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## **Webinar- Closure of Rafah Crossing is a Participation in the Genocide on Gaza**

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](https://www.aohr.org.uk)) recently held an online webinar on Friday, 08 December, addressing the dire situation in the Gaza Strip. This event focused on the severe conditions resulting from the Israeli occupation's ban on essential supplies and the closure of the Rafah crossing in light of the ongoing genocide.

The [webinar](#) highlighted the dire consequences on Gaza's health sector and the urgent need for medical treatment outside the Strip. Discussions centred around strategies for reopening the Rafah crossing to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid and provide medical evacuation for those in critical need. This gathering aimed to rally support and find actionable solutions to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The webinar featured a diverse panel of activists, scholars, journalists, and human rights defenders. Speakers included Dr. Lola Bañon- Professor of Journalism in the Department of Philology and Communication at Valencia University, Mohamed Ismail – Director of Egyptians Abroad for Democracy, Sarah Wilkinson – English Activist and Campaigner, Member of Global Conscience Convoy, Dr. Noa Shaindlinger- Assistant Professor of Middle East History at the Department of History and Political Science at Worcester State University, SQ – American Teacher and Youtuber, owner of YouTube Channel WayofLifeSQ, and Nadia Hararah- Palestinian American Activist.



In her contribution, English activist and campaigner Sarah Wilkinson, a member of the Global Conscience Convoy, shared insights from her experiences and observations regarding the situation in Gaza and the complicity of various nations in ongoing Israeli aggression. Wilkinson detailed the Convoy's challenges, particularly their inability to reach Rafa due to restrictions imposed by the Egyptian government, which she described as disguising itself under a pro-Palestinian guise. She highlighted the arrest and subsequent incommunicado status of four activists, underscoring the severity of the situation.

Wilkinson also spoke about the group's efforts in Cairo, where their primary goal of delivering aid was obstructed. She pointed out the irony of a truck carrying toys resembling food being allowed into Gaza, contrasting sharply with the desperate need for actual food and supplies. Furthermore, she emphasised the campaign's shift towards pressuring the Egyptian government, noting the challenges faced by journalists in documenting these events due to severe restrictions.

Discussing the broader context, Wilkinson remarked on the complex military dynamics in North Sinai and questioned Egypt's control over its borders. She criticised the decision to allow a United Nations truck with plastic toy food through, while real food supplies were barred entry. Additionally, she highlighted the activities in Cairo, including protests and conferences, despite being under constant surveillance and facing the threat of arrest.

Wilkinson also addressed the UK's role in the genocide, condemning its complicity in hosting Israeli arms factories and supplying materials for weapon manufacturing. She pointed out the British government's profit from the arms trade and the challenges in asking them to divest from such lucrative activities. Wilkinson expanded her critique to include the West, the EU, and the US for their active funding and support of the genocide, emphasising the daunting task faced by activists against a deeply entrenched system of support for these actions.

In her final remarks, Wilkinson reiterated the group's commitment to continuing their attempts to reach Rafa and their efforts to pressure the Egyptian government to allow



aid. She stressed the importance of the international community recognising and addressing the actions of the Egyptian government and the broader involvement of Western nations in perpetuating the crisis.

Overall, Wilkinson's testimony painted a picture of a challenging and complex situation, marked by governmental restrictions, humanitarian crises, and the complicity of international actors in the ongoing genocide and ethnic cleansing Israel is committing against the Palestinian people.

In her insightful contribution, Dr. Lola Bañon, a Professor of Journalism at Valencia University, provided a profound analysis of the situation in Palestine, highlighting the challenges faced by journalists and the international community in understanding and addressing the crisis. Dr. Bañon emphasised the difficulties in conveying the Palestinian narrative due to the dehumanisation prevalent in international media, which often leads to a skewed perception of the Palestinian people and their suffering in Gaza.

She underscored the importance of social media in presenting the reality of Gaza's plight, despite the skepticism about the authenticity of these images and stories. Dr. Bañon stressed the necessity of giving Palestinians a voice, which is frequently overlooked in global discourse, and the need to understand their aspirations before proposing solutions.

Addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Dr. Bañon pointed out the unprecedented severity of the situation, with over two million people facing starvation. She called for immediate actions, particularly opening the Rafah crossing, to alleviate this dire situation. As a journalist and professor with extensive experience in Gaza and Palestine, she expressed her commitment to not only reporting the facts but also bridging gaps in understanding and advocating for the enforcement of international laws to protect civilians.



