

## SPEECH AT A DEMONSTRATION IN TEL AVIV COMMEMORATING 40 YEARS OF OCCUPATION

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**G**ood evening. It is a great honour for me to stand on this stage beside my friend and brother Bassam Aramin, a man of the Palestinian peace camp, one of the founders of the Combatants for Peace movement of which two of my sons, Alik and Guy, are members. Only last week, on Tuesday in Anata and on Thursday in Tulkarem, the Combatants for Peace movement succeeded in organizing two massive gatherings and recruited 10,000 Palestinians to their goal — a joint nonviolent struggle against the occupation through close cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians. If not for the racist laws of the State of Israel, all those thousands of people could be with us here this evening to prove once and for all that we have a partner.

Bassam and I are both victims of the cruel occupation that has been corrupting this country for 40 years now. The two of us came this evening to lament the fate of this place that has buried our two daughters — Smadar, “the bud of the fruit” [Hebrew], and Abir, “the perfume of the flower” [Arabic] — who were murdered at an interval of ten years, ten years during which this country has filled [up] with the blood of children, and the underground kingdom of children on which we tread day by day and hour by hour has grown to overflowing.

But what unites Bassam and me is not just the death that the Occupation sentenced us to. What unites us is principally faith and a willingness to raise the children that have been left to us so that they will never again allow corrupt, greedy and power-hungry politicians and generals who thirst for blood and conquest to rule over their lives and set them against each other. No more will they allow the racism that has spread over this country to lead them off the path of peace and brotherhood that they have paved for themselves. Because only that brotherhood can bring down the wall of racism that is being built before our very eyes.

For 40 years now, racism and megalomania have dictated our lives. Forty years during which more than four million people have not known the meaning of freedom of

movement. Forty years in which Palestinian children have been born and raised as prisoners in their homes, which the Occupation converted into a prison, deprived at the outset of all the rights that human beings are entitled to because they are human. Forty years during which Israeli children have been educated in racism of the type that has been unknown in the civilized world for decades. Forty years during which they have learned to hate the neighbors just because they are neighbors, to fear them without knowing them, to see a quarter of the citizens of the state as a demographic danger and an enemy within, and to relate to the residents of the ghettos created by the policy of occupation as a problem that must be solved.

Only 60 years ago, Jews were residents of ghettos and seen in the eyes of their oppressors as a problem that needed to be solved. Only 60 years ago, the Jews were enclosed behind ugly concrete and electrified walls topped with watchtowers manned by erect armed figures, and deprived of the ability to make a living or to raise their children with dignity. Only 60 years ago, racism exacted its price from the Jewish people. Today, racism rules in the Jewish state, tramples people's dignity underfoot and deprives them of liberty, and condemns all of us to lives of hell. For 40 years now, the Jewish head has unceasingly been bowed in worship of racism while the Jewish mind is devising the most creative ways to devastate and demolish and destroy this country. That is what remains of the Jewish genius, which has become Israeli. Jewish compassion, Jewish mercy, Jewish cosmopolitanism, love of humanity and respect for the other have been long forgotten. Their place was claimed by racism. It was only racism that motivated a Border Guard soldier to pull the trigger from inside his armoured vehicle and to shoot at the head of little Abir as she huddled by the wall of her school in fear of the military vehicle that was plopped down in the schoolyard as if it owned the place. It is only racism that motivates the drivers of bulldozers to demolish houses on top of their occupants, to destroy vineyards and fields, to uproot centuries-old olive trees. Only racism can invent roads on which circulation is classified on the basis of race, and it is only racism that motivates our children to humiliate women who could be their mothers and to abuse old people at the evil checkpoints, to strike young people their own age who, like them, want to drive with their families to bathe in the sea, and to look on impassively as women give birth on the road. It is only pure racism that motivates our best pilots to drop one-ton bombs on residential buildings, and it is only racism that permits those criminals to sleep well at night.

Because racism eliminates shame. This racism has erected for itself a monument in its own image — the monument of an ugly, rigid, menacing and invasive concrete wall. A monument that proclaims to the whole world the banishment of shame from this country. This wall is our wall of shame; it is testimony to the fact that we have turned from being a light unto the nations to “an object of disgrace to the nations and a mockery to all the countries” (Ezekiel 22:4).

