



Qalandia Checkpoint

For those people who think that what is happening to the Palestinians is not apartheid or ethnic cleansing or genocide, ask the Palestinian parents who have just lost their children, the Palestinian families who are watching bulldozers rip into their homes, the Palestinian children who are too afraid to go to school, the elderly and the handicapped who are too afraid to stay at home, the Palestinian mothers who have lost their babies, the Palestinian children who wet their beds, the half-alive Palestinians without legs and arms and only half their face.

Ask the Palestinians who have collapsed from heart attacks and strokes because ambulances are not allowed through. Ask Palestinians who must scramble over torn up bitumen and take the long way round while Israelis zoom along modern highways built only for their use. Ask the Palestinians who are spat on and ridiculed, stripped, taunted and humiliated in front of the waiting crowds by the Israeli soldiers for whom it has become a sport.

Ask the Palestinians who come home weary from all that waiting and all that shame to find their family homes reduced to rubble, their children sobbing, their possessions scattered and buried. Ask the Palestinians who come back to the

ruins of their offices and their schools only to find walls and files and books and pictures smeared with soldiers' excrement and fouled with their urine. Ask the thousands of Palestinians who have been woken at gunpoint in the early hours of the morning and herded outside. And then ask the families how they feel when their fathers, brothers, grandfathers, and sons are bound and blindfolded, beaten up and taken away and then killed or jailed or simply disappear without a trace.

Ask the Palestinians how they feel when they hear the rumble of 200 Israeli tanks mass along a 9 kilometre stretch outside their cities. Ask the Palestinians if they shudder when they hear the scream of F-16 bombers slice the skies, or hear the whirr of Apache helicopters hovering overhead. Ask the Palestinians how it feels to have a gun pointing at you when you have been waiting at the checkpoints in the hot sun or the bitter wind and icy rain for hours.

Ask the Palestinians what it is like to be stateless, to have no papers, no passport, no legitimacy. Ask the Palestinians who apply for a *laissez passer* allowing them to travel overseas, what it is like to be refused re-entry by Israel if they are late for any reason. Ask what it is like to then have to move from country to country because no one will accept you as a citizen. Ask the Palestinian refugees who are languishing in camps without any future or hope for their children because Israel refuses to allow them to return home. Ask Palestinians who have tried to seek asylum and have been told that they must be held in detention for the rest of their lives because Israel will not accept them and neither will any other country. Ask the Palestinians who "write born in Palestine" on forms when it really was Palestine and have it crossed out

because no such place is recognised even though legally and actually it is right.

Ask the Palestinian workers who come home empty-handed because a wall rises between them and their jobs, the Palestinian farmers whose crops are rotting on trees they cannot get to and whose farming land has been turned into roads and Israeli settlements. Ask the men who wait at gates in the wall to open, sometimes all day, to tend to their land so that Israel cannot use the Absentee Laws against them.

Ask what you would say if all this was happening to you and every door to freedom was slammed shut forcing you to stumble from one dead end to another. Ask what you would do, what you would accept. Ask if it is human and if you could see it done even to the least of mankind.

You might well ask the Palestinians to make the concessions for the sake of peace: to desist from violent resistance; to give up the right of return; to forfeit East Jerusalem as their future capital; to agree to Israeli control of their borders; to accept the Jewish settlements, the Israeli-only roads and military posts in their midst; to agree to a Wall that separates them from those they love; to accept that they can never own their own piece of land or their own house; to suppress the feelings of humiliation and shame that they have borne for over half a century; and then what? That is really the question.

Forty years of oppression and almost sixty years of dispossession are too many years of pain for any human being. It is time for the Palestinians to be released from Israel's vice-like control. It is time to balance the scales of justice. It is time to stop killing the Palestinians.

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This monthly newsletter is dedicated to bringing out the humanitarian stories behind the suffering people of Palestine.

The newsletter is a not-for-profit media release and your support would be really welcome and most appreciated.

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