

Baroness Uddin, CIAC, distinguished guests and friends

Thank you for giving me this award in this prestigious House of Lords. I know I do not deserve this, but I have accepted it in honour of my Palestinian friends, the many victims of wars and disasters and also my NHS patients. This award is for them.

I very much regret not being able to be with you today but we all know about the ongoing disastrous tragedy in Gaza. We know that more than 10,000 had already been killed, among them 4000 children. Many more are missing – feared buried under the rubble. Twenty four thousand are wounded. Many of us have our hearts wrenched out just watching the massive bombing of this little strip of land in which 2.2 million Palestinians call home. It is a little bit smaller than the Isle of Wight. As a doctor, my heart stopped when all the hospitals in Northern Gaza were threatened with bombing and some of them have already been destroyed.

At this moment, I am absent from the House of Lords because I am with doctors and health workers in a Vigil on the pavement of Downing Street - remembering all who have lost their lives, both Israelis and Palestinians, and calling for a ceasefire.

My journey with the Palestinians began 41 years ago when as a Pro-Israel Christian doctor; I volunteered to treat the war victims in Lebanon. In that summer of 1982, Beirut, the capitol of Lebanon, was held siege for 10 weeks. It was denied food, water, electricity and medicine. It was subjected to ten weeks of relentless bombing - killing 14,000; making thousands homeless, and destroying many institutions which sustained life such as hospitals, clinics, schools and factories. The declared war aim was to flush out the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

The PLO did evacuate, and there was a ceasefire of 3 weeks which was abruptly broken by a massive land invasion by hundreds of tanks. More homes were destroyed and more civilians killed. I was working as a volunteer surgeon in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra Shatila which was sealed by tanks so that people could not escape. At least 3,500 civilians including children and old people were butchered, women raped before being killed. Families who recently welcomed me to their broken homes to share with me their broken lives were massacred. All these atrocities were carried out under the watchful eye of the Israeli Army.

The BBC World Service broadcasted hourly that the Israeli Army had gone back into Lebanon to get rid of the PLO terrorists left behind in violation of the ceasefire agreement. There were no terrorists found in Sabra Shatila. There were only Palestinian refugees who were driven out of historic Palestine in 1948 and forced to live in refugee camps. There they remain refugees. They gave birth to refugees, who grew up refugees and died refugees. There, as refugees, they were slaughtered.

I have been journeying with the Palestinians for 41 years. How do I find them? They are the most generous and kind human beings I have ever met. They have suffered untold injustice - made homeless, wounded again and again, killed, imprisoned, impoverished, humiliated, dispossessed. Yet they remain human and courageous.

Today they are bombed to smithereens in Gaza under the watchful eye of the whole world, and being trampled under the iron heels of the occupiers in the West Bank. We see them live on television fleeing the bombs in Northern Gaza hoping to seek refuge in Southern Gaza. We saw them being fired on as they fled. We see the broken and mutilated bodies of children and families pulled out from under the rubble. Those who fled to Southern Gaza and survived the journey live in appalling conditions with scarcity of food, water and electricity. They live in unbelievably crowded conditions – 150 persons sharing 4 toilets! People in Gaza call it the Second Nakbah – a forced displacement of a million people through military action. They are the refugees of our 2023.

Generations of young Palestinians born in exile in the squalid refugee camps dotted all over the Middle East are not allowed to return to their ancestral homes. Yet they struggle on, living in hope for a world of peace with justice and freedom.

I receive this Award on their behalf. But I also would like to share with you their love and steadfastness and my gratitude of being given the privilege to serve them, and to learn from them the best that is in humanity. I am not afraid to call for, and pray for a Free Palestine so that the younger generations can live in peace and security. And I hope all of you in this award ceremony will support me in this demand for a ceasefire with a homeland and a secure future for the Palestinians.

Dr Swee Chai Ang 10 November 2023

