

ZU-LAT

Equality and Human Rights

Dear [[שם פרטי]],

Sunday was the 55th anniversary of the start of the Six-Day War, and therefore also marked 55 years since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the final tally, Israel has managed to exist without a military regime for just six months – between December 1966, when the military rule governing Palestinian citizens of Israel was abolished, and June 1967, when the military rule in the occupied territories that remains to this day first began.

During these years, we became addicted to framing the conversation in tactical terms: Will a curfew be effective? Or perhaps administrative detentions, or maybe home demolitions and dispossession? Day after day, we violated the fundamental human rights of our occupied subjects. We stole their lands, their property, and their hopes.



Zulat president,
Zehava Galon

**”
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And month after month, year after year, we allowed military officers and politicians with no conscience to run our lives. They spoke of

"mowing the grass," meaning the periodic slaughter of Palestinians to return them to a state of submission; of "managing the conflict," meaning refraining from ending it; of a policy of big sticks and tiny carrots. In practice, the idea was to atomize Palestinian society.

And last week, we once again found ourselves watching pogroms perpetrated by settlers, who are unwilling to see the symbol of Palestinian national aspirations even in Palestinian territory, as well as an enormous eruption of hatred for other human beings among tens of thousands of right-wingers and their supporters in Jerusalem. Under the watchful eye of our police force, rioters assaulted Palestinians, damaged their property, spat at them, and called for their mass murder.

Before the very eyes of the district police chief, tens of thousands of deliberately incited youths shouted "death to the Arabs" and told Arabs their village "should be burned." But the police chief didn't order any arrests for violating the law against incitement to racism. And the prime minister and public security minister both boasted that this annual racist march through the Old City's Muslim Quarter had passed peacefully.

There's a clear connection between this tactical conversation and the rapidity with which Israel is falling to radicalized racists. When we give in to the tactical framing, which shrinks the deprivation of millions of people of their human and civil rights to the question of where the roadblock should be placed or whether to use "less lethal" Ruger rifles instead of sponge-tipped bullets, we lose our capacity to make a clear moral statement.

Morality is power. Jewish tradition teaches that patience is better than heroism and that one who governs himself is better than one who captures a city. There is neither genuine power nor heroism in throwing stun grenades at women and handcuffing young girls. There is only weakness and fear.



We've kept silent in the face of pogrom after pogrom because we grew up on the notion that what matters is practicality whereas moral considerations denote weakness. People spoke about separating from the Palestinians as a strategic need, because continuing the occupation regime would end up harming us, Israelis. Not coincidentally, this was the view voiced by Israeli generals. And since there were some who thought that the generals would bring us victory, we preferred not to talk about moral considerations. Morality is for the hoity-toity, as is well known. We became addicted to so-called "practicality," and it poisoned us.

We abandoned morality. No government has dared to say loud and clear that we should withdraw from the Palestinian territories because we are not willing to rule over another nation, that such rule is clearly immoral, that it will turn us into an apartheid state.

Here is what former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu said in a discussion about the Palestinians in 2018: "Nations respect morality up to a point, but they respect power much more. We reject the concept of occupation. If occupation was the issue, there are some well-known and big countries that are occupying other countries, yet no one dares say a word about them. No one says a word about Turkey and northern Cyprus." After a 30-year political career, the truth came out of Netanyahu's mouth: occupation is not the issue and populations held under occupation are not important. The only thing that matters is power, and Jewish power at that.

When Netanyahu marketed the normalization agreement with the United Arab Emirates, which came in exchange for reneging on the annexation plan, he called it "peace for peace." Not only did he lie about the price he was required to pay for the normalization of relations, but he also boasted that the agreement created a first crack in the solidarity of Arab states with the Palestinians, under which the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel had so far hinged on ending the occupation.

Netanyahu managed to convey the message that morality should be ditched, given that Israel's rule over the Palestinians was no longer an obstacle in its path to prosperity.

Therefore, we also moved on to the next thing when a senior politician, who is our prime minister today, defined the Palestinians as "shrapnel in the butt." In his speech at the UN General Assembly, Naftali Bennett claimed that "Israelis do not wake up in the morning thinking about the conflict," and he made it clear to US President

Joe Biden that "we will not establish a Palestinian state."

Over the years, such statements have shaped the consciousness of Israelis in a way that allows them to feel good with themselves, to get used to living with a conflict, and to go about with their everyday life without demanding answers to moral questions. This did not happen overnight but was built over years of rule on the Palestinians, amid denying, repressing, and turning a blind eye to what was being done over there in our name. Israelis do not feel they are paying a price, and they continue to believe that Israel does not violate human rights.

When Israel's leadership pays no heed to moral considerations in its policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians, who clearly are the immediate victims, and does not seek to end the occupation, it ignores the heavy price that the occupation exacts on Israelis as well: bloodshed, death, bereavement, moral decay, the debasement of democratic principles, the ruination of Jewish-Arab relations within the State of Israel, our ties with progressive Jews around the world, and our standing in the international arena. The occupation is here, the Palestinians are here and they are not going anywhere. And nowhere is a courageous leadership to be found to say: Enough with the occupation!!!

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Yours truly,

Zehava Galon

President of Zulat for Equality and Human Rights

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