

# 'The Closest There Is to Hell' | A Personal Plea From a Friend in Gaza

Wednesday 6 December 2023, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 4 December 2023).

**'What we truly need are bulldozers to dig and lay us deep into our land'**

"I was planning to write about daily life during the truce," my friend Bassam Nasser wrote to me on Friday morning from the Gaza Strip. "The challenges of securing water; praying for no rain or cloudy weather so that solar panels continue to produce some electricity to charge phones; the search for any type of food... the types of conversations with people; the smell of shelter schools, kilometers of queues to fill a cooking gas cylinder and other many daily challenges. But instead I woke up to the heavy sound of artillery and bombing."

I met Bassam 32 years ago when he studied sociology and social work at al-Najah University in Nablus ([before Israel began banning students from the Gaza Strip from studying in the West Bank](#)). He earned a master's degree in Middle East history at Tel Aviv University. As someone who worked most of his life at aid and conflict resolution organizations, he also completed a human rights course in the United States.

*An aerial view shows the destruction caused by Israeli strikes in Wadi Gaza, in the central Gaza Strip, last month. Credit: Mahmud Hams / AFP*

[Due to the bombardments of the first days of the war](#), he and his family uprooted themselves from Gaza City to Deir al-Balah, and then to Rafah. "The closest there is to hell," he wrote to me in Hebrew. Most of his messages are in English, and so he wrote when the bombing resumed: "The hopes were high for an extended truce, with some optimistic about a longer-term cease-fire. The decisive directive came from influential figures often referred to as 'masters of the universe,' urging Israel to exercise restraint as its military operations progressed in the southern Gaza Strip.

"The sole distinction between today and 55 days ago lies in the nature of the authorization granted. Initially, it was an unrestricted approval for actions such as killing, massacring, destroying, invading and besieging 2.3 million people. The current authorization essentially permits a continuation of these actions with an aim to conclude before Christmas. Message was received and execution has started. At least 30 people were massacred in less than four hours. [By Saturday noon, the number of Palestinians killed amounted to 270, according to the Ministry of Health controlled by Hamas - A.H.] The hypocrites involved seem to desire to celebrate [Christmas] without any disturbance from images of killed Palestinian children."

*Palestinians, including people injured during the bombardment, pass an Israeli tank as they flee the north through the Salaheddine road in the Zeitoun district on the southern outskirts of Gaza City on November 24, 2023. Credit: MAHMUD HAMS - AFP*

On November 27, [still during the temporary truce](#), Bassam wrote: “While wandering through Rafah’s streets, I avoid eye contact with the others, a multitude of individuals – adults and children alike – who, like me, are unfamiliar with the city and are seeking food or bedding necessities. Many people are mumbling to themselves, and their purpose remains unclear. They don’t seem to be praying or chanting a hymn, or even singing. The desire to stop each person and inquire about their needs is strong, yet the challenge lies in meeting their eyes. They appear dispirited, lost and sad, searching for something, silently asking for help without direct gazes. I ponder how they perceive me. Do my face and eyes convey optimism or hope? The realization strikes me that I might radiate a similar sense of despondency, frustration, and sadness. I wish to have the courage to stop them all and apologize for being helpless. To apologize for believing in such an unfair world and international community.”

On November 7, Bassam wrote, addressing friends with psychology and psychiatry backgrounds: “I kindly request that you refrain from attempting to diagnose my situation. I am neither post-traumatic nor entirely ‘normal.’ Please do not look at me with pity or sympathy, for I am not unwell and do not require assistance. I am not a substance abuser or an aggressor, and I have no need for treatment or medication. I was raised in much the same way as you, and my children were brought up similarly to yours. The only distinction is that I was born in the same land as Jesus Christ...Our primary issue is our aspiration for freedom and self-determination....We refuse to live in captivity whether in enclosed spaces or open-air prisons...We will not tolerate humiliation. We will not turn the other cheek to those who oppress us or give our coat to those who steal our shirt.”

*A child sits in a tent as Palestinians, who fled their houses amid Israeli strikes, shelter at a United Nations-run school, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, December 4, 2023.Credit: IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/ REUTERS*

The same day, he also wrote with longing about the city of Gaza, “which may not be the most comfortable or sophisticated city, but it possesses a captivating charm that rivals more privileged places. Gaza is characterized by the generosity, magnanimity, and pride of its people...It’s a city located by the sea and remains unyielding in the face of storms.”

And on November 2, he wrote: “As someone who was born in Palestine and has lived my entire life under occupation, I have every right to question why my family, friends, relatives and neighbors are being killed...If our fate is sealed and we’re destined to meet martyrdom regardless of our actions or words, and if our graves have already been opened and our shrouds prepared, we don’t mind enduring thirst and hunger. The international community can continue with their planned aid deliveries to Gaza. What we truly need are bulldozers to dig and lay us deep into our land. I do have one personal plea, though. If you can, please ensure that my children’s bodies are covered.”

**Amira Hass**

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**P.S.**

• Haaretz. Dec 4, 2023:  
<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/2023-12-04/ty-article/.premium/a-personal-plea-from-a-friend-in-gaza/0000018c-3480-dc03-a9ec-3cfbc1670000>

- Amira Hass' articles in Haaretz:

<https://www.haaretz.com/ty-WRITER/0000017f-da24-d494-a17f-de27b9aa0000>