in this world there are rights for the young, for the youth, or for the people who walk on this earth, regardless of who they are?

When I decided to leave the country, the decision was hard... very hard. But after I felt the darkness of the siege increasing, and the smiles of people fading, their laughter disappearing, I thought to myself, "Leave now before you get lost between your feet." The separation was burning, exile was scalding, and my mother's heart, oh my, it was painful... She was afraid her youngest son would be away so long that she wouldn't live to see him and her dream of seeing her grandchildren running around her. She doesn't know that my fear for her is far greater than her fear for me.

Since I arrived in Morocco in 2016, there have been two wars on Gaza, the last one in 2022.

In Gaza, every two years war breaks out, and the situation is miserable, with bombardment ongoing... As much as God allows, hit, strike, hit, and strike.

When I talk to my family during the war, they respond to me coldly: "It's okay... we're fine." Even though every time rockets fall on them... I always say, "May God protect them." Normally, people fear for their children while they're in exile, but we, in our exile, fear for our loved ones back home.

Since October 7, I've been living in a nightmare, and every time I say, "Oh God, let me wake up from it," but this nightmare keeps getting worse and worse. But as time passed, I realised that the nightmare of Gaza is real. We see it, we feel it, and the people live it.

When I talk to my family, I feel immense weakness, but I can't do anything for them... They always ask me, "Where should we go?"

People are running, some carrying their children, others carrying their mothers on their backs, some with their mattresses, and everyone is running. They don't know where they're going, but they feel that the farther away they go, the safer they'll be.

I followed the displacement of my family from Al-Safatawi to the beach, from the beach to the UN schools, from the UN schools to Sheikh Radwan, and from Sheikh Radwan to Abu Iskandar. With every displacement, there were stories and tales full of fear and terror. One day, I felt like the world had turned dark in my eyes. For three days in a row, I couldn't reach my family, and I felt that Gaza was being wiped out. Thoughts came and went: Are they alive? Are they awake? Or are they asleep? Can they even eat or drink? My night was day, and my day was night. I couldn't sleep, not even eat. I lived in my room as if I were a prisoner.

At night, my phone rang... My sister was calling me: "We're fine."

I cried out of joy, and started jumping around the house like a madman. I spoke to everyone just to believe her.

After the call ended, even though I was reassured about their safety, I felt uneasy. Not long after that day, my phone rang at night... And the one thing I hate most is my phone ringing at night.

"Hello... What's going on?"

My sister said: "Look online, what are the symptoms of a stroke?"

I responded, shocked: "Why? What happened?"

"Mom's eyes turned, and her tongue was heavy, and it's 12 o'clock at night. There's no ambulance, and there's shelling everywhere, and the tanks are surrounding the house."

At that moment, I felt broken... It was as if someone had tied my hands and feet and was suffocating me. I felt helpless, weak. I imagined my mother calling me with her swollen eyes, and I was powerless, unable to do anything.

The most I could do was make an appeal:

"If the blood didn't stir something in your hearts, will you at least hear my appeal or even see it?

My mother is from my country, and the country needs an ambulance.

Will you save this country? Or will it meet the same fate as many other countries that die right before your eyes?

The country is patient despite the pain, but the rest is up to you.

Try to awaken your conscience before we lose our country."

And I am certain, no matter what I say, no matter how much I speak, no one will care, and no one will feel anything.

## #12 Mahmud Abu Shaa'ban

9/11/2024

"Loss is extremely difficult, and no one can truly understand it except those who have lived through it. Losing your mother, father, brother, sister, her husband, their children, and your grandchildren all in one day — that's something so painful, no one could bear such a loss all at once. You lose the warmth and tenderness of your family, you lose their voices, everything that belonged to them, you lose your sweet memories, and even your home and the grave where they are buried, a place where you can't go to visit them.

I miss my loving mother and father, who were always by my side whether I was upset, happy, or needed anything. They were always there, sharing every moment, no matter what. I miss my brother, who was more than a brother to me. He always supported me, stood by me, and helped me endure everything. I miss my compassionate sister, who was like a second mother to me. Do you know what it means to lose all of your family?

