

## A painful truth: Building bridges between Palestine and Israel

Ali Abu Awwad<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 11 May 2019  
© UNESCO IBE 2019

**Abstract** The standoff between Palestine and Israel is one of the most entrenched and enduring conflicts in the world. The cycle of violence and mutual blame seems without end. This Viewpoint argues that non-violence is a path that has yet to be taken in attempting to move toward peace and reconciliation. Non-violence has the potential to overcome the trauma and the pervasive feeling of victimhood that exist on both sides. It is however a painful and challenging path that requires Israelis and Palestinians to take responsibility for their lives; to recognize and challenge destructive behaviours while respecting each other's identity and desire to live with dignity on this land. Non-violence can offer a way forward for these two truths to live side by side.

**Keywords** Non-violence · Conflict · Peace

My life experience has shaped my belief that non-violence is the only viable path toward a lasting solution between Palestine and Israel. However, it is a difficult journey, one that involves deep personal and societal transformation. It involves recognizing every side's own responsibility in solving the conflict. It involves going beyond victimhood. It involves walking toward the other and their fears. There is not an easy fix on the non-violent path.

Non-violence is not a tactic nor a strategy. Non-violence is an identity, a way of being that influences my decisions every day, from the moment I wake up. It involves deciding not to be a victim, to be responsible for my life, to stand up for my truth while respecting the Other. I believe it is possible to create a movement that promotes non-violence as an identity for the whole of Palestinian society. Such a movement can in turn create the conditions for a political solution to the conflict.

---

✉ Ali Abu Awwad  
mehra@b8ofhope.org

<sup>1</sup> B8 of Hope, 4, av. de Champel, 1204 Geneva, Switzerland

In this article, I begin with my own life story and my transformative encounter with non-violence. In the second part, I describe some of my key learnings and how both sides might start overcoming violence and write a different story for Palestine.

Change starts from within. A door often opens when we witness a genuine individual experience that breaks through the conventional narratives. Much of the violence exists and continues because we only know and believe one story. A story of division, fear, and stereotypes. Non-violence invites a different story. This is my own.

## My story, my journey to non-violence

I was born in 1972, a refugee in my own country. My parents had to leave their village in 1948 during the period known as the *Nakba* ("catastrophe" or "disaster" in Arabic), when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes. The creation of the state of Israel, a cause for celebration and a profound achievement for most Jews following the horror of the Second World War, became a disaster for the Palestinian people. Two traumas, two people, two identities, two cultures, two narratives, two truths. We have lived with these seemingly irreconcilable realities since then. As a Palestinian, it means the only reality I have known is the one of the occupation.

I was born of a political mother, a prominent member of Fatah, still today the main Palestinian political party, yet my first education happened in the street. I spent most of my childhood feeling insecure leaving home, going to school, crossing checkpoints. When you grow up in such an environment, you don't need anyone to teach you to hate. You do not need a curriculum that incites violence, the environment does the job for you. Eventually anger becomes part of you as well as a constant feeling of injustice and victimhood.

I took part in the first Intifada as a teenager and was eventually sent to prison. I was accused of stone throwing and other offenses, but I believe the real reason was because I had refused to cooperate with Israeli interrogators who wanted information about my mother's political activities. The feeling of injustice and anger only grew stronger. I was incarcerated for four years, but prison is also where my education about non-violence began. I not only read many books on Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the different philosophies of non-violence, I got to experience its transformative power for myself.

My mother was in prison during the same time and I was aching to see her. One day we decided to start a hunger strike. After 17 days, we were allowed to see each other. This success was a turning point for me. Until then, I was blinded by feelings of anger, blame, and injustice. There I discovered the power of my own humanity. I realized that it was my best weapon to achieve my rights and that, even in prison, I had a choice, I could act, I could decide not to be a victim.

In 2000, I was shot in the leg by an Israeli settler and evacuated for treatment in Saudi Arabia. While there, I learned that my brother Youssef had been shot in the head by an Israeli soldier. I was very close to my brother and the suffering was immense. He was not a militant. He was a peaceful father of two children, killed because of an argument with a soldier at a checkpoint. I thought about revenge but then realized that what I wanted was justice. Yet, I felt the only true justice was to have my brother back and this was impossible. Realizing this, I hated myself, my enemies, and the whole world.

