

Statement on the Genocide in Gaza

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Thawra/Revolution by Malak Mattar

Feminist Dissent would like to thank the Palestinian artist Malak Mattar for giving us permission to use the image of her painting Thawra/Revolution. Mattar is a 22-year old artist from Gaza.

Note: *Since we've written this statement, a new expanded cycle of violence has opened in the Middle East, triggered by the Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Syria and the massive Iranian drone and missiles attack on Israel which was helped to be shot down with the help of UK and US forces. Where will it end?*

Sunday April 7, 2024 marked exactly six months since Israel unleashed its brutal war on the Palestinian people in Gaza, a war that shows no sign of stopping any time soon.

We at Feminist Dissent can barely find the words to describe the pain and the rage we feel at the cruelty and injustice that has unfolded since 7 October 2023. On that day, Hamas and its associates assaulted, tortured and murdered many Israeli civilians and foreign nationals, including women and children - [1200 people were killed and 253 taken hostage, of which only 112 have been released or rescued and 12 bodies recovered](#). Those assaulted and killed included peace activists, some of whom were themselves Holocaust survivors, who had long committed themselves to a life in the service of humanitarianism, compassion and reconciliation between the two peoples. Hamas did not distinguish between the civilian population and the Israeli state.

Nor did Israel when it began its campaign of revenge - ostensibly against Hamas - which has turned out to be a brutal all-out war on the people of Gaza who continue to be demonised, dehumanised, dislocated and killed en masse. In the last six months, 33,494 Palestinians have died, including more than 13,000 children and 8400 women. [A further 8000 people are missing](#). These figures don't include those who are injured or those dead in the West Bank.

It is self-evident that this is not a symmetrical war or a war without context. While both Hamas and the Israeli state represent fundamentalist and anti-democratic forces of terror and repression that feed off each other, they do so in a profoundly unequal dynamic in which Israel is the dominant force, given the sheer might of its military power and western backing. Gaza has been kept as a virtually open-air prison for years and Israel has long held the belief that its divide and rule policy of the various Palestinian factions will enable it to continue its domination of the Palestinians

undisturbed. It has aspired to reach 'normalisation' with other Middle Eastern countries while ignoring the Palestinian issue. The Hamas attack exposes the limitations of such policies, especially in a neoliberalised and religionised Israel that has abandoned most of its citizens in favour of specific economic and especially religio-nationalist interests.

[The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians has to be understood through a history of ongoing settler colonialism, occupation and racialised apartheid fed by the Zionist settler project and increasingly, by Jewish right-wing and fundamentalist politics.](#) The tragedy of this war is that the attack by Hamas has enhanced Israeli existential anxiety and added the thirst for revenge to the increased dehumanisation of 'the other', which has been growing in Israeli occupation policies. As a result, the war's aim to 'finish Hamas' - an organisation that Israel has cultivated for years as an intra-Palestinian political power countering the secular and then more progressive PLO - has in practice become a war aimed at the total annihilation of Palestine. By blocking humanitarian aid and by destroying the Palestinian legal, social, cultural, religious and economic infrastructure needed to sustain life, Israel has moved from domicide to ongoing genocidal policies that include [starvation as a weapon against the people of Gaza](#). Israel's AI-driven military campaign has enabled it to extend the war in all directions to encompass all parts of Palestinian society including journalists, educators, health and aid workers, the elderly and the sick. The widespread death, displacement and devastation that has followed has led the UN and many humanitarian agencies to warn of the 'imminent danger of famine', which in fact is already a reality to more and more of Gaza's inhabitants especially in the north.

The warning signs of an impending genocide were there from the beginning. Following international outcry, in January 2024 South Africa successfully pushed the International Court of Justice to provisionally rule that Israel is engaged in plausible acts of genocide and to call for an immediate ceasefire in compliance with Israel's obligations under the Genocide Convention. Israel's shameless rejection of the ruling signifies a staggering sense of impunity enabled by the backing of the UK and other western powers. The encouragement, military and financial support of Israel by the US, Germany, UK and others, epitomises a new low in our post-war rules-based international world order. It represents a naked show of opportunist complicity and the degradation of global leadership that has descended into dangerous levels of legal, moral and political bankruptcy. It is precisely this collusion that led former Supreme Court judges and lawyers in the UK to take the unprecedented step of issuing a letter warning that the [UK is itself at risk of seriously breaching international humanitarian law through policies such as its arms trade with Israel](#).

An added dimension of the war is the sexual violence and rape Hamas committed against Israeli women. In regard to 7 October 2023, there is credible evidence pointing to a calculated assault on Israeli women whose bodies were violated, mutilated and used as weapons of war. We denounce these acts of brutality and depravity in the strongest terms possible and support independent investigations into these events as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although the sexual violence did not reach the scale that we have previously seen in wars in Bosnia or Rwanda, clearly Hamas intended to exact revenge through the humiliation and degradation of Israeli women.

But Hamas' acts of rape and mutilation come from the same ideological wellspring that plays itself out over the bodies of Palestinian women. In line with all religious fundamentalist movements, Hamas has rolled back women's rights in Gaza by imposing discriminatory Sharia norms and laws that conceptualise women as inferior and justify restrictions on their movements, their oppression and other forms of violence against women. [For instance, year on year the numbers of Palestinian women who are assaulted or killed, including those in so-called honour killings, by violent men have increased in Gaza and in other Palestinian territories.](#)

This is one just one of many reasons why Hamas does not symbolise some heroic fight for Palestinian

liberation as many on the Left have claimed. It is a militant Islamist group that was created from the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood by the Israeli state in Gaza to sow division and weaken the Palestinian struggle for freedom. It is no more concerned with women's human rights than the Israeli state, which has also wasted no time in instrumentalising the rape and sexual violence of Israeli women to justify the massacre of Palestinians. We should not forget that Israel too has its own long and sordid history of using sexualised violence against Palestinian women and even men and boys as a weapon of torture. At the same time, it also appeases Jewish fundamentalist and ultra-orthodox forces that demand greater patriarchal control of women within Israeli society.

The use of rape and violence against women in any context must be condemned but so must Israel's subjugation of the people of Palestine, which not only depends on indiscriminate violence and surveillance but on genocide itself.

It is hard to have hope in these bleakest of times. But we would do well to remember that within Israel, resistance to Netanyahu's disregard for the lives of the hostages and their families and to his brand of war mongering politics is growing, albeit for different political reasons. While Israel's existence as an ethno-nationalist and apartheid state is not yet in serious jeopardy, its dubious claim to democracy and peace-seeking is unravelling fast.

While most politicians continue to excuse or defend Israel's actions, outside of Israel resistance from all quarters of civil society is gathering momentum. Guided by notions of freedom, the rule of law and social justice, more and more people everywhere call not only for an end to the war or even to the post-1967 occupation; they call for a transformation of Palestine/Israel into a state where all residents of all ethnic, national, gender and class backgrounds can enjoy equal individual and collective human and civil rights. For those of us who see ourselves as secular, anti-racist, anti-fundamentalist and socialist feminists, the fight for the survival of our humanity and the core values that should underpin it has become an urgent political struggle.

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P.S.

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