

Gaza offers us the choice of life

Amos Gvirtz

Will Gaza's non-violent struggle be a turning point? Israel has always cited the murderous struggle waged by the Palestinian terror organizations as justification for its policies, but now Gaza has chosen to explore the option of non-violence. It began as a private initiative that subsequently was taken over by the Hamas. Yes it is not pure nonviolent struggle, it is a popular unarmed civil struggle and has the potential to replace its policy of violence. The success of a non-violent struggle would undermine the Israeli government's claim that security issues are at the basis of the move to annex the occupied territories, and might oblige the government to change course, in the direction of peace and not annexation.

For this reason the government is making every effort to ensure the failure of this protest, disseminating false propaganda which propagates the idea that this protest represents a danger to Israel and its sovereignty.

International reactions were disappointingly feeble with the United States even expressing support for the killing of unarmed demonstrators! Here is a radical Islamic organization with a credo of violence, exploring the possibility of turning to non-violent civil struggle. Encouraging this move could possibly motivate other Islamic terror organizations in the world to adopt this same option. Israel however, has chosen to neutralize this possibility at the very outset.

Hamas has in fact offered us, the Israelis, the option of transferring the conflict between us from a violent to a non-violent arena. We all remember the terror of the rockets that were fired at us during the last confrontations in Gaza. We all remember with pain the casualties of these confrontations. We are all afraid that the next confrontation will be even more terrible. But Israel's right-wing government prefers the violent struggle – which it believes it will win with ease. We the citizens of Israel have the choice between an unending war with all its suffering and its casualties, and a struggle that will not endanger our lives or our security. One must understand that at the essence of non-violent struggle lies respect for the lives and for the existence of one's enemies. In other words, the moment that Hamas abandons violence in

favour of non-violence in pursuit of justice for the Palestinian people, it also abandons its desire to destroy us.

For years the Israeli message to the West is that we are at the forefront of the global struggle against Islamic terror. Now the organization most closely identified with this terror, has set in motion an initiative, whose importance cannot be overestimated, to choose the path of non-violence. Success in this initiative will send a signal to other Islamic terror organizations who might possibly consider adopting the same policy of non-violence, which could only be of benefit to the West. So it is in the West's interests that this experiment succeeds. I therefore hope that Western countries will pressure Israel's right-wing government to change its way of dealing with this civil struggle.

If the leaders of the West do not do this, I call on the citizens of the West: As long as the Palestinians abandon terror in favour of peaceful civil resistance, encourage them by strengthening BDS, which is essentially a non-violent struggle. Anyone who seriously opposes violence must offer an alternative.

Gaza is on the brink of a humanitarian disaster. From within this terrible situation, the Palestinians in Gaza have chosen to test the option that until now they have not tried. They are demanding an end to the siege and justice for themselves, without endangering our lives or our security. This paves the way for the Israelis to conduct an operation, local and international, to save the lives of two million people, without putting our own security at risk. Moreover, it will open the way to peace between our peoples, with possible ramifications for the relationship between the Islamic world and the West. For the sake of our future, we must do everything to make this experiment succeed. Let us choose life!