A year later my mother decided to host a group of beavered Israeli parents at our house. I could not understand why my own mother would invite enemies to our home. The encounter transformed me. Here I was listening to Israeli parents offering their condolences to my

family while talking about the pain of losing their own children. There I saw Jewish people cry for the first time. I grew up believing Jewish people did not have tears. That day I experienced the power of recognizing the other's pain.

This whole experience brought me back to the words of Malcom X I had read in prison a few years before: "Justice is just us". Justice is the act I take toward myself to heal my pain, which means that I must be just with myself first before being just to anyone else. I must release myself from the prison of victimhood without giving up my rights. The one who killed my brother wanted to kill my humanity. Moving toward healing and reconciliation meant that I was not prisoner of that crime anymore. Now I could see that my enemy was not the Jewish people but their fears. When you see the Other as a victim, you also start seeing him as a possible partner with a different truth but a shared humanity.

After touring the world for many years to convince people that peace starts with the reconciliation of victims, I decided it was time to shift my focus to Palestine. I was convinced that genuine transformation would start there, with the people on the frontline. In 2010, I moved to my family farm in one of the most contested parts of the West Bank. On this small piece of land surrounded by Israeli settlements, I decided to create the Karama Non-violent Centre. *Karama* means "dignity" in Arabic.

The first initiative I co-created at Karama was focused on dialogue and called "Roots". In just a few years it has become a unique meeting place for people who, according to common wisdom, should never meet: Palestinian political activists, young recruits of the Israeli army, Jewish settlers; extremes on the political spectrum, often considered enemies of the peace process. At Roots they have met, felt safe, and been listened to and respected as human beings. They have also felt deeply challenged in their beliefs and attitudes toward one another. I believe those dialogues are creating the foundations from which a new narrative can emerge.

However, the creation of Roots has not been without its painful challenges, starting with my own inner conflicts. I continuously struggle with the serious concern of what Palestinians call "normalization". By talking with Israeli settlers do we give legitimacy to illegitimate action, do we help "normalize" the occupation and the existence of illegal settlements? But I balance this by thinking about the Other. Even the Jewish Roots members are considered traitors by many in their own community just because they speak to Palestinians.

I also discovered that there is this pervasive feeling of guilt within both Jewish and Palestinian society regardless if they are taking part in the conflict or making steps toward the Other. Not just guilt for your personal action but guilt because of the behaviors of others in your own community. This has reassured me that I am working in the right direction. So, I believe the most essential issue today is that both sides acknowledge each other's truth regarding their claim to the land and guarantee for both to live with dignity, not at the expense of the other.

Those dialogues also revealed to me the formidable barriers faced by Palestinians on their own path to dignity. Barriers that paradoxically I feel we could begin to overcome through changing the perception we have of ourselves. In 2015, I therefore joined a number of Palestinian community leaders and activists to create Taghyeer (which means "change" in Arabic), a Palestinian non-violent movement and a vehicle to help create a non-violent identity within Palestinian society.

Taghyeer aims to support the creation of a network of non-violent community leaders and followers across Palestine. Through workshops, trainings, and social and direct action, we are trying to spread the values of non-violence, shift the mindset of a culture of fighting

to a culture of peaceful resistance and responsibility. The movement is also an umbrella for independent organizations and non-violent activists who often feel isolated and threatened in their community. Ultimately, all these forces must be united in a massive movement that will guarantee enough support for, or pressure on, political leadership on both sides to craft a peaceful solution.

Throughout my journey, I have realized that my experience was far from unique. While they are mostly invisible in the media, thousands of courageous Palestinians and Israelis at all levels of society are everyday bridging this terrible human divide. Their inspiration as much as my own experience has enriched my understanding of what both Palestinians and Israelis might need to change in order to overcome this story of division and violence.

## **Recommendations: A courageous path forward**

In my recommendations, I first focus on what we as Palestinians can do to overcome violence and move toward freedom. While Palestinians appear to be the side most deprived of power and options, I believe we can decide our own destiny by embracing the path of non-violence. In the second part I describe how grassroots reconciliation and courageous dialogue can progressively transform conflict into an unlikely partnership for peace with Israel.

## **Making peace with oneself: Non-violence**

### *Escaping the prison of victimhood*

Palestinians suffer from the injustice of the occupation. This is very real. We have many reasons to be angry or despair about an unjust situation that has now lasted for 70 years. We are right about this. Yet, I often ask people: "Do we want to be right, and only right, or do we want to succeed?" When we let anger or despair overcome us, when we accept the role of victim, we risk either seeking justice through violence or fall into apathy and dependency. None of these are viable solutions, especially in the Palestinian context.

