

LETTER

Spotlight on Gaza: February 2024

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I am a female psychotherapist of South Asian origin with many relatives residing in the Middle East.

I owe it to the people of Gaza at the very least to share my thoughts about the unrelenting trauma that has emerged in Palestine since October 7th, 2023. I am, like many colleagues, extremely distressed and disillusioned. The disproportionate response from Israel to defend itself following an attack from Hamas is evident from the existing death toll of innocent civilians, which has now reached a staggering 28,000, and 12,000 of those are children. This currently leaves 1.8 million Palestinians displaced, with many unaccounted for and lying under the rubble. We also cannot ignore the fact that thousands have been illegally detained and have been living in a chronic state of apartheid for over seventy years. It is therefore no surprise to see the outright condemnation of South Africa toward the atrocities being committed in Gaza.

Many of my clients have expressed how our therapy sessions have been a place where they can *safely* explore the depth of both their anger and helplessness because they have been shunned in their workplace. They resort to accessing social media groups where they feel identified with others and can freely raise issues about events in Gaza. Though this can be a positive tool, it also displays the darkest side of human suffering in the most graphic detail. There is the example of the orphan boy who arrived at Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza clutching a bag tightly; devoid of all emotion he explained to the doctor that it contained the body parts of what was left of his parents and other family members. He will be traumatized not for months but years to come like thousands of other Palestinian orphans.

Certain people from the world of news and media feel that the spotlight on the war in Ukraine has diminished. This is not the case; it is simply that in the 21st century we are witnessing an ethnic cleansing of such catastrophic magnitude that the International Court of Criminal

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Justice has condemned Israeli politicians for regarding international law with contempt and is subsequently investigating them for alleged war crimes that equate to a 'textbook case of genocide'. As I write, I hear that troops are continuing their ground offensive with even greater ferocity, blocking urgently needed supplies from United Nations convoys. There are daily acts of violence against Palestinian farmers in the West Bank whose only livelihood comes from growing olives. Palestinians who have recently been referred to as 'animals' by their oppressor, are so hungry they are now resorting to eating animal feed. The United Nations has reported 800,000 cases of serious infection leading to malnutrition.

We saw the immediate response of both the UK and European Union toward the Ukraine war. Their condemnation of Russia was unanimously swift; yet they largely chose to abstain from voting for an immediate cease fire in Gaza. Ukraine's children and families were warmly invited to the UK to be housed and settled. Where is the urgent drive to invite the orphans of Gaza? It is insidious but the unconscious racist element is prevalent. Human beings gravitate toward people who look like them.

I never thought that in my lifetime I would witness a genocide that is being allowed to continue. Powerful, economically robust nations watch on while we may see the possible voluntary expulsion of the remaining population of Northern Gaza. I am often at a loss for words at peace marches when young children ask me why no one puts a stop to the annihilation. It seems that in the 21st century we have made great strides in technology but choose to ignore the lessons of the past.