On October 18, 2023, I received the news that my sister's house, where my family was, had been targeted. At that moment, I didn't know what to do! I felt so powerless, I couldn't do anything except call them. Of course, no one answered. I was terrified. I prayed to God that they were safe. I called my close friends from the area, asking if any of them could reach the place to check on them, but unfortunately, none of them could do anything. I called my aunt who lives near the house, and she told me that the targeting was not on their house, it was behind the house. She tried to calm me down, and I felt a little relieved, but the fear still controlled me. I wasn't reassured. My older brother and I gathered and started making calls to other relatives, each one telling us conflicting information about the others. Some said they had been injured, and others were trying to reassure us. After six hours, all communication was lost, and we didn't hear anything from anyone.

A few hours later, my aunt managed to get to the area, and we stayed in touch with her. That's when the shock hit. That's when she told us, one by one, the names of our family members who had been martyred. Unfortunately, we lost everything we held dear! But the occupation wasn't done with us yet.

A few days after burying them, we received the news that the cemetery where they were buried had been bulldozed. And the occupation didn't stop there. Weeks later, we were informed that our house had been leveled to the ground. The house where I was born, where I lived my childhood, my life, and my sweet memories, every corner of it held a special place in my heart.

Even though I've shared my story with you, I'm sure no one can truly feel the pain and sorrow that I'm going through.

To this day, I'm waiting for the war to end so I can be reassured about my family. To this day, I'm waiting for my family to call me. I miss them so much. I had dreams of getting married and making my family proud, especially my father, because he really wanted to see me happy. I wanted to make him happy and name my child after him; he would have been so proud. The last time I saw my family was in June 2023, and it was the happiest time of my life because it was the first time in years that all of us, me and my siblings, gathered with our parents. They were so happy to see us. Before I traveled, my parents told me, 'God willing, next time you come, we will rejoice together.' But the war stopped everything, and it took the dearest people to my heart. I wish my family were still alive so I could get married, make them happy, gain their approval, serve them with my eyes, and tell them: 'I love you so much, my dearest family in the world.'



## #13 Mahmud Bala'wi

19/11/2024

To all the free people of the world, to all the humans of the world!!!

Enough with the injustice, enough with the death, enough with the silence!!!

My message is for anyone who carries even the smallest part of humanity in their heart. I know you hear about Gaza, but I want you to understand that the situation is beyond words. The war against us is not just about bombing, it's not just about blood... The war against us is genocide. It's a merciless war that kills every one of us, and it doesn't differentiate between anyone.

I have survived several bombing attempts. Our house was bombed, we moved to another house, that house was bombed too, and we lived in a tent. Can you imagine how one can live under the threat of death 24 hours a day?

We can't take it anymore, we are exhausted! We demand that every person who carries even a part of humanity in their heart stop this war, stop the bloodshed that is pouring. Stop killing us. We are human beings, we want to live, just like the rest of the world... just like you!

We are not just numbers on the news. We are not just images on the screens. We are human beings. We are families, we are children, we are mothers. We live in an endless hell.

For us, war is a black shadow that never leaves us. It destroys everything. It takes from us everything precious. Every moment of our lives is now in danger.

We don't just live under bombing; we live under siege. We live with the painful memories of our cousins, our friends, our families, our relatives, and everyone who has been martyred or wounded.

We are in the final stages. We are gasping for breath before they finish exterminating us!

I hope my message reaches you, and that you come to our aid!



## #14 Mahmud El-Turk

13/11/2024

### My Message to the World About the Gaza War 2023/2024

We are still alive, but everything inside us is dead!

Yesterday, I was alive, carrying the hopes and dreams of every thirty-year-old, full of infinite achievements. But today, those dreams have been stolen, and that ambition has been killed. All that remains are memories inside me that never sleep, haunting me every moment. We were forced to leave our warm, beautiful homes and displaced to an unknown path—living in a poor, nylon-covered tent that offers no protection from the summer heat or the winter cold, with no basic necessities of life. I now live the life of ancient primitive humans, gathering wood and anything that can spark a flame, sitting by its fire and smoke to bake a loaf of bread to stave off hunger.

Has anyone ever tried to live the details of their day, their months, or even a whole year, but in ten times the suffering? To live in Gaza means to endure multiplied suffering in all its forms—fear, bombardment, humiliation, repeated displacement, and the loss of family and friends without even saying goodbye, not knowing whether they are alive, either because you were forcibly separated from them, or because the war has drained you and torn everything inside you apart.

