

## **Speech for the SYLFF Prize Award Ceremony**

**Amal Jadou**

Dear Friends, Sisters, and Brothers:

The Tokyo Foundation, its members and partners, as well as its distinguished chairman and executive directors, have made a difficult decision that makes a difference in my life. You have already made a difference in my life by standing up for justice and the pursuit of peace in my country by intervening positively in the cause of peace. You did so by believing in me, a young woman from a refugee camp, somewhere so far away from here. You granted me the opportunity to study in prestigious American universities such as the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Harvard Law School. You have taken me by the hand, removing me from the tiny refugee camp where I had been living and opening my mind to new horizons of knowledge and education. Now you are rewarding not only my hard academic work but also recognizing all those who are committed to a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, who continue to challenge the current cycle of violence and the mutual infliction of pain and suffering, and who continue to provide hope in the midst of darkness and fear. I am truly honored to receive this prize, which I view as a source of empowerment for individuals all over the world who share the values of justice, reconciliation, and peace.

I come to you from a small beautiful country that has a name and an identity. It has a long, continuous history and a distinguished language. It has been the cradle of several civilizations and religions. Prophets, pioneers, pilgrims, and poets have made it their destination. My people are one, fused by centuries of history in my homeland, bound together by a collective memory of shared sorrows and joys and a unity of purpose and vision. We have our own songs and hymns, our folkloric stories, and our own poetry and images that all share a tint of melancholy that colors even our happiest moments. These are all important aspects of our national and cultural identity.

I come from a country that glows with the brightness of heavenly good news and celestial messages. It has given humanity a great deal of knowledge, art, culture, mythologies, and other forms of the richness of human expression. It has also experienced much pain. My country is called Palestine. Palestine has surpassed the local alphabet to enter the international lexicon as a synonym for the quest for freedom and liberty.

From my small country Jesus Christ rose to spread the light of love and peace to the whole world so as to end its suffering. With his birth, humanity's pursuit of a new historical era began. It all started there in my country. The land of my country has captured the love and the imagination of millions of people throughout history.

For more than one hundred years now, my country has been searching for its humanistic salvation. As one handcuff is broken from around the wrists of Palestine, it is replaced by a new one. My country is still searching for its stolen liberty. It is still defying an occupation that presses so heavily on its chest. Palestine is shaking under the blades of the occupiers. The hands of Palestine are waving, urging the world to end its silence to oppression and aggression. But my country will not die, because conscience never dies.

I am the daughter of a people who have been dispersed and massacred. Our villages

have been destroyed. My people live in a diaspora all over the world. We live humiliated in camps. We live with our memories and our sadness—and with the keys to our destroyed homes.

I come to you only after breaking a tight siege, a siege of fear that prevails on the allies— a siege of continued pain and the groans of the dead, the prisoners, and the hungry. In my mind still echoes the hovering of the Apache helicopters as they drop tons of explosives on children and women in Nablus, Gaza, and Jenin. The scenes of uprooted trees live in my memory.

I come to you after witnessing the withering away of the green in my country. I have seen people humiliated at checkpoints and trodden upon by military boots. The cities, villages, camps, and neighborhoods of Palestine are separated from each other by 618 Israeli military checkpoints. To come to you, I had to pass through armed checkpoints and daily terror. I tried to find a hole in the huge “Apartheid Wall” that is being erected around us. The wall is stealing our land and our water, leaving my people in a large prison.

As I come to you, in my heart is the pain of my people. Each Palestinian household has suffered from death, injury, deportation, and/or imprisonment as a result of the occupation of our land. Since the beginning of the current intifada, 3,200 Palestinians have been killed, 6,300 houses have been demolished, and hundreds of acres have been expropriated by the Israeli occupation authorities. About 70 percent of my people live below the poverty line. My country is a war zone where war is waged daily on the humanity and dignity of each individual.

I stand before you in the fullness of such pain, but I maintain the pride of my people and their anticipation, yearning, and dreams of justice and freedom. For too long my people have been silenced, denied their natural rights, and their identity negated. Our rightful struggle against injustice has been slandered, and our present existence is only considered by the past tragedy of another people.

As I was growing up, for me the most painful aspect of the Israeli occupation was the denial of my people’s existence, as we were victimized by the myth of "a land without a people" and described as "the invisible Palestinians." In the face of such willful blindness, we refused to accept dissolution. Our continued struggle for peace and freedom is a testimony to our perseverance and resilience. We will not settle down until we reach a just peace.

