

Dr. Alma Itzhaky, artist and researcher, Israelis for Peace
Speech at the rally “For a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel”
October 18, 2024

I speak here today on behalf of our organization, Israelis for Peace. As Israelis living in Germany, we have been demonstrating every Friday for almost a year now in front of the Auswärtiges Amt with a clear demand: stop weapon deliveries to Israel and impose a ceasefire. Of course, we are just one small group out of the numerous organizations and hundreds of thousands of people who have been demonstrating in Germany throughout the year. And I am excited to see so many people standing here today to demand an immediate ceasefire and a just peace.

But I am also furious; furious that one year on, we will still have to be demonstrating for this elementary, minimal demand: that Germany stop its support for what are indisputable war crimes and crimes against humanity, the worst the world has seen in this century.

This war must stop first and foremost for the sake of the Palestinians, who are living through these unimaginable atrocities, and for the sake of the Lebanese – but it must also stop for the sake of Israelis, for us and our loved ones back home.

What future does Israel promise us? A future of endless war. Our so-called “moderate” politician Benny Gantz said a few months ago that children who are now 12 will still be fighting in Gaza, in the West Bank, and in Lebanon. I will not have that future for my son; nor for anyone’s child. Israel’s leaders, all of them, tell us that we have no other choice, that if we want to live, we must live by the sword. They tell us this lie when there have been so many different choices we could have made, so many opportunities, which Israel rejected one after the other.

Israel rejected peace. It refused diplomatic solutions, justice, and reconciliation – throughout this horrible year and all the decades before it. Our leaders chose war, again and again, not for our security but for their political survival, and out of their fundamentalist, Jewish supremacist ideology that refuses to acknowledge Palestinians as equal human

beings. But this remains the only truth, and the only solution there is: only when the two peoples living in the country will be free, only when they have equal rights and equal share in determining their lives and fate, will our children have a future other than killing and being killed.

Warlords thrive on war, and this government – the most extreme, most authoritarian, and most contested there ever was in Israel – has used these long months of war to tighten its grip on the levers of power, to oppress and silence dissent, to bridle the press, and to poison the hearts and minds of Israelis with genocidal propaganda. They used these months to hand out guns, hundreds of thousands of firearms to terrified citizens. How long before these guns kill women and children inside Israel – as always happens when people keep a gun on their kitchen counter? How long before these guns are used against demonstrators?

The extreme, right-wing settlers leading this government used the war to grab more land in the West Bank, to build more settlements, and now, after killing tens of thousands and reducing Gaza to rubble, they are ethnically cleansing north Gaza to prepare it for permanent occupation. These war criminals, these mass murderers, have as little scruples about sacrificing the lives of their own citizens – they are sacrificing the lives of the hostages to destroy Gaza, and they are risking every person in Israel and the entire region to ignite an imperial war against Iran and its allies.

These criminal leaders tell us that only military strength and victories will bring us security, but I don't think that anyone in Israel believes them anymore, not after October 7th. That mighty Israeli Army, with all its overwhelming technological advantage, could not protect thousands of citizens attacked in their homes on that day.

Like anyone who has family in Israel, I am afraid for their safety. Like anyone else, I would like to make sure that such a heinous massacre of civilians could never happen again. But I refuse to accept that security for my family must mean death, starvation, and endless terror to millions of other families who are no different from mine. Regardless of the terrible crimes our and their leaders committed, we all deserve to live in safety and freedom.

But this lie, that we have no choice, is also a self-fulfilling prophecy: we have gone so far down the road of killing and destruction that it does seem, sometimes, like all other options are lost; it does take much courage and faith to imagine, where we stand today, a different future. And that is why Palestinians and Israelis who are fighting for peace and justice – the two of them together, and not apart – are weaker than ever.

We cannot reopen this path by ourselves; we cannot rebuild these possibilities only from within. Only decisive international action can push in this direction and create a new political reality – first of all, by ending the war, and then by enacting the recent UN decision stating that the occupation is illegal, and all the previous international decisions about the Occupied Territories and the rights of the Palestinian people. It is the responsibility of Olaf Scholz, of Annalena Baerbock, and most of all, of Joe Biden, to end the war today, and to respect international law and justice.

Violence and dehumanization never stop at the border; they always turn around to affect those who inflicted them on others. Israeli society is already sick and crumbling with them. No matter what happens next, the atrocities that our society committed in Gaza will haunt us all our lives. But we must do everything in our power to end them, now, if there is to be any hope for a different future for Palestinians and for Israelis.