

# Remembering Shulamit Aloni: Israeli MK, Peace Advocate and Outspoken Critic of the Apartheid

"What we do in (Gaza) and the West Bank is worse than all pogroms done to Jews"

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

Global Research, January 27, 2014

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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On January 24, longtime Israeli MK, minister, human/civil/women's rights champion, and outspoken critic of Israeli apartheid passed. She was 86.

Her roots were Polish. Her parents were rabbinical family descendants. She was born in Tel Aviv.

She was a prominent peace advocate. She opposed occupation harshness. She championed Palestinian rights.

As a youth, she was a socialist Zionist Hashomer Hatzair (Youth Group) member. During the British Mandate period, she was a Palmach brigade member.

Its mandate was much more than military. It contributed significantly to Israeli culture, values, character and spirit.

After Israel was established, she worked with child refugees. She helped establish a school for immigrant children. She studied law. She taught. She wrote. She spoke out forthrightly.

She held various government posts. She was a longtime MK and Israeli minister. Her portfolios included Education and Culture, Communications and Science and the Arts.

In 1973, she founded the Movement for Civil Rights and Peace (Ratz party). She established the Israel Consumers Council.

She led the Meretz party. She advocated Israeli secularism. She believed religion has no place in politics.

During Israel's 1982 Lebanon war, she established the International Center for Peace in the Middle East.

Ahead of 1984 elections, she aligned with Peace Now and the Left Camp of Israel. She advocated electoral reform.

She argued for establishing a constitution. Israel has none. Basic laws substitute. They fall way short of what's needed.

She opposed student tours to Nazi concentration camps. She said conducting them helps

make Israel a warrior nation. It turns youths into aggressive, nationalistic xenophobes.

She was a Yesh Din board member. It defends Palestinian civil and human rights. It exposes Israeli abuses. It champions long denied accountability.

She believed anti-semitism is misused. It's done to suppress legitimate Israeli criticism. She was outspoken to the end.

She made fundamental rights her core issue. She was true to her values. She challenged Israel's establishment.

She stood up against government officials, generals and extremist rabbis against peace, equity and justice. She was fearless. She was unflinching.

In 1985, she received the Kreisky Prize for Human Rights. In 1996, the International Academy of Humanism awarded her a Decoration of Honor.

In 1998, she received a special lifetime Emil Grunzweig Human Rights Award. In 2000, she was awarded the Israel Prize.

It's Israel's highest honor. Aloni won it for her lifetime achievements. It was for her contribution to Israeli society.

She received honorary doctorates from Hebrew Union College, South Korea's Kon-Kon University, Brussels' Free University, and the Weizmann Institute of Science.

She taught courses at Ben-Gurion University, Tel Aviv University, Princeton University, and the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliyyah.

She was often a voice in the wilderness. Israel is more ruthless today than ever.

In January 2007, she [headlined](#) "Yes, There is Apartheid in Israel," saying:

"Jewish self-righteousness is taken for granted among ourselves to such an extent that we fail to see what's right in front of our eyes."

"It's simply inconceivable that the ultimate victims, the Jews, can carry out evil deeds."

"Nevertheless, the state of Israel practices its own, quite violent, form of Apartheid with the native Palestinian population."

"(It) practices a brutal form of Apartheid in the territory it occupies."

"Its army has turned every Palestinian village and town into a fenced-in, or blocked-in, detention camp."

It turned Occupied Palestine into an open-air prison. "Indeed Apartheid does exist here. And our army is not 'the most moral (one) in the world' as we are told..."

Apartheid is "an international crime," she said. Israel "rob(s) (Palestinians) of their freedom, land and water."

“We apply collective punishment to millions of people” and much more.

After Operation Cast Lead (December 2008 – January 2009), she said the disgraced IDF is no longer Israel’s Defense Forces.

She keynoted “A Gathering to Protest and to Mourn” Association for Jaffa Arabs program. Standing room only heard her.

She pulled no punches calling the IDF a “brutal and hedonistic army of conquest.”

She called Gaza “a giant detention camp...with no way in or out.”

“The (Israeli) public unashamedly celebrates the killing and the destruction. They rejoice that we have a large, strong army, but meanwhile Israel has abandoned its values...”