Furthermore, Dr. Bañon highlighted the critical yet complex role of the European Union in this genocide. She urged EU Member States, including Spain, to actively participate in providing humanitarian aid and enforcing international law, including the protection of civilians. Her remarks shed light on the need for a more cohesive and proactive approach from the EU in facilitating peace and stability in the region, underscoring that their actions or inactions have far-reaching implications beyond the immediate region, impacting the global commitment to human rights.

Dr. Bañon's reflections presented a multifaceted view of the Palestinian crisis, touching on media representation, humanitarian needs, and the responsibilities of international bodies, offering a deep and nuanced understanding of the ongoing challenges and the urgent need for effective solutions to put an end to the Israeli occupation.

Nadia Hararah, a Palestinian-American activist, shared a heartfelt and distressing account of her family's experiences in Gaza during the ongoing Israeli aggression.

Hararah described the last 60 days as excruciating, going beyond the longstanding difficulties faced by Palestinians. She vividly detailed the ordeal of her family's forced journey south, painting a grim picture of the severity of the situation, with her cousin fainting multiple times due to lack of food and water.

Hararah highlighted that the crisis in Gaza transcends a mere food shortage; it's a struggle against extreme weather conditions without adequate clothing or shelter. The destruction of her family's homes has left many living in shelters or on the streets, further exacerbated by the lack of supplies, making the cold December weather even more unbearable, especially for children.

She brought attention to the healthcare crisis, exemplified by a family member in need of dialysis, a service disrupted by the fuel shortage in hospitals. This situation reflects the broader state of medical facilities in Gaza and the dire need for essential supplies.



The activist conveyed the deep exhaustion and desperation of her family in Gaza, who live in constant fear due to ongoing bombings. Their primary wish is for a ceasefire, as they seek a respite from the relentless fear and destruction. Hararah mentioned the particularly harrowing recent days with no communication from several cousins, emphasising the breakdown of basic communication infrastructure in the area.

Lastly, Hararah touched upon the unique pain experienced by the Palestinian American community, who feel a sense of helplessness as they witness their families' suffering through social media. This pain is compounded by the complexities tied to the U.S. government's involvement in the crisis. Their collective plea is for an immediate ceasefire and access to basic necessities – food, water, clothing, and fuel – for those struggling to survive in Gaza.

SQ, an American teacher and YouTuber, provided a compelling and impassioned perspective on the situation in Palestine, emphasising the desensitisation to the loss of life and the broader implications of the ongoing aggression. He expressed alarm at the numbing routine of tragedies in Palestine, including the loss of children, hospitals, and historic mosques, pointing out how this desensitisation, especially as amplified by social media, serves as a testament to the ongoing ethnic cleansing.

He highlighted the destruction of a 600-year-old mosque, underscoring the loss not only of a place of worship but also a significant piece of cultural and historical heritage. SQ emphasised that this act symbolises the broader attempt to erase Palestinian heritage and identity.

SQ criticised the silence of major news outlets like BBC and Fox, suggesting that their lack of coverage on these issues points to a concerning trend of censorship and suppression when it comes to speaking up against powerful groups. He underscored that the situation in Palestine is more than a regional conflict; it's a global concern involving ethnic cleansing and oppression.



He articulated that the crisis in Palestine transcends religious or ethnic lines, framing it as a human rights crisis marked by systematic ethnic cleansing. SQ reflected on the teachings of Islam, highlighting the sacredness of innocent life and lamenting the countless lives lost.

He noted the stark contrast between the atrocities committed in 1948 and the present, where high-quality visual documentation now exposes these acts to the world, revealing the ongoing ethnic cleansing and genocide. This exposure, he argued, is critical in countering controlled narratives of the past.

SQ also spoke about the profound impact of the crisis on global perception, sharing that even his students, not from the Muslim community, are recognising the injustice in Palestine and seeking to understand the extent of the suffering and the agenda of ethnic cleansing.

He raised concerns about the long-term psychological trauma inflicted by the aggression, particularly on children, and noted that while cessation of violence is necessary, it does not address the deeper issue of systemic ethnic cleansing and its implications for the Palestinian community.

Finally, SQ highlighted the significant responsibility of the international community, especially the United States, in addressing the situation. He criticised the U.S. for its inability to restrain Israel's crimes, crossing into outright genocide and ethnic cleansing. He argued that the traditional defence narrative is losing credibility, leaving a stark reality of systematic eradication of a people and their culture.

Mohamed Ismail, the Director of Egyptians Abroad for Democracy, provided a critical analysis of the political and humanitarian situation in Egypt and Palestine, particularly



focusing on the actions of General Sisi and their implications for the Palestinian people.

Ismail began by addressing General Sisi's ascent to power through a military coup and the support he receives from Israel and the international community. He linked Sisi's actions in the Sinai region to the broader 'deal of the century,' emphasizing that this deal aims to displace Palestinians from Gaza and deny them their right of return.

He elaborated on the 'deal of the century,' stating that it includes plans to make Sinai a new homeland for displaced Palestinians. This plan, according to Ismail, involves providing temporary documents and building infrastructure like airports, contributing to a larger conspiracy to permanently displace Palestinians and erase their right of return.

Ismail highlighted the solidarity of the Egyptian people with Palestinians, contrasting this with the Egyptian government's actions. He pointed out the brutal tactics employed by Sisi's regime to suppress dissent, such as immediate killings, which have rendered public opposition in Egypt nearly impossible.

Expressing hope for a future where Egyptians can freely express dissent, Ismail clarified that the objection of Egyptians is not to hosting Palestinians but to the permanent displacement and the ending of their right of return, which would effectively end the Palestinian cause.

He discussed the strategic construction of the Ben Gurion Canal, which links the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and passes through Gaza. He noted that the project's success depends on the absence of resistance in Gaza, revealing Sisi's encouragement for Gazans to relocate to Sinai in exchange for a supposed better life.



Ismail warned of the dangerous conspiracy behind offering Gazans a false haven in Sinai, urging the people of Gaza to recognise and resist this strategy as it threatens their identity and rights.

Finally, Ismail addressed the ongoing aggression and attacks that result in forced displacement of Palestinians. He criticised the portrayal of these actions in the media, emphasising the need for global awareness and recognition of this as forced displacement, not mere evacuation.

Dr. Noa Shaindlinger, Assistant Professor of Middle East History at Worcester State University, provided an in-depth historical analysis of the Israeli occupation of Gaza, focusing on its roots and implications. Her speech, grounded in her research as a historian, offers valuable insights into the historical context of the ongoing conflict.

She said that "in 1956, the first Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip occurred, which serves as a crucial point in understanding subsequent events and the lessons learned by Israel from this occupation. The massacres of Palestinians during this period, though not as well-documented as current events due to the lack of technology and social media, are significant in understanding the historical trajectory of the situation".

She added that "the occupation of Gaza in 1956 and the Sinai Peninsula by Israel revealed their intentions and strategies. While Sinai was considered a territory to be returned to Egypt, Israel showed an interest in annexing the Gaza Strip. This early indication of their long-term goals underscores the ongoing struggles faced by Palestinians"

She pointed out that "Israel's policy in 1956 reflected a clear objective: maximum land with minimum Palestinians. This explicit policy, evident just eight years after the Nakba of 1948, highlights the systemic efforts to displace Palestinians and seize land".





She highlighted that "during the 1956 occupation, Israeli policymakers grappled with the issue of the Palestinian population in Gaza, knowing that incentivising them to leave was unlikely to succeed. This dilemma led to various ideas, including the creation of a Canton – a region annexed to Israel but without granting full citizenship to Palestinians residing there".

Dr. Shaindinger pointed out that "one suggestion in 1956 was to turn Gaza into an enclave where Palestinians would have limited representation in the Israeli Knesset, a concept reminiscent of apartheid policies. This idea of separate and unequal representation for Palestinians in Gaza reveals the deeply entrenched discriminatory policies of the time.

She added that "other policymakers considered relocating the Palestinian population entirely to other countries, with some even suggesting the United States should fund such a move. This idea of population transfer highlights the extreme lengths considered to alter the demographic balance in favour of Israel.

Dr. Shaindinger emphasised the historical precedence of these policies, noting their recurrence in different forms over the years. She pointed out that similar tactics were employed in 1967, 1973, and the early 2000s in Janine. By examining these historical events, she suggests we can gain insights into potential future developments in the region.

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK)