

An Israeli Voice Supporting Palestinians

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The first time I met Tuvaal I was just a wee young kid. She was working in Scotland and was attending the same left-wing socialist gathering my father and I were at. We remain in touch.

She is Jewish Israeli and a vocal socialist activist in Israel and a member of the Israel-Palestine section of International Socialist Alternative. She fights for various causes, including Palestinian human rights – and when I spoke to her recently, she described her anger and frustration with the recent events inside Israel and the illegally occupied territories. During our lengthy conversation she explained her understanding of how the sequence of events unfolded that led to the increased brutal violence against Palestinians in the past few weeks.

Before the vicious Israeli attacks against Palestinians, Tuvaal talked positively about the many jointly held demonstrations that had taken place, between Israelis and Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah district in Jerusalem, against the planned evictions of Palestinian residents.

She pointed out that racist laws, for instance, allow a right-wing NGO to buy the homes of Palestinian families, kick families out and let Jewish settlers move in their place.

“I view these laws as enshrining ethnic cleansing,” she asserted.

“For the past few weeks, Palestinian youth have been heroically defying the Israeli regime and its armed forces; first, protesting against provocations by Israeli police in Al-Aqsa mosque, protests which despite being answered with brutal oppression, won victories against the police. Then, the protesters moved to demonstrate against the evictions in Sheikh Jarrah. Attacked by both Israeli armed forces and the neo-fascist settlers, the protests persisted, in turn, inspiring many more protests around the world.”

During a recent demonstration called, ‘Stop the expulsions in Sheikh Jarrah – oppose the war on Gaza’, saw more than 200 Jewish and Palestinian protestors, peacefully marching together around the neighbourhood, meeting families who were about to be evicted. They chanted in Arabic and Hebrew, “Settler thieves, leave our homes!” and “No to Israeli armed forces and settlers in Sheikh Jarrah – No to the occupation”.

Tuvaal described the feeling of unity and solidarity – and then came the brutal and vicious Israeli response.

“Israeli armed forces decided to violently disperse the peaceful protesters – a deliberate act of provocation. While the settlers stirred up trouble, the armed forces attacked Palestinian youths, and fired stun grenades and water cannons targeting the protesters. The use of stun grenades caused many injuries.”

After the violent dispersion, Tuvaal confirmed Israeli settlers “had fired live ammo at the Palestinian residents’ homes.” At this point in our conversation Tuvaal wanted to make clear that she condemned any attack on civilians, whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians.

When I asked about the current mood of Israelis, Tuvaal admitted the Palestinian response to Israeli brutality had stirred up a nationalist mood amongst Jewish Israelis – and then went onto say that this isn’t very difficult to do considering the entrenched right-wing political landscape of the nation and the lack of a strong left voice.

She described how far right forces, including settlers in mixed Palestinian and Jewish cities and neighbourhoods, as well as organised settler forces from the settlements in the West Bank, have exploited the current events – using it as an opportunity to increase violent attacks on Palestinians and to undermine the coexistence of Jews and Palestinians in these cities. Specific incidents of brutal violence have been witnessed. The horrific shooting of a young man in Lyd by settlers. The horrifying lynching of a taxi driver in Bat Yam, who was beaten for an hour by a mob – and the police nowhere in sight.

“The Israeli police are also responsible for causing provocation and unrest in Palestinian cities and villages. They violently attack protestors against the war on Gaza. Whilst they defend the violent actions of settlers, they carry out their own actions of violence against Palestinians.”

Although many Israelis support the actions against Palestinians in Gaza, many in the Jewish community are opposed to the “racist attacks” against Palestinians in ‘48 territories’.

“Jewish bus drivers have been escorting Palestinian colleagues to their homes and ensuring their safety. Unions have strongly condemned the violence against Palestinians and have issued messages published across many social media platforms of solidarity between Palestinians and Jews. Our task on the socialist left is to broaden the message: from solidarity with neighbours and colleagues, to solidarity against the brutal attacks on Gaza and against the bloodshed instigated by the Israeli regime.”

Although the current ceasefire has been welcomed by all parties, Tuvaal stresses that Jewish activists, although small in number, remain firmly opposed to the Israeli regime and its brutal actions and policies targeting Palestinians. They are trying to expose the regime and highlight the ongoing crimes it is committing. The challenges are there. The Israeli media, for instance, “is firmly aligned to the Israeli leadership and army propaganda.”

“The ceasefire would not have been achieved without the fearless, determined mass movement of Palestinians, including the inspiring one-day general strike held a couple of days before it was announced. It also wouldn’t have been achieved without the incredible solidarity movement, with mass demonstrations held all over the world.

However, the ceasefire does not mark the end of the Israeli state's aggression towards Palestinian people – the occupation, siege, ethnic cleansing, house demolitions, and poverty. But it also does not mark the end of rebellion against these oppressions. The mass movement continues on Friday, after the ceasefire was announced, mass demonstrations were held in Al-Aqsa, in the West Bank, and in Umm El-Fahm (inside 48 borders). The evictions in Sheikh Jarrah still loom over the families' heads – but the weekly protests will continue. We, socialists – Palestinian and Jewish – who oppose the occupation, will continue fighting against it, wherever and however we can."

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Shahbazz Afzal is an independent writer and political activist.

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