

Distinguished Trustees of the Gandhi Foundation,  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
And friends

I would like to express in front of all my sincere joy for receiving the Gandhi International Peace Award that I dedicate to my Grandfather. If you look at my photo in 1987, throwing stones on Israeli soldiers, you would think “how come this person is receiving an Award for peace?”

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I grew up in Al Amari refugee camp, near Ramallah. But this refugee camp is not where my grandfather grew up and lived. He lived in Al Ramleh, in what is now considered Israel, until 1948-- when they were chased by the Jewish militia. From Al Amari refugee camp, where he ended up, my grandfather used to remember the enchanting smell of orange blossom and the taste of oranges of Naani.

For my part, my childhood, as that of most Palestinian children at the time, was rather marked by the smell of tear gas and gunshots in my refugee camp. Since very young, after school, we were used to sneaking out from our houses to prevent the Israeli soldiers from committing their regular abuses in our camp. And before school, at the rise of dawn, I would go around selling newspapers in order to help my family needs.

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Then one encounter changed the course of my life. Soreida Hussein, to whom I sold newspaper, saw in me a drive for music. And not long after, she ensured that I join a music workshop in the Popular Art center. This is where I discovered viola. Since then, music became part of my life. Two years later, I was selected to receive a scholarship for music studies in France. Aware of the impact music had in my life, I saw the need to give the same chance to other Palestinian children to learn music. This is when Al Kamandjâti Association (meaning the violinist) was born. I founded Al Kamandjati in France, and then, as soon as I finalized my studies, I returned to Palestine to start this new adventure.

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Al Kamandjâti aims at spreading music culture among all members of the Palestinian society, building empowered and creative persons, aware of their

Palestinian national identity, who contribute to develop a cohesive society that respects freedom of expression, tolerance, equality and cooperation.

Thanks to its several music centers in Palestine and Lebanon, AK teaches music to thousands of Palestinian children yearly, with a focus on the most disadvantaged ones. They learn new ways of self-expression, get more self-confidence and self-esteem, learn essential social skills and above all, it creates an important outlet and opens new horizons for them. In addition to its music education program, the association organizes more than a hundred concerts every year. These activities aim at spreading the musical culture among the Palestinian society, highlighting their own musical heritage, as well as opening them to other cultural traditions.

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Music taught me resilience, as well as how to be proud and protect my culture and heritage, and this is why we can consider music to be pacific resistance. I would like to thank once again the Gandhi Foundation for this recognition. Yet my story should not be used to discredit or demonize other forms of resistance my people is employing to get its freedom: the right of Palestinians to resist Israeli occupation is part of international law. Clearly, Israel is denying and violating this law, by suppressing even peaceful protests by detentions, shooting on demonstrators, including hundreds of children...And this highlights Israel's attempts to completely delegitimize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. And by criminalizing even non-violent resistance activities, Israel advances what Jeff Halper has labeled its "matrix of control"— a complex web of legal, architectural and systemic devices designed to fragment and isolate Palestinian society.

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Additionally, the international discourse, particularly coverage by western media outlets, serves to perpetuate and further solidify the stereotype of the Palestinian 'terrorist', discounting the severity of the apartheid regime, disregarding the relevant international treaties — and therefore discrediting the right to resist.

Gandhi said: *"I wish the Arabs had chosen the way of non-violence in resisting what they rightly regarded as an unwarrantable encroachment upon their country. But according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds."*

*Here I would like to ask you- given we all know the famous 21 days of Gandhi's fasting- Does anyone know how many days over 1500 Palestinian prisoners went on hunger strike just this past April? Over 40 days!*

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And as a reminder:

Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was ratified by Israel in 1966, states that “all peoples have the right to self-determination.”

It elaborates the right to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”. Clearly, Israel is not abiding by either this covenant or any other UN resolution. Let us pause and think about the word “Peace”. I want to say: We should stop abusing the word “peace”; we want justice. Peace will be a natural result of justice.

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As many of you know, we are sadly commemorating this year the centenary of the Balfour declaration « Al Nakba » or « disaster » for the Palestinians. This declaration uprooted a whole nation from its ancestral homes and continues to devastate several generations of Palestinians, decades later. This is why, I take this opportunity, in front of the House of Lords, to call on the United Kingdom to apologize to the Palestinian people for the Balfour Declaration and recognize the right of Palestinians to their state. Not one Palestinian, anywhere, remained immune from the harm invited by Balfour and his government.

And if Balfour was keen to ensure “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine,” why is it then that the British government remains committed to Israel despite all its violations of Int’l law?

Let us not keep a blind eye on injustice, otherwise we are accomplice. And this is where I would like to thank courageous individuals like the 2003 Gandhi Peace Awardee, Denis Halliday, who dared to speak out.

Thank you again for such an opportunity, and I welcome all questions.