We have witnessed stories we never imagined before, films and tales that history will tell to future generations, and you are the witnesses. We've lost the feeling of comfort and security. Our faces have aged prematurely. They are pale, tired, and exhausted, filled with the painful pangs of life.

Now, all we think about and all we dream of is returning to our destroyed homes to live on top of their gray rubble! We have little left to say to the world, to make sure it still hears us! Do not forget us and leave us alone. We are not just numbers in death toll statistics. We are humans, just like you. We love life, we have hopes we wait for and believe in, and we have the right to live in peace and security, to stop the endless cycle of wars.

At a moment of realization, I ask myself: Who am I?

How have I been able to endure all these events?

## #15 Mahmud Najem

11/11/2024

I am Mahmoud, one of the residents of besieged Gaza. I live with my child in a tent after the war destroyed our home and our dreams. I write these words from the heart of suffering and pain, while the sounds of bombardment and destruction surround us. I see in my child's eyes questions I have no answers for, a fear that knows no sense of security, and hope struggling to survive.

Gaza is not just a place; it is our homeland that we love, and we dream of seeing it live in peace and safety. I address this message to all who can hear my voice, to those with compassionate hearts and living consciences, to move and help save us and put an end to this suffering. We are human, we have the right to live with dignity, to be safe, and to give our children the childhood they deserve.

I ask you to carry my voice and the voice of everyone in Gaza, to support efforts for peace and to bring hope back to a land tired of sorrow. We are here, in the heart of pain, believing that humanity and justice are stronger than any war. Please: save Gaza, save our childhood, and save our future.

## #16 Heba Daoud

19/11/2024

I feel like a body without a soul!!!

Before the war, my life was perfect beyond words. I had a small family filled with love, just as I had always dreamed.

I had a home that I built with love with my husband, and I had reached a point in my career that I had wished for.

But I still haven't woken up from a nightmare that has lasted over a year!

I lost everything. It started with the bombing of our house, the martyrdom of my father-in-law, and my brother-in-law, and my husband was critically injured, losing his memory for a month, and his condition was dire. I didn't recover from this nightmare, only to lose my sister, my soulmate, her husband, and her children.

I tried to resist all this pain! The people closest to me and my home are gone, and I must be strong to bear this responsibility. I have two children, my husband is injured, and I have to fight this brutal world.

We were besieged four times, and we escaped each time by a miracle. The last time was when they bombed our house while we were inside. They pulled me out, and I had to walk to the south with my two children while they took my injured husband. That moment was the worst of my life. I collapsed, but I had to stand up to protect my children. I hugged them and walked through a sea of tanks and soldiers. Not one of them had an ounce of mercy. When we had crossed half the distance, they dropped white phosphorus on us, and we almost suffocated. I held my children and ran to protect them.

We reached the south, but we had no shelter, no clothes, no food, neither for my children nor for me. The situation was catastrophic. My husband needed several urgent surgeries as his injury was life-threatening. After suffering and trying, we managed to travel to Egypt, where he underwent the first surgery for his ear and passed the critical stage. At that moment, I thought I would get some rest, but I have not tasted rest since then.

Every time I try to sleep, and before I do, the events replay in my mind, and I break down in tears. And if I do sleep, I see nightmares!

Then came the greatest loss that truly broke me and made everything else I lost seem insignificant. My father passed away because of the war. He had cancer, and there was no cure, which caused the disease to spread throughout his body, and he passed away, strong until the end!

At that moment, I felt like I lost the world and everything in it. I reached the point where nothing could affect me anymore, and in simple terms, (my feelings were wiped out).

Now I am in Egypt, trying to live for my children and my husband, but I am without a soul, without any passion for life—the life that the war has stolen from me!

## #17 Yasmeeen Ja'rou

13/11/2024

The seasons have passed, yet we haven't lived their familiar details. We didn't eat oranges in winter, nor did we buy roasted corn on the cob by the harbor in summer. Even the olives weren't harvested; they were pressed into the ground by the treads of tanks. The earth did not bloom on my mother's grave because spring hid in fear and was buried beneath the rubble.

"Everyone is fine, don't worry. We pulled them out alive. They're now in the shelter school. Calm down, only Salman, Najah, her husband Mahmoud, their son Luay, their daughter Wardah, Asil, Anas, Bakr, Abu Anas, Abu Jalal, Um Jalal, Ahmad, his infant son Osama, Ali, Abu Hassan, Hassan, Zakia, Manal, and her infant son Amir have ascended as martyrs."