The peace process has left Palestinians confused about their identity. Before the Oslo Accords of 1993, Palestinians had an identity of fighters; we were fighting a war for our freedom as a nation. After the Oslo Accords, we were supposed to adopt an identity of citizens. However, this identity was never allowed to fully emerge because a Palestinian State never materialized. What we were left with is an identity of victim.

The first step toward freedom is to decide not to be victims anymore. It is to stop looking at the Other, judging them, comparing myself to them, and conditioning for them to take the first step before I can release myself. I left my own prison the moment I started my hunger strike and realized I could act, I could resist. As Palestinians, we cannot wait for Israel to recognize the injustice of the occupation and give us our rights. Political freedom and political rights will not be achieved if we are not free as human beings.

### *Understanding non-violence*

One of the reasons why non-violence is not yet embraced more broadly in Palestinian society is that it is misunderstood. Most Palestinians believe non-violence is a weak and naïve

proposition. They imagine Israeli and Palestinian peace activists sharing hugs and hummus in Tel Aviv or Cyprus while the situation on the ground remains the same and the everyday suffering and injustice continue. Yet, engaging in acts of non-violent resistance is not about being nice. It is about investing in our anger—not simply to resist what we do not like but to show the other what he is about, and what his actions and behaviours do and mean.

I was recently driving to Bethlehem during the month of Ramadan on a late afternoon. The Israeli army had created a temporary checkpoint blocking the entry of the city. I was furious. I could also see the frustration in the eyes of the other Palestinian drivers. Everyone had been fasting all day, everyone was hungry and eager to go home for dinner after sunset. As I approached the checkpoint I decided to step out of the car and talk to one of the soldiers. He was shocked. Palestinians never leave their car and walk toward an officer at a checkpoint. I explained to him in a calm but firm way that his behaviour was not only hurting me and my people, it was creating the contrary of what he was seeking, which was security. Palestinian anger only grows after such acts and the risk of violent retaliation increases.

It so happens that, several years before, one of his colleagues had seen me speak at a Roots event for the Israeli pre-army academy. During those dialogues, I try to convey to these young people what the daily experience is of a Palestinian under the occupation and therefore the consequence of their actions on Palestinians. It does not stop them from serving in the army but it might change their understanding and bring more humanity in their interactions with Palestinians. As he recognized me at the checkpoint, this young soldier walked toward me and asked what was going on. Eventually he said he would talk to his army leadership about this issue and invited me to speak to them and to troops in other parts of the West Bank. In the end, the officer removed the checkpoint.

I know of other examples of such spontaneous non-violent action undertaken by Palestinians. But such instances are still few, and we need to convince more people to overcome fear and take those steps. Non-violence is the most effective manager of violence, fear, and suffering. It does not mean you accept your life conditions but, rather, to go beyond all that to become a solution maker. Taking the path of non-violence takes courage. It is about taking responsibility for our lives and resisting the injustice, every day. Every moment is a practice of giving up our victimhood.

Finally, developing a non-violent identity is not simply about resisting the unjust actions of the other. It is about development and taking responsibility by creating and maintaining a life of dignity. The Israeli occupation makes it very difficult for Palestinians to develop both economically and socially. Yet, despite these constraints, we can find sustainable solutions for energy, water, health, agriculture, and other sectors that do not increase our dependency on Israel or international aid. We do not have to wait to have our own State develop a society that can be respected. We can show Israel and the world that we can be a strong, independent partner for peace.

### *Promoting non-violent leaders and role models*

To convince more people to take the path of non-violence, Palestinians need a new leadership role that will shape a movement and solve the confusion between concepts of “fighters” and “citizens”. We need to hear those voices in the community who have managed to break through the narrative of victimhood and have shown results—not only peace activists but also educators, entrepreneurs, and public-sector workers who have decided to stand up

peacefully against injustice or work to build a resilient community and Palestinian citizenship against all odds.

I believe that people, particularly youth, are living with the heavy burden of the past on their shoulders instead of focusing on building a peaceful future. We need to empower and give visibility to those people who have managed to free themselves of the painful past and allow themselves to carry on toward a hopeful future, especially by taking responsibility.

With the Taghyeer movement, we strive to identify, train, and support those community leaders, and encourage them to tell their story and teach the skills of non-violence to others. Some of the most role models who make the greatest impact are the ex-combatants converted to non-violence. They have the credibility of having been fighters, of knowing the price of violence. Their conversion so powerfully contradicts the narrative of victimhood that it is hard for people not to listen. Their voice is particularly strong with youth.