On her 81st birthday, she discussed the condition of the State of Israel. “What we do in (Gaza) and the West Bank is worse than all pogroms done to Jews,” she said.

“It’s hard for me to say a kind word about the state today. We are in great distress morally and socially, as well as in the realms of politics and law.”

“The Right has two left hands. The Left doesn’t exist...Since 2000, with the launching of the Second Intifada, we have murdered thousands. We have blood on our hands.”

She denounced extremist settler violence and vandalism. “We are a nefarious people,” she said.

At age 80, she published “Israel: Democracy or Ethnocracy?” She minced no words criticizing her homeland, saying:

“The state is returning to the ghetto, to Orthodox Judaism, and the rule of the fundamentalist rabbinate is becoming more profound.”

In 1994, after Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 Muslims at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, she forthrightly denounced settler violence.

She was a pioneer peace, equity and justice champion. On Friday, allies and opponents praised her. They called her “a moral compass,” “a special breed,” “an inspiration for all women.”

Eighty-eight-year-old former right wing Israeli MK Guelah Cohen said:

“It was impossible not to admire such a combative woman who fought for what she believed in and was prepared to pay the price.”

Former Ratz/Meretz MK/minister Yossi Sarid called her “a phenomenon.” She feared “absolutely nothing.”

“She wanted to change the national and social agenda, and she did so on her own by virtue of her own capabilities, and attained great and unparalleled achievements.”

Current Meretz leader Zahava Gal-On called her “trailblazing.” She inspires Israeli human

rights activists.

“She transformed Israel into a better place to live and never stopped fighting for the values she believed in with which she will forever be associated: peace, absolute equality irrespective of religion, gender and race.”

Labor party leader Issac Herzog said she set an example for others. She “instigated significant change in Israeli public discourse.”

She “broke down walls that protected antiquated ways of thinking. (A)s a nation, we must respect her. She will be remembered as a courageous fighter for peace, coexistence and minority rights.”

[Haaretz](#) editors said “Farewell to one of Israel’s true fighters on the left.” With her death, “one can only hope (Meretz leader) Zahava Gal-On remains true to her opposition to Benjamin Netanyahu’s government.”

She uncompromisingly supported right over wrong. “(S)he was an undaunted fighter for human and civil rights as well as equality for women, while opposing religious coercion, the occupation and the settlements.”

She warned about Israel on a “slippery slope of religious fascism, war crimes, and the silencing of freedom of expression.”

Her ideals are more important today than ever. Netanyahu and Knesset extremists “turn(ed) Israel into an isolated fortress, repressing its citizens and threatened by international boycotts.”

Haaretz columnist [Gideon Levy](#) called her Israel’s “first lady.” She became a legend in her own time. “(N)o one disputed her honesty, determination or courage.”

“She invented Israeli enlightenment.” She inspired others to follow her example. She was “a warrior for justice.”

“Most of her dreams did not come true. Israel became a worse place – racist, ultranationalistic, occupying, theocratic and bullying.”

It’s polar opposite what she stood for. “Was she ahead of her time,” asked Levy? “Absolutely not. She came at exactly the right time.” She’s gone too soon. It’s when she’s most needed.

She was humble. She was one of the least egoistical politicians of her time. She cared only about issues mattering most.

Peace Now mourned her passing. “The pillar of fire has been extinguished,” it said.

She was “synonymous with the struggle for peace, security, equality and social justice.” She wrote books on civil, women’s and children’s rights.

She was “a teacher and leading legal and ethical expert on these issues. She was a leading feminist and a courageous liberal voice of progressive values.”

She died peacefully at her Tel Aviv District Kfar Shmaryahu home. Family members were with her.

Cause of death wasn't disclosed. One of her sons attributed it to old age. On Sunday she was laid to rest. An era passed with her.

Her friends called her Shula. She's survived by three sons, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Her books include The Citizen and His Country; Children's Rights in Israel; and Women as Human Beings among others.

She remained a human rights champion to the end. She's sorely missed. She leaves a huge void to fill. Hopefully others are up to the task.

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*His new book is titled "Banker Occupation: Waging Financial War on Humanity."*

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