I stand before you today not as a supplicant but rather as a torchbearer for the truth. I stand before you empowered by hundreds of United Nations’ and other international organizations’ resolutions, the latest of which was the International Court of Justice’s advisory opinion to the General Assembly, saying that the majority of the separation barrier being built by Israel violates international law and the rights of Palestinians. My plea from Tokyo to the whole world is this: that the international community stand by its commitments to my people and end the Israeli occupation. I call on the international community to ensure that the Fourth Geneva Convention is applied and respected in the Occupied Territories and that Palestinian mothers be able to deliver their babies in hospitals instead of at checkpoints. I ask the world to play an active role in setting free the 8,000 Palestinian prisoners who are currently languishing in Israeli prisons and detention centers, most of them detained without charge or trial, many cruelly mistreated and tortured in interrogations, guilty only of seeking liberty and defying the occupation.

The message of peace-loving Israelis and Palestinians is simple: End the occupation

and end the suffering of both peoples; stop confiscating and stealing the lands of others to build settlements; end the death of civilians on both sides; end fear and insecurity; and end pain. Occupation exacts a high toll on the occupiers as well as on the occupied. Young Israeli men and women are being transformed into tools of a blind, violent, and oppressive regime. They are inflicting pain on their fellow human beings, who in turn react and inflict pain on innocent civilians, and thus the cycle continues. Pain knows no national boundaries, and no one can claim a monopoly on suffering. During the period of my education in the United States, I have marched in protest hand in hand with American Jews as well as with Israelis who detest the occupation as much as I do. These individuals are my natural allies against oppression. My call to the international community is the call of liberals all over the world: for the world to do its best to set us free and to not forsake or forget us.

Since 1988, the Palestinian people and its leadership have responded positively to every just peace initiative in their pursuit of peace, and they have given birth to a resolution to create two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. We cannot be made to bear the brunt of other people's "no" and their violation of international legitimacy, their continued assassinations, confiscation of land, and settlement activities. The state of Palestine must be born on the land of Palestine so as to reverse the injustice of the destruction of its historical reality and to set its people free. Palestine must be created as a state that includes all of the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The most significant principle that I have learned through my studies is the indispensability of the rule of law, at both the national and international levels. Only the rule of law is capable of providing accountability and guaranteeing justice. I am a strong believer in institutions, for they serve as safeguards against unilateral power and selfish individualistic interests. It is within these two parameters of law and institutions that a resolution to the Middle East conflict can be found. Only the involvement of the international community and the implementation of relevant international law can serve as a factor of balance between the two unequal parties. The international community and international law are needed to silence the drums of war—a war that is taking a toll not just in Palestine/Israel but across the region. The regional client regimes that are seeking to maintain control are exploiting the lack of a settlement of the Palestinian question to continue to oppress their peoples and to deny them the right to participate in governance.

Globally, fundamentalist ideologues exploit the lack of a solution to the Palestinian problem in order to mobilize young men and women to get involved in terrorist actions. It is necessary to emphasize that artificial and unilateral solutions such as that reflected by the apartheid wall will not resolve the conflict and will only lead to greater violence and greater injustices, including the continuing theft of land and water, as well as to the creation of isolated ghettos, destroying the chances of a viable Palestinian state.

Another imperative for peace and stability in the Middle East is Palestinian nation-building on the principles of democracy, separation of powers, the rule of law, respect for human rights, institution building, and accountability. Occupation is a new form of slavery, and it should not be used as an excuse to avoid responsibility. The most important requisites for Palestinians today are our national unity and the chance for our young men and women to assume their roles in leading the nation. What is needed now is a leadership that has a new vision and that is able to

formulate policies and strategies that will empower the people. Resisting occupation and building the nation must go hand in hand, so that a free, liberal, democratic, and open-minded Palestine can be established.

My pledge to you is that together with fellow Palestinians and activists from the Israeli peace camp, as well as with people from all over the world who believe in freedom, I will continue to work for the principles of justice, peace, reconciliation based on international legitimacy, democracy, and reform.

Three years ago, in the statement of purpose portion of my application to the Fletcher School, I said that I was going to the United States to grow wings in order to fly. But I was naïve to think that I needed to grow wings. In my academic learning, I discovered that God had created me with the wings I need. For me to learn to fly, I merely needed to be trained in how to use my wings. I discovered that what I have learned is how to navigate better in a changing environment and how to keep my eyes focused on my goals. Fletcher was the ideal place for me to learn how to navigate. I thank The Nippon Foundation and The Tokyo Foundation both for the SYLFF fellowship that I received and for the continued support that enabled me to learn how to navigate more smoothly while keeping in mind not only the interests of my people, but also those of all humanity.

Thank you for listening so attentively.