

# Morning—and Mourning—in Gaza: Palestinians Can Finally Begin the Important Work of Grieving

by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish

*The following op-ed by Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish was published in The Globe and Mail in Toronto on Jan. 21, 2025, one day after the commencement of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. Dr. Abuelaish wrote the book, I Shall Not Hate, after three of his daughters and a niece were killed in an Israeli attack in 2009. The Schiller Institute in Denmark's interview with him in March, 2024 is available [here](#). In April, 2024 he spoke at the Schiller Institute's [Oasis Plan conference](#).*

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For many years, grief in Gaza has been repressed, buried under the weight of bombing and fear, as though expressing pain is some sort of privilege.

And so, at this fragile and paradoxical moment—the start of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip—Palestinians stand before a long-awaited scene: a chance to grieve in peace.

During a war, moments turn into living testimonies of pain, horror, killing and destruction. War is not experienced by people as a struggle for power, but as a test of human will in the face of the harshest violence and injustice. And this war has stolen people's dreams, their most basic rights to a dignified life. Every destroyed house was once a haven, and every shattered street was once a passageway to hope. Even if the war fully ends, its impact will never leave souls.

But hope remains the hidden force that can give life new meaning.

The ceasefire is an opportunity for this hope to take root in Gaza, a land that has never known peace, where each day begins and ends in suffering, and which is burdened by wounds both past and present. This city deserves the chance to mourn without fear and to live free from the shadow of death. While complete peace may seem far off, this ceasefire offers a space to begin anew. It is a desperately needed respite for the departed souls, for the hearts of those who endure, for a land that deserves lasting tranquility one day.

There is now a chance for hope to truly take root in the heart of the widowed mother, the orphaned child, the grieving father, the sister clinging to memories. Despite their immense losses, they embody the strength to survive.

In a land that has known injustice, oppression and occupation more than it has known peace, grief becomes an act of resistance. To grieve means acknowledging your loss, acknowledging that you are a human who is burdened with hurt. But mourning for lost loved ones without fear of meeting the same fate has been an elusive dream for Gaza. Today, in the peaceful silence of streets that were yesterday filled with a different kind of silence—one pregnant with the terror of potential destruction—mourning allows for the contemplation needed to pursue new meaning and new life.

Of course, mourning is not the end of the road. It is the first, crucial step toward rebuilding the soul, toward respecting the memory of those who have passed away, toward giving wounds space to breathe. Mourning is the only way to remain human in the face of hatred.

After more than 15 months of bombing, people

## **GUEST OPINION**

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are returning to the rubble—not for shelter, but for the heartbreaking task of recovering the bodies of loved ones. Among the debris lie painful memories. How deep, this pain—finding bodies, some of which have been gnawed at by stray dogs.

The dreams of children—of learning at school, of finding lost friends or toys—lie under that rubble, too. But mourning allows them to find a world where safety and innocence can thrive again. These dreams that refuse to be buried remind the world that even in war, the hope of children is capable of survival.

Those who have lived in a cycle of constant terror may now finally find long-awaited sleep. It will still not be an ordinary sleep, but one burdened with memories and pain, one that reveals the wounds. And even when ceasefire agreements are announced, the wait for peace remains painful. The hours become somehow heavier than years, as people live on a knife's edge between the fear of the last bombing and daring to hope for salvation. Every passing moment over the last 15 months has brought with it the possibility of loss; now, it is mixed in with the fragile possibility of peace—and the potential for a different kind of pain.

Pain in Gaza is turning into energy for persistence. A bleeding wound becomes a symbol of strength. But loss, despite its cruelty, plants in hearts a determination to live. Palestinians are not only victims of war; they are an example of indomitable will, embodying what it means to rise from the ashes. The land itself tells stories of the suffering of this resilient people. The houses

that were destroyed were once filled with laughter, and the streets that were reduced to rubble were once corridors of life—but despite all this, Palestinians stand tall, turning pain into a lesson and steadfastness into a way of life.

On this land, there is something worth living for. Gaza is not just a city, but a symbol of determination and hope. From beneath the rubble, Palestinians are now embarking on the work of creating life from death. Defeat is not in destruction, but in the loss of faith in freedom and dignity; this is what the people of Gaza are rejecting. That's why Palestinians remain hopeful. It's not only because they deserve life, but because they believe that freedom is coming, and that the pain they are experiencing today will be the seed for creating a more just and peaceful future.

From Gaza's pain, profound human lessons emerge. Palestinians teach us that wars may destroy homes, but they cannot erase faith. They teach us that hope, when it becomes a way of life, is superior to any weapon or restriction.

That is why Gaza is not just a suffering city, but a symbol of resilience. So, its people, who transform every tragedy into strength and every destruction into construction, are now sending a message to the world: life always triumphs. Palestinians are governed by hope, armed with will and believe that freedom, justice, equality and dignity are essential and crucial to peace.

Who knows how long this ceasefire will last? But the journey to peace can now begin.