"Everyone is fine"—a lie to reassure Salman's wife, Najah and Mahmoud's children, Anas's mother and father, and...

If only they were fine. But from beneath the rubble, they emerged in pieces, buried in temporary graves. Yes, temporary graves!

Are you surprised?

Let me explain: we cannot go to cemeteries to bury them. The people were buried in schoolyards, hospital grounds, street corners, and alleyways.

We will exhume them when the oppression and darkness end. We will unearth them and renew the anguish of separation, the sorrow in our hearts, and the death of hope for their return and reunion. If only the pain had ended with their departure and moved on.

And then, what comes after?

The hungry in the north, the thirsty in the south, exiles without shelter, a reality unlike any other:

Dispersed here and there.

No safety, no peace.

Displacement everywhere.

How long will this persist?

Is change impossible?

And then, what comes after?

Will we continue to lean every night on pillows weighed down with burdens, stained with dark worries and waking nightmares?

And then, what comes after?

Is change impossible, or is permanence inevitable?

We turn over between bitter truths, trapped by thoughts that won't leave us, burdened by the weight of day and night.

O leaders, our souls have aged, and the fragrance of our youth has withered. Faces have grown pale and troubled.

To God, we plead our misery and despair.

To God, we complain of our weakness and weariness.

To God, we cry out against tyranny and injustice.

To Him, we surrender our affairs and their outcomes.

And then, what comes after?

The heart no longer desires life; its cravings have been extinguished. We yearn only for the fog to lift, for the hidden light that will sting our eyes after its long absence—more than a year. It will pain our souls with what we will see in its wake.

Each of us carries a story too vast for the pages of literature to contain, a tale of how we lived, what we saw, and how we survived. Each of us has had our life turned upside down. But the war will end, and the days will bring us back together—if we do not ascend. This is the truth of our faith in God and the firmness of our certainty.

## #18 Yasmin Katbeh

19/11/2024

Hello, I am Yasmin Katbeh, the little girl who had many dreams but couldn't fulfill them because God had written a special story for me.

I am Yasmin, the little girl whose heart was strong and who feared nothing. Death, for me, was something inevitable—it was coming, it was coming. It didn't matter much to me.

But now, my life has turned 180 degrees. I became Yasmin the coward, whose heart jumps at the slightest thing, and the reason for that is that I became a mother. Motherhood changed my life.

In the 2021 war, they bombed the Al-Shorouk Tower on Rimal Street, and I was living right across from it. All the shrapnel flew into my kitchen and shattered all the glass in the house. My dear son, Sufian, was terrified—he was just a year old.

After the terror we lived through, we moved to another place. My in-laws hosted us for nine days. But the bombardment didn't stop. They hit the street where we were, Al-Kanz Street. I remember the moment I looked into my husband's eyes and made him promise to take care of Sufian. It was the hardest moment of my life—when you have to entrust your child to someone because you don't know whether you'll live or die.

After the ceasefire, my husband and I decided to go to Russia, my mother's country, to get citizenship and then return with hope to our homeland. Once we arrived, we felt relief, at least we were safe. But then came the difficulties of being in exile, not adjusting, and feeling like we didn't belong there. We comforted ourselves by believing that we would definitely return.

But after October 7th, all our dreams collapsed. When the October War started, I was pregnant with my second son, Yousef, in my ninth month. With all the news and events, I couldn't stop crying, to the point that my husband took my phone away so I wouldn't see the body parts and destroyed houses. From the first month of the war, my family's home in the Palestine Tower was bombed, and I couldn't breathe—the oxygen ran out. What saved me was my 3-year-old son, Sufian. He held me and hugged me until I could breathe again. My husband reassured me that my family was fine. He said: "They're all fine, don't worry, I called them and they're safe."





In Gaza, there's no one who hasn't had their home destroyed or bombed. A year passed, and my son turned one, and the war still isn't over. Inside me, there's always a battle. One voice says, "The country is lost, there's no going back," and another voice says, "Gaza will return, even better than before."

Many dear ones remain in Gaza. Thank God, I haven't lost anyone in this brutal war. At the same time, I thank God that my children are safe. I'm afraid that my children will one day think Russia is their home and forget Palestine and Gaza. I fear they'll grow up like children of foreigners who don't speak Arabic.

