

Article for the Jerusalem Post I take the unusual step of addressing Israelis on the eve of your election. I write as a Palestinian who has been an advocate of nonviolent action and dedicated much of my life to the search for peaceful solution to conflicts like our own with the Israelis. I think it is important to share with you, our neighbors, the feelings of many of us. We, Palestinians follow very closely your politics, since our destiny is so much interwoven with yours, and we also witness one of Israel's most important elections in recent memory is approaching: We are all tired, devastated by so many casualties, the loss of the lives of innocent human beings from both sides, most of them people whose only fault was to wish for fair treatment and above all, a peaceful, normal life.

More than ever before Israelis have a choice: continue the conflict or make peace with us, your Abrahamic cousins. The current policies have brought neither peace nor any resolution to the conflict. Three generations of Palestinians refuse to be dominated by an occupation that does not provide us with our basic rights, the universal human rights to which Israeli governments have committed, expressed in multiple treaties you have signed. This is an unsustainable situation and one that inevitably results in hostility and conflict. The conflict must be ended before more of your nation's wealth is poured into it - not only money and other resources but the most precious wealth of any nation: the lives of its citizens.

I strongly encourage every Israeli to vote for those parties who support a path to peace and reconciliation and possess a deep commitment to end the hate and the discrimination. Your voice in this matter is crucial. Do not be fearful of the difficult times we are in, rather be the change by casting your vote for peace. Be brave and honest. Work to bring change to the difficult times we are in.

As a Palestinian I envy you your election and its process. We Palestinians should be self-critical for not conducting our long overdue democratic process. No matter how much restricted we have been, we managed to do so in the past, and we can do it again, if the willpower of our leadership and people requires nonviolent action..

Indeed, for most Palestinians we feel that the way ahead is, nonviolence is the path to follow towards full freedom. But it is also true that Increasingly we sense and voice that if we are not granted self-determination in the form of an independent state, then the time has come to join our Arab brethren inside Israel. Our lives will be better as citizens of an existing state rather than remaining under occupation. So the way forward is for the Palestinian Authority to hand over its governance responsibilities to the newly elected Israeli government. The PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] will remain our representative until the day we acquire our full rights as citizens of one state shared with our Jewish neighbors.

Such a political arrangement does not need to be permanent. We can take as an example the state of Czechoslovakia, brought into existence through the good will of the international community a century ago and recognized as a member of the League of Nations. At the end of the Cold War, the two components of this country amicably and by self-determination agreed to split into two sovereign states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The two now coexist side-by-side. So too, it may be that at the present time, we cannot establish two sovereign states, Israel and Palestine. If so, and for as long as this is the case, let us live within a single state that respects the rights and dignity and needs of us all.

But make no mistake: endless occupation is not an option. Either Palestinians will enjoy their rights as citizens of their own state, or we must enjoy our rights as citizens of Israel.

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right of every individual to take part in free and fair elections to determine their government. You can be proud that the drafter of this unique document was a proud Jew, Justice Rene Cassin, and for that he was awarded the Peace Nobel Prize. Facing the elections in Israel, I call upon all Jewish democrats in Israel to understand that three generations of Palestinians are denied this basic right that you are about to exercise.

You can see the legacy of Rene Cassin when you look in the mirror. The commitment to his high ideals should be a priority. Please do not wait for a future Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement to then ask

forgiveness for your mistake: vote now for peace with justice. This is your chance to make your voice heard and choose a new path for your country. It's your chance to make things right and vote for a just and equitable resolution to this conflict, not only for yourself, your family, friends and neighbors, but for Israel, the Middle East and the world.

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