The role of community leaders should also be to help create safe spaces for others. Adults and children alike need to feel safe to express their fears and hopes without feeling judged by their own people. Palestinians are often afraid of being perceived as traitors for even speaking of engaging with the other side. This is true for ordinary Palestinians as much as for the current leadership.

One of the challenges that politicians in particular are facing is that their credibility often comes from a place of hatred toward the other or violence toward the other. This is true on both the Palestinian and the Israeli side. Combined with the issue of corruption, people have lost faith in a leadership that offers no credible strategy or even vision of a path forward. The time is ripe for a non-violent, grassroots leadership to fill the gap and build the foundation of a non-violent Palestinian identity.

### *Building a movement*

To accelerate the transformation of our culture and leadership toward non-violence, I believe those grassroots efforts need to be combined with mass actions. Both local and international media today essentially ignore the achievements of non-violence. These stories do not fit the narrative of division and violence. Furthermore, it is difficult for people to connect those disparate efforts into one emerging story and movement of change. Most non-violent leaders (as defined above) and organizations do not know each other or do not consider themselves as being part of non-violence. For most, they simply decided not to be victims, to support their community, and to live a life of dignity.

This is why we need mass actions to help tip the balance toward a different narrative. Mass action will make visible what I believe most Palestinians ultimately want. Many do not want the end of the State of Israel. They want the *occupation* to end, they want a Palestinian state where their freedom and rights are respected. I believe the day we have hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the street protesting non-violently for their rights and dignity, the world will pay attention. The Palestinian leadership will pay attention. Israel will pay attention. And a similar mass movement will arise in Israel.

Today we have a problem of leadership but this can change if both sides rise non-violently as a mass movement, pushing their politicians to sit together and come up with solutions. There has to be mass pressure on politicians to guarantee a just solution and to condemn or forbid any incitement toward the other. To bring a mass majority to

the street is our mission as non-violent community leaders. Then I believe there will be enough politicians ready to sign peace agreements.

The path toward reconciliation starts by reconciling with ourselves as Palestinians and choosing non-violence. I believe this commitment to non-violence will eventually create a powerful momentum toward reconciliation with Israel. Our path to freedom will not come through Jewish bodies but through Jewish hearts. Likewise, Israeli security will never be achieved through occupation and military control.

### **Making peace with the other: Reconciliation**

#### *The competition of suffering*

My experience spending time listening to Palestinians and Israelis from diverse backgrounds and beliefs has taught me one thing about this conflict: both people are stuck in a competition of suffering, with the whole world watching. We are stuck with our anger and our fear because we are stuck within ourselves. We are stuck with our trauma and the other's trauma. Ultimately, we both act as victims.

Palestinians are paying the price of Jewish fears and have to live with the physical and psychological violence of the occupation. Yet, the occupation is not part of Israel identity, it is a behaviour. Israel maintains the occupation and uses violence because it believes it is the only way to protect its identity and existence. They have reasons to believe this and be fearful. Their history has taught them this. Our own refusal to accept Israel's existence tells them this. But this fear and their own feeling of victimhood blind Israelis from the terrible consequences of their behaviour on the lives of Palestinians.

This is the consequence of victimhood as an identity. When you consider yourself a victim, you become judgmental, you cannot see your own responsibility in the situation. No one can possibly argue with you because you are a victim. Yet, I still believe the identity on both sides is not violent. Neither Palestinians nor Israelis are fanatics. But today victimhood prevents us from seeing a different path forward. Victimhood prevents us from seeing each other. And this gives more power to political extremes in our society and more legitimacy of violent behaviour.

#### *The separation wall of stereotypes*

The fear, anger, and violence toward one another is fuelled and maintained through stereotypes. They are perhaps the most formidable walls preventing us from seeing each other. Those walls are often created by education. The way we teach history on both sides is disastrous. We each decide what history is about. We are afraid to speak the truth. Israelis do their best to ignore the Nakba; Palestinians, the Holocaust. We do not want to give legitimacy to our enemy. We do not want to teach history in a way that will promote understanding. We teach in a manner that will increase hatred because we think that this is the only way for us to survive, on both sides. We don't need to change history to teach peace because the past is painful. What we need to do is to change the way we view history, similar to the idea of having to change not one's identity but one's behaviour. The media plays a similar role and helps reinforce the narrative of victimhood and division.

