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# **Nurit Peled-Elhanan at the Closing Session of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine 17.3.2013**

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I would like to dedicate these words to our beloved Stephane Hessel, to whom I was introduced in Paris by my children Elik and Guy who admired him profoundly and were inspired by him for their own struggle against the occupation of Palestine.

I would also like to dedicate these words to the memory of a young man, of the age of my children, the Martyr Mo'ayad Nazeeh Ghazawna (35 years) who died yesterday in Ramallah hospital. Mo'ayad sustained injuries 3 weeks ago after being targeted by a tear gas canister used by Israeli occupation forces. And to all the children of Palestinian mothers who are killed and maimed and tortured as I speak, who are kidnapped from their beds every night and thrown into solitary cells, cut off their parents and families, interrogated in the most cruel conditions, traumatized for life, for nothing but throwing stones or crossing a road for Jews only, or entering their village on the way from school through a hole in the fence. These children and their parents can never be heard in any court or tribunal in the world. Their discourse has no validity in the Western Judicial system. Their sentence is always already formulated. They are criminals by the very fact that they are Palestinians. And this fact alone allows their oppressors to treat them as beings " who are forcibly denied all social or legal status, and whose lives are dispensable with impunity".

These children and their parents who protest every Friday against the Apartheid Wall and the settlements in Nabi Saleh, Qaddum, Masaara, Nilin, Bilin and in Bet Umar, to name but a few villages, whose houses are demolished with excuses derived from what the late sociologist Stanley Cohen called the Zionist kitsch, received, maybe for the very first time, a proper hearing in the Russell Tribunal on Palestine.

Palestinians are not allowed to leave their homes even to go to the next village and visit their relatives, let alone travel to Brussels. But we who are so privileged, must be their emissaries. We cannot afford, a Stephane said once and again, to exasperate, for exasperation is the denial of hope and we, who can speak and have the privilege to be heard, must create hope for those who have none.

People who survived Auschwitz often say that one of the most exasperating things was the knowledge that nobody knew their suffering, nobody saw their misery. The world has never been interested in human suffering, especially when it happens in its back or front yard, and has always classified it under Politics. Hardly anyone today really studies or teaches about Palestinian suffering and the devastating consequences of Israeli aggression for children and their families. Therefore knowing that there is an institution which is professional, respectable and influential, that is aware of their misery and is fighting for their lives, for their dignity and for their freedom is an incentive for all those who resist Israeli evil, Palestinians and Israeli alike, to go on fighting and to keep on living. As I understand it this has been one of the main goals of the Russell Tribunal. The other goal was, to find enough evidence to incriminate Israel and its Western accomplices in terms they cannot ignore.

Israel has succeeded to advertise itself as a democracy but it is as the Tribunal stated an apartheid state according to international law, an oppressive regime which deprives half of its dominated population of basic necessities such as water in the summer. Giorgio Agamben recently said: "The state of Israel is a good example of how when the state of exception is prolonged then all democratic institutions collapse. This is what happened in the Weimar republic"

Israel has reached an unimaginable peak of evil. And indeed many people all over the world find it hard to imagine that this is so.

Who could imagine Jewish thugs, wearing black boots and helmets, armed with guns and batons, lashing dogs at small children and old people, or letting asylum seekers die of thirst in the desert and prisoners die of hunger strikes, punishing them and their families by sending them to confinement; who would conceive of Jewish doctors driving a

wounded man out of hospital and letting him die of thirst on a deserted road, who would think of Jewish soldiers breaking the neck of a young girl with a pink scarf for protesting against oppression. Who could imagine the education of Jewish girls as consisting of beating up and harassing women and children, or a Jewish soldier girl receiving a badge of courage for murdering a Palestinian boy who went to fetch his birthday cake.

The only possible conclusion must be that Israeli evil has nothing to do with Judaism and that what is manifested in Israeli behavior is not Jewishness. It is pure colonialist, nationalist and chauvinistic racism and should be treated as such.

Stephane Hessel was crystal clear about that and therefore was thus defined by another fellow-militant Michel Warschaeski, and I quote: "Stephane hessel n'etait Pas seulement la conscience du 20ieme siècle mais la conscience juive en tout ce qu'elle a des meilleurs"

The Russell tribunal has proven and will hopefully go on proving Stephane's conviction that the worst attitude in the face of injustice is indifference. Or denial. Indignation and engagement are the only possible responses to Evil. And for that I am thankful to all of you who do the work. It is very important for all of us, over there, to know there are people over here who will not let go until the wall falls and justice prevails.