I hope Gaza returns, and may God compensate our people in Gaza and have mercy on all the martyrs, Amen!

## #19 Ali Abu Yaseen

8/11/2024

### My Message to the World

- My mother screamed, "Oh my flower! What is your son doing, Sheikh? He's bringing us shame and disgrace with his nonsense!"
- "Leave him, oh my beautiful one, let him talk nonsense. Before I became a Sheikh, back in my youth, I had a folk dance troupe in the village, and I used to play the 'Arghul'."
- "So, you're not bringing in light from outside?"
- "What? What? What word did you swallow? (She meant the light, as in 'Noura')."
- "I didn't swallow anything! You're free to do as you please with your son. And take your word from the neighbors! What about 'Tantina', Ali? Tantina?!"

I believe this was the first time a 'oud' (a traditional Arabic musical instrument) entered the Beach Refugee Camp. I was 13 years old. Whenever I wanted to take my 'oud' outside the house, I would wrap it in a blanket—one we received from UNRWA as part of the winter aid, which included clothes and blankets—and it felt like I was hiding a corpse.

I bought the 'oud' by working on our land in the occupied countryside when I was just 13, saving up for it. I remember it cost 200 Jordanian dinars back then. Of course, I first started working at the age of 10.

When the war broke out on 7/10/2023, we fled from the Beach Camp to Deir al-Balah on 11/10/2023. We took with us just a change of clothes, thinking we would stay for a couple of days, a week at most, and then return. That's why I left my 'oud' on top of the wardrobe, and I placed a pile of clothes underneath it, so it wouldn't get damaged by the vibrations from the bombing. I made sure it was secure and left the house. The 'oud' was the last thing I saw in the house before leaving. I never imagined, nor did anyone who fled Gaza to the south, that the war would last this long. Now, it's been 400 days—13 months in exile. I can't stand being away from my 'oud'. For the first time in all this time, I haven't played or sung! 400 days, and I spent most of them crying for the loss of my family, friends, neighbors, the children, and the scenes of people on the streets. Everything about war drives you to tears—no, it drives you to madness.

I've often seen people wandering aimlessly, losing their minds, going mad. The truth is, I no longer know who is more insane: us or the world watching what's happening and staying silent, not rising up as an entire country is being wiped out? I don't want to talk just about the war and our condition, I want my 'oud' and my voice back so I can sing. I often dream that I'm playing it, and wake up to find my fingers moving on the strings of the 'oud'. Give me back my 'oud' and my voice!

Another tragedy is that for the last 35 years, I haven't left the stage—whether as an actor, director, writer, or trainer. I've never stopped working in theater. All those years, I worked continuously. How is it possible that in 400 days, I haven't performed? I haven't stood on a stage! The theater is my second home—I've spent more time there than I have at home with my family. Bring me back to the stage! I know Israel has bombed and destroyed all the theaters. But just stop the war, and we'll perform in the streets! We don't need a stage, or sound, or lights, or decoration. Just leave me, the audience, and the street. I know the occupation has destroyed the streets as well, but we won't be defeated. We'll find a rooftop, one that was swept by the wind and hasn't exploded. We'll climb to the top, and I'll perform the show while people watch from around the ruins. In this very performance, my 'oud' will accompany me as a substitute for music and all the other necessary elements. It's a great idea, don't you think?

If the war ends and I'm still alive, I'll do that. That is, if I can find the 'oud' in its place on top of the wardrobe. And if I find the wardrobe at all—because the top floor of my house has been destroyed. This is what I saw in the video my friend sent me of my house—Amjad, my son's apartment, which he had been preparing to marry in and live in, was completely destroyed.

Back to the subject: I'm sure this show will attract the press—Theater, destruction, and an audience made up of children, women, youth, and elders—a beautiful cocktail, what a sight! The audience can sit however they like or stay standing. They have a lot of options—there's a broken column, a destroyed child's bed, a flipped and warped cooking pot, or a broken tree stump. The important thing is to stop this war and take me back to my home. I've never been away from my home for more than three months. I can't stand it. Take me back to my library, to my world, to my theater, to my 'oud', to my audience. I miss them, and I miss myself! It's been 400 days of being lost. Take me back to where I belong. I've forgotten who I am. Does this war ever end, or what?!