And this evening we must ask, Where do we take our shame? How will we remove the disgrace? But first and foremost, how is it that the shame does not keep us from sleeping at night? How do we consent to have half our salaries used for the execution of crimes against humanity?

How did it happen that we succeeded in restricting the shame to two columns in the newspaper, and to devote to it no more than the minutes that we devote to a cursory reading of the articles of Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, as one reads a report on a scenario that was known in advance?

How did it happen that we succeeded in packing endless daily suffering, hunger, malnutrition, children's trauma, disablement, orphanhood and bereavement into one alienating word: "politics"?

How is it that our children continue to strut and swagger in the uniforms of brutality that they wear when they serve in the army of slaughter and destruction?

How is it that all the splendid institutions of the world stand aside and cannot do a thing to save one child from death or to remove one concrete block from the wall of shame? How is it that all the peace and human-rights organizations are not able to stop the jeeps of the Border Guards that come to terrify schoolchildren and to kill them, are not able to stop one bulldozer on its way to demolish a house on top of its occupants, to rescue one olive tree from destruction or one schoolgirl who lost her way to school and found herself in the gunshots of the soldiers of the Occupation?

One of the answers to these questions is that the State of Israel is able to silence and paralyze the entire world because there was a Holocaust. The State of Israel has acquired a permit to abuse an entire nation because there is anti-Semitism. The State of Israel is bringing existential disaster — economic, social and human — on its citizens and on its subjects and no one dares to stop it because once there was Hitler. And all that while, the survivors of the Holocaust are suffering the ignominy of hunger in this country.

This evening we must appeal to the world for help in ridding ourselves of the shame. This evening we must explain to the world that, if it wants to rescue the people of Israel and the Palestinian people from the imminent holocaust that threatens all of us, it is necessary to condemn the policy of occupation; the dominion of death must be stopped in its tracks. All war criminals who put away their uniforms and set out to travel in the world must be arrested, tried and imprisoned instead of being allowed to enjoy the pleasures of freedom while they are still dragging behind them a jingling cashbox full of war crimes.

And the time has come for us to stop handing our children over to an educational establishment that plants in them false and racist values and teaches them that their contribution to society is summed up in the abuse and killing of other people's children. The time has come for us to explain to them that the local population of this place is not divided into Jews and non-Jews as is written in their school-books, but into human beings such as Bassam Aramin and many others like him, who if not for the racial laws that restrict their movements would be standing with us today, and people who have lost their humanity and take pleasure in destruction and devastation. And the time has come for us to tell our children where they are living.

Today, while the entire civilized world enjoys slandering and smearing the Palestinian education system, there is no schoolbook in Israel that presents a picture of a Palestinian as a modern ordinary person. There is no schoolbook in Israel that presents a map that shows the true borders of the state. There is no schoolbook in Israel in which the word "occupation" appears. Our children are conscripted into the army of occupation without

knowing the place in which they are living and without knowing its history and its people. They join the army imbued with hate and fear. Our children are educated to see everyone who is not Jewish as the Goy, the Other, who generation after generation seeks to destroy us. This education makes it easy for the military establishment to turn children into monsters.

Therefore, the only way to prevent our children from becoming tools in the hands of the machine of destruction is to teach them the history of this place, to draw for them its borders, to help them to know the neighbours, their culture, their customs, their courtesy and their rights on the land where they live and lived for many generations before the Zionist Pioneers arrived in the Promised Land of Israel. And above all to teach them not to submit to the state, not to respect its authority, because the state is ruled by petty thieves and base opportunists who do not control their sexual and other impulses even in the most dire times and run this country according to the laws of the Mafia. "You killed one of mine, I'll kill a hundred of yours. You threw a home-made bomb at me, I'll drop on you a hundred of the most elaborate and destructive bombs in the world that will leave no trace of you or your family or your neighbours. You burned one of my cars so I'll burn one of your cities." That is the logic of the criminal world.

This evening we must think about those who are condemned to death in the next year, and of those who are condemned to fall into crime under the cover of the law and the uniform. We must rescue all of them. We must teach all of them not to obey orders that, even if they are legal according to the race laws of this state, are manifestly inhuman.

And above all, this evening we must stop for a moment, all of us, and look into the face of little Abir Aramin, her head shot from behind, whose murderer will never face judgment in this country and will never be punished in any way he deserves, and ask ourselves [with Anna Akhmatova], Why does that streak of blood rip the petal of her cheek?