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Dear World: This is What Palestinian Unity Looks Like



Image by Sohaib Al Kharsa.

Even those of us who have long emphasized the importance of the Palestinian people's voice, experience, and collective action in Palestinian history must have been shocked by the cultural revolution resulting from the Israeli war on Gaza.

By cultural revolution, I mean the defiant and rebellious narrative evolving in Gaza, where people see themselves as active participants in the popular resistance, not just mere victims of the Israeli war machine.

When the ceasefire was announced on the 471st day of the Israeli genocide, Gazans rushed to the streets in celebration. Media outlets reported that they were celebrating the ceasefire, but judging by their chants, songs, and symbolisms, they were celebrating their collective victory, steadfastness (sumud), and resilience against the powerful Israeli army, supported by the US and other Western countries.

Using basic means, they rushed to clean their streets, clearing debris to allow the displaced to search for homes. Though their homes were destroyed – (90% of Gaza's housing units,

according to the United Nations) – they were still happy, even to sit on the wreckage. Some prayed atop concrete slabs, some sang in large, growing crowds, and others cried but insisted no power could ever uproot them from Palestine again.

Social media was flooded with Gazans expressing a mix of emotions, though they were mostly defiant, expressing their resolve not just in political terms but in other ways, including humor.

Of course, the bodybuilders returned to their gyms to find them mostly destroyed. Rather than lament their losses, they salvaged machines and resumed training amid collapsed walls and ceilings punctured by Israeli missiles.

There was also the father and son who composed a song in the *ahazej* style, a traditional Levantine vocalization. The son, overjoyed to find his father alive, was reassured by his father that they would never abandon their homeland.

As for the children – 14,500 of whom were killed, according to UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) – they resumed their childhood. They claimed destroyed Israeli tanks in Rafah, Beit Hanoun, and elsewhere as their new playgrounds.

One teenager, pretending to be a scrap metal salesman, yelled, “An Israeli Merkava tank for sale,” as his friends filmed and laughed. He finished by saying, “Make sure you send this video to (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu,” before moving on, unfazed.

This does not mean Gaza is free of unimaginable pain, which is difficult for the rest of the world to fully comprehend. The emotional and psychological scars of the war will last a lifetime, and many will never recover fully from the trauma. But Gazans know they cannot afford to grieve in the usual way. So, they emphasize their identity, unity, and defiance as ways to overcome grief.

Parallel to its military assault on Gaza since October 7, 2023, Israel has invested heavily in dividing the Palestinian people and shattering their spirit.

In Gaza, it dropped millions of flyers from warplanes on starving refugees, urging them to rebel against Palestinian factions by providing Israel with names of “troublemakers.” The Israeli army offered large rewards for information, but little was achieved.

These flyers also called for tribal leaders to take control of their areas in exchange for food and protection. To punish those who resisted, Israel systematically killed clan representatives and councilors who tried to distribute aid throughout Gaza, especially in the north where famine was devastating.

Against overwhelming odds, Palestinians remained united. When the ceasefire was declared, they celebrated as one nation. With Gaza destroyed, Israel’s actions obliterated Gaza’s class,

regional, ideological, and political divisions. Everyone in Gaza became a refugee; the rich, poor, Muslim, Christian, city dwellers and refugee camp residents were all equally affected. The unity that remains in Gaza, after one of the most horrific genocides in modern history, should serve as a wake-up call. The narrative that Palestinians are divided and need to “find common ground” has proven false.

With the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank aiding Israel’s war on Jenin and other refugee camps, the old notion of political unity through a merger of the PA and various Palestinian factions is no longer viable. The reality is that the fragmentation of the Palestinian political landscape cannot be solved through mere political agreements or negotiations between factions.

However, a different kind of unity has already taken root in Gaza and, by extension, across Palestinian communities in occupied Palestine and the rest of the world. This unity is visible in the millions of Palestinians who have demonstrated against the war, chanted for Gaza, cried for Gaza, and developed a new political discourse around it.

This unity does not rely on talking heads on Arabic satellite channels or secret meetings in expensive hotels. It needs no diplomatic talks. Years of endless discussions, “unity documents,” and fiery speeches only led to disappointment.

The true unity has already been achieved, felt in the voices of ordinary Gazans who no longer identify as members of factions. They are Gazzawiyya. Palestinians from Gaza, and nothing else.

This is the true unity that must now form the foundation of a new discourse.

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