



Letter from Gaza with a response from New York

written by Zahra Ali
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The Institute of Women's Studies (IWS) at Birzeit University in Palestine has launched "[Women's Testimonies from Gaza](#)", a project aiming to amplify the voices of women in Gaza living under the ongoing Israeli genocidal military operation. Beyond "archiving" or "documenting," the project seeks to build community with them, while [publishing their words](#) in Arabic and translating them into English. I was invited to contribute to the project and I decided to write an answer to one of the authors of these testimonies. These are Duaa's words, followed by mine.



“We are fine – thanks to the world that grants us choices, choices between swift and slow death, between dying of thirst or hunger. Dying in grief over memories destroyed with every street, the details of which you have memorized, or for a house that you lived in for years and was turned into ashes. Between the death of your loved ones, one by one, or being erased from existence along with all from your lineage. Perhaps, in the end, you survive with half a body, half a soul, half a heart. Thanks to the humanitarian efforts so that we experience displacement and forced migration over and over again. Thanks to the world that draws inspiration from our death, producing texts, poetry, and slogans that resonate. Thanks to the world that, until the last breath, watches and observes the scenes of walls collapsing on our heads. Thanks to the world that sips its morning coffee as usual, smokes its cigarette, and writes about our steadfastness in the face of the massacre. The same world that still has energy to contemplate the remains of children, count their numbers, pray and implore God to grant us victory. By the way, how many did they count? I no longer count for this is the task of the world. Our task is to contemplate this amount of death and believe it, that the world we once knew is past, and we are in the midst of a new world, a world of our own.”

Duaa Badawi, October 31, 2023, Facebook post

Duaa Badawi, 28 years old, is a content writer and marketing specialist from Gaza. She has a BA in Communication and Media Studies from Al-Azhar University and recently returned to Gaza in March 2023 after four years of living abroad in Istanbul, Turkey. Duaa, a mother of two, was displaced from her home in Gaza City to Rafah in the south. After Israeli airstrikes targeted her neighbourhood, some of her family members were injured and her house, in addition to many others in the neighbourhood, was destroyed.

“Dear Duaa,

I read your words, over and over again. I read them as if you wrote them for me. I read them as if I am looking at you in the eyes while you are saying them. What



are words after all? Just sounds that contain little fragments of our feelings. I felt these fragments deep in my heart, I hear you, I feel you. I hear the intense and unbearable pain in your anger. Yes, you are right, the world has let you down, we have let you down. You, your loved ones and your entire people are in a world of your own. Being from Iraq, I have caught glimpses of this world throughout my life, and I carry them with me wherever I go.

My dear Duaa, believe me, nothing is the same anymore, nothing tastes the same, nothing feels the same. I know exactly what you mean when you denounce our hypocrisy, I have felt the same many times about the way the world describes my people. Nobody chooses the apocalypse, and there is nothing to be gained from it. All the poetry, the texts, the slogans mean nothing, they are just the testimony of the deep and profound failure of humanity to account for our losses, for the destruction of our world.



When Family is the Only Shelter. Photo by Malak Mattar.



Duaa, I want to tell you one thing, and I hope that amidst the unspeakable tragedy that you are in, it brings you a little something. Take it as if I am sitting with you in the tent and offering you a cup of Iraqi tea, very black, very bitter, but with a lot of cardamon and a little bit of sugar. I promise you, Duaa, that I will do everything in my power to stop this, that I will not give up on you, that I will continue to listen to you, to look you in the eyes.

Duaa, I live in New York City and teach at an US public university, in the heart of the empire that supports and arms the criminals that kill your people. I will let everybody know about you. I will say your name, the name of the members of your family killed by these cruel and heartless assassins, the name of your people in the streets of this city. I will teach my students about the history of your people, your poetry, your literature, I will make sure they know everything. I will fight the obscene impunity that Israel enjoys and the naked injustice that bring death to your world. I will make it known by everybody. I will fight so you can obtain your rights, for a better future for you, for your two children, and for your entire people

My dear Duaa, I cannot bring back the people and places that you have lost, and everything that was destroyed, the beautiful streets of your neighbourhood, your memories, but I can offer you this promise, and send you my most sincere prayers and the assurance that I will never look away.

Your sister Zahra”