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OPINION

I wasn't going to raise my voice again, but Israel has given me no choice



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Late last week, I read a headline in Israel's oldest newspaper, *Haaretz*, that left me horror-struck: ["30,000 Dead. A Stampede of the Starving."](#) In just over four months, 30,000 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza and, last Thursday, hundreds more killed and wounded while charging for food in the famine-gripped north.

Furious [debate rages over exactly how these people died](#) – crushed, gunned down, or a combination of the two – but what seems certain is that Israeli forces opened fire on thousands of desperate, famished people trying to reach aid trucks.



Mourners receive the bodies of victims of an Israeli strike on March 2 in Rafah, Gaza. GETTY

For four months, I have resisted requests to comment further on this conflict after having waded in with two articles in October. [My first](#) said that, as a Jew, despite the pure evil of Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, I stood with both Israelis *and* Palestinians. [My second](#) said that, although I had no answers for how to destroy Hamas, an organisation whose founding charter calls for the obliteration of Israel, surely it could not be done by starving, besieging, and terrifying millions of innocent people – nor killing tens of thousands of others – as retribution.

I then stopped writing. To write is to sometimes bleed onto the page. This felt too much, and besides, who would listen? Certainly no one with the power to end this disaster. “What more can we do, David?” my friend Stephanie wrote as the numbers of dead and wounded kept mounting. “Nothing,” was my first and second thought because the momentum towards further destruction felt unstoppable. “It’s only going to get worse before it gets worse,” the man in the plane seat next to me had predicted two weeks earlier.

Stephanie’s email arrived at the end of January, along with an article about the International Court of Justice’s ruling that Israel could be engaged in acts of genocide. “What hideous fate was this?” I’d asked myself. “The victims of genocide now possibly inflicting genocide themselves.” Then the further thought: “Is this what centuries of persecution does to a people? Inures them to the pain and suffering of another people?”

Then I read comments from American Jewish scholar Shaul Magid on [his Facebook page](#). “I look at the morning news, and what do I see? Myriad ways we (Jews-Israel) claim that we are being framed, that we are not to blame, that we are doing nothing wrong, that we are justified, and it is they, only they (fill in everything from Hamas to the ICC), who are evil. No complicity, no error, no responsibility, no sin.”

I wanted more Jewish voices to be raised in protest, like that of US Senator Bernie Sanders, who kept calling for a ceasefire, and American playwright Eve Ensler, who described the forced relocation of entire families into “safe” zones, bereft of food, water, medicine or fuel, as “sickening” and “grotesque”.

“If you still do not understand that this is ethnic cleansing and genocide,” Ensler said, “if you still believe that Israel ... is ‘defending’ itself, you have had to deaden some profound aspect of your compassion in defence of a delusion.”

I spent nights thinking about those people with deadened hearts and the governments – our own included – who had failed to call for a ceasefire in Gaza and then [suspended payments to UNRWA](#), the main provider of aid to the stricken region, after Israel had accused a dozen of its staff members of involvement in the October 7 slaughter.



Israeli soldiers pose for a photo on a position on the Gaza Strip border, in southern Israel, last month. AP

And this at a time of war, mass dislodgement and impending famine, and when the allegations – still unsubstantiated – were directed at roughly 0.1 per cent of the UN agency’s estimated 13,000 Gaza staff members.

I thought about this abject failure of the international community and the failure of so many Jewish people to condemn an Israeli government so utterly hijacked by right-wing extremists, messianic radicals, hooligan settlers and a morally bankrupt prime minister.

The Israeli government had for months been preventing sufficient aid from entering Gaza, and Palestinians were now eating grass and drinking putrid water. Hundreds were being forced to share one latrine. Children were beginning to die of famine, and even aid workers were starving to death. Virtually every hospital had been damaged or destroyed. Doctors, nurses, artists,

students, teachers, journalists, entire families and children, thousands upon thousands of children, all dead.

“I have never in my many, many years as an aid worker seen a place that has been so bombarded for such a long time, with such a trapped population, without any escape,” said Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

And, still, I swallowed my tongue, even after I heard American anti-Zionist [Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss](#), denounce Israel. “We cannot be silent,” he said. “Because we’re Jews, we have to stand up and say ... ‘not in our name, we totally object to this. We cry and hurt with the people of Palestine’.”

On February 10, they discovered the body of [Hind Hamada](#), the little Gazan girl who, in a recorded phone call with the Palestinian Red Crescent, had pleaded to be saved. Her family had been complying with Israel’s “humanitarian” call to evacuate Gaza City when they were fired upon by Israeli tanks.

The six-year-old’s fate had remained unknown until she was found in her aunt’s burnt-out car, having bled to death under the bodies of her family.

From that, I turned to an image of another Palestinian girl wailing, shaking and pounding the dirt over the loss of her family, and then I listened to [Bisan Owda](#), the young Palestinian filmmaker who, since the war began, had built an [Instagram following of 4.4 million](#) while trying to describe the indescribable:

“Hey everyone! This is Bisan from Gaza, the land of love, life and death. So the groom and bride, Maryam and Abdullah, who got married just three days ago in tents, were killed today. They were living in the ‘safe’ area of Rafah. There are no safe places and no safe people in Gaza and all our attempts to live, to love, to complete our lives while waiting for this war to stop, will fail. There are no other solutions than to stop this war and [begin a] ceasefire.”

Then I read about the “stampede of the starving” and the assessment of Volker Turk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: “There appear to be no bounds, no words to capture the horrors that are unfolding before our eyes in Gaza. This is carnage ... All people in Gaza are at imminent risk of famine.”

That was it. I texted my editor and asked if I could attempt another story. Yes, I could. And so now, in trying to find the words, I reach for those of [Elie Wiesel](#), the Jewish Holocaust survivor and author who, in 1986, accepted the Nobel Peace Prize by swearing never to be silent about the suffering of others.

“Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views,” he said, “that place must – at that moment – become the centre of the universe.”

At this moment, Gaza is the centre of the universe and remaining silent is no longer an option. If, indeed, it ever was.

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