

The tragedy of the Palestinian people: Can the youth find new solutions?

By Atle Hetland

Young people are as concerned as older people about the armed conflict that is raging on the Gaza Strip. Israel and Palestine do not enjoy peace and the world watches as the tragedy evolves. Who can find new solutions to the conflict? Old people have failed. Can the youth succeed?

“The current Palestinian crisis, where Israel with its massive military force bombs Gaza is evidence of the complete failure of our international organizations”, says Sumeera Hassan from Lahore. She is currently visiting Islamabad during her summer holidays from her Masters’ degree studies at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy.

“There is extremism on both sides. The two peoples base their actions on religious belief, notably Judaism and Islam. The driving force is religion more than economics and lack of land and space”, says Sumeera. “The United Nations was established to mitigate conflicts and help find peaceful solutions. In the current situation, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) does well, but is only a humanitarian and development organization without any political mandate”, she says.

The president of the National Youth Assembly (NYA) Hanan Ali Abbasi, 30, from Abbattabad, says that he is of the opinion that Israel is violating the human rights and that it should immediately stop the bombing of innocent people. He says that NYA has not yet issued any statement, so he expressed his own opinion.

His colleague in NYA, Jahanzeb Khan, 33, from Kohat, differs. He wants Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, to be banned. The radical political organization has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2007 after it won a decisive majority of seats in the Palestinian parliamentary assembly in 2006. It has less support in the West Bank, and has little cooperation with the Fatah Party there, which is affiliated to PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization. Hamas does not recognize the state of Israel.

“I have understanding for Israel’s actions”, Jahanzeb says. “Israel doesn’t have much choice because Hamas keeps sending rockets across the border into Israel. Hamas uses innocent children and adults as shields to gain sympathy”, he says.

Shahid Ijaz, 22, has recently completed his MA in psychology from the International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIUI), and is now off to the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) for his M. Phil. Degree. He says that both Palestinians and Jews see the same geographic areas as their *holy land* and have very little tolerance for each other. He notes that the United Nations resolutions about durable solutions in Palestine, and also in Kashmir, are from 1948, but they have still not been implemented

“In the short term, I believe that the Americans and Saudi-Arabians, with other countries, can broker peace, if they really want to, being the main sponsors of the two peoples. In the long term, I believe the United Nations has to take entirely new approaches in disputed territories”, Shahid says.

“Such territories could be called ‘UN states’, with administration, security and policing under the control of the United Nations, which means all the world’s nations”, he says. He suggests that the populations in such territories should be ‘diluted’, with people from other religions and areas encouraged to settle there, while it should also be made easy for out-migration.”

“I believe this international solution would be particularly important in the Israel-Palestine situation where the conflict between the two peoples has gone on for so long. It began hundreds of years before the time that the oversight by the League of Nations and the United Nations began, and the existence of the state of Israel since 1948. The conflict has escalated after 1967, when Israel occupied large Palestinian territories. The ‘two-state solution’ was recommended in the Oslo Accords from 1993 but has come to nothing”, Shahid Ijaz says.

“True, this is a youthful proposal”, says Dr. Christine Amjad Ali, director of the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi. “I don’t want to comment on the proposal as such, but I am very encouraged that the youth continue to care and that they search for new ways to solve the protracted conflicts and generation-long tragedies”, she says.

“I believe that it is the young generation that must help find solutions to so many problems”, says Amna Imran Khan, joint secretary in the Ministry of Communications and former Secretary-General of the National Commission for Unesco.

“I would like to draw attention to the important work in peace education that Unesco has been leading, especially the ‘international decade for a culture of peace and non-violence for the children and youth of the world’, which ended in 2010, but the work continues. Its slogan is ‘*peace is in our hands*’.”

“That is a good reminder when we on 12 August will celebrate the International Youth Day. We should plan discussions and exhibitions in all our educational institutions. In order to have active peace, we need educational programmes among the people who have been in conflicts”, says Amna Imran Khan.

Photos attached

Photo captions:

1. Sumeera Hassan is on a three-week visit to Islamabad before returning to the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy where she is studying public policy.
2. Four young psychology students at the International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIUI), who are concerned about the scars that young children will have when they experienced violence and war.
3. Faisal Dayo from Sukkur in Sindh is studying journalism at National University of Modern Languages (NUML). He is deeply concerned about the lack of peace between Israel and Palestine.

(-Photo by the writer)