

## **Sabra Shatilla 41 Anniversary 22 September 2023, Greetings from UK**

### **Dr Swee Ang on the 41 Anniversary of the Sabra Shatilla Massacre**

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear brothers and sisters

As Salamu alaykum

To be with you all today - especially with the families of the martyrs of Sabra Shatilla - is a very special gift from God. Standing here, I feel I am in a sacred space. I bring you many greetings from friends in the UK and the rest of the world, especially from sister Ellen Siegel in the USA. We are with you every day in your courageous journey towards justice and freedom for Palestine.

In Britain, the crime against Palestine and her people began in 1917 with the Balfour declaration and the British Mandate. Sadly, it continues today. Right now, the British Government is in the process to outlaw boycotts divestment and sanctions. Friends who protest against the presence of weapon manufacturers in UK are being arrested and taken to court, put in prison. People who speak up and write in support of the Palestinians are accused of anti-semitism, harassed in their workplace, sacked, and threatened with the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The mainstream media publish and broadcast lies against them. Like everyone else I have suffered many attacks including being accused of being a white supremacist and a Ku Klux Klan sympathiser - despite being a tiny Singapore woman refugee! Artists, performers and lecturers have their events cancelled just because they support the Palestinians. The list goes on.

But something more amazing is going on too. In the streets of many cities like London, Glasgow, Liverpool, in the counties and in remote UK, and in Europe and the USA, more and more people, especially young people, are coming out in support of Palestine. Our demonstrations used to be a few hundred, then thousands and now tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands.

In 2018, I was medical doctor on board the Freedom Flotilla Awda sailing towards blockaded Gaza. While in international waters, two large Israeli battle ships, dozens of gunboats, and two hundred heavily armed marines came for us and hijacked Awda and took us to prison in Ramleh. Awda was impounded and never sailed again. But Awda's child, the Handala, will be setting out for Gaza again in 2024 to defy the military blockade. Earlier this year, Handala visited Britain and was given a rapturous welcome. Next year, it will sail through European cities and ports on its way to Gaza and no intimidation can stop people in Europe welcoming Handala and sending Handala on to challenge the blockade of Gaza. Handala will return to Palestine.

Many people ask - why do thousands round the world choose to suffer and stand in solidarity with Palestine?

The answer is because the truth about Palestine can no longer be hidden. Because the steadfastness and brave resistance of the Palestinians living under brutal occupation in the West Bank challenging ethnic cleansing every day inspire us. Because Gaza under military blockade and facing major military assaults by land, air and sea choose to die standing rather than live on its knees! Because the generations of Palestinians living in exile as refugees in camps all over the Middle East crying out for the right of return have broken the media blockade against them and their voices cannot be silenced anymore. Their very presence today against all attempts to wipe them out as a people fills us with hope for their future and humanity's future. They have shown us the real meaning of struggle.

Forty one years ago I came to Beirut as a volunteer surgeon expecting to meet terrorists. I came to Gaza Hospital and joined the PRCS. I lived in Sabra Shatilla. There were no terrorists. Instead I met Palestinians driven out of their homes in 1948. I met a kind, generous, gentle and strong people resisting the terrors inflicted on them. I fell in love with them. A month later, they were brutally butchered in the Sabra Shatilla Massacre. They were lied about, betrayed and killed. But they never gave up. Today they keep Palestine alive through their families, friends and children. They demand nothing except their divine human rights and their right of return to their homeland. For me it is my undeserved honour to be with them, share their lives, their struggles, and their witness. Even if I die now – I know they will win their struggle against evil and oppression and will claim their rightful place in a Free Palestine.

22/09/23