Yet, perhaps the biggest curriculum for hatred is our environment. As I previously mentioned, I did not learn hatred in school. It was enough for me at ten years old to see my

mother beaten in front of my eyes by Israeli security officers. I was not into politics, I was not a fanatic, I was just a child who saw his mother humiliated. That was enough for me to turn to violence or to do anything possible just to resist the occupation. It then took me another twenty years to truly meet Israelis, to see them as human beings with feelings, to see their own humanity and suffering.

Conversely, Israeli children grow up with their own stereotypes. Most of what they learn about Palestinians is not from experience but through schools, politicians, media, and acts of hatred. All they seem to know about Palestinians are the falsehoods that we are suicide bombers, that we do not respect life. They think Palestinians throw rockets against them while they spend their days and nights in fear, that Palestinians want to throw them into the sea.

Since the second Intifada, Palestinians and Israelis have grown increasingly apart, not just in abstract political terms but also in the actual possibility of meeting one another, person to person. With physical and psychological walls separating them, the foundation of trust, understanding, and therefore genuine coexistence remains beyond reach. Beyond the work of non-violence and reconciliation that needs to happen within their own society, Israeli and Palestinians can change this by engaging in courageous and ultimately transformative dialogue on the ground.

### *Courageous dialogue*

I define "dialogue" as a secure place for argument, a space where we can disagree without feeling threatened. A place where destructive behaviors can be confronted without threatening one's identity. This distinction between identity and behavior is at the heart of non-violent dialogue. Recognizing this difference is even more essential when deep trauma exists on both sides, often inflamed by religious sensitivities, as is the case especially for Israelis.

Through genuine dialogue we first learn how to listen: listening to the other's story and his narrative; withholding judgment to experience what the other feels and how he thinks about us. Through dialogue we build awareness and recognize our emotions rising as the other speaks; we progressively become less prisoner of those emotions. We can see the humanity in each other. My humanity becomes a mirror for you to see the destructive nature of your behaviour and to feel compassionate rather than guilty.

Through dialogue, I have realized that my struggle with Israelis was not about their identity or religion, it was about their behavior: the behavior of the occupier. In that sense, I realized I did not have any issue with Israelis living wherever they want as long as it was not diminishing my own rights and identity as Palestinian. As I started to open to this possibility, I saw that the people I was facing in those dialogues were ultimately not challenging my identity and right to exist on this land either. What they were reacting to was violence as the political act, violence as a behavior.

As we learn to listen to each other, we start realizing that the other is part of our life. He is not me, he does not have the same identity. We do not have the same narrative. Yet, we progressively learn how to respect the other's identity while realizing that there is one place for these two identities. Two truths, both valid, living side by side.

Non-violence is an ideology of understanding. We progressively stop getting stuck on the behavior of the enemy: violence, occupation. We become less judgmental. You start considering your victimizer as a victim too. You identify with him. Conversely you start



expecting him to help you. And progressively, often without realizing, you become partners in solutions.

### *Engaging the extremes*

Dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians do happen regularly in places like Tel Aviv or Ramallah. However, peace will not be made between the converted on both sides or with the people most removed from the reality of the conflict. It will happen on the frontline where the tensions between the two narratives are at their greatest. It will happen by engaging with the extreme on the political spectrum who are most resisting the possibility of coexistence.

This is why we created the Roots Initiative: to show that non-violent dialogue was not only possible but also was at its most necessary and transformative in what seemed to be the most hostile of environments. It is common to see Israeli leftists in Tel Aviv defend the creation of a Palestinian state. It is much more uncommon and powerful to hear an Israeli settler speaking up for Palestinian rights in the West Bank.

As violence is an act that must be addressed by us Palestinians, settlements are an illegal act that must be addressed by Israelis. Most of the Israeli left remove themselves from their responsibility by refusing to directly face the settlement movement, which only encourages settlement mentality and the reinforcement of stereotypes, leaving Palestinians to face the settlement movement alone.

We need to create more spaces for dialogue on the frontline, between Palestinians and Israelis—but I would also argue between Israelis themselves. In many ways, Israelis also need to reconcile between themselves before they can hope to reconcile with Palestinians. The same is true for Palestinians. I often challenge the Israeli left to not just speak about peace with Palestinians in Tel Aviv but come and face directly their own people in the West Bank. On the other hand, dialogue must not be the goal but must be the first step toward direct action and responsibility to end the humiliation, violence, and injustice. Otherwise dialogue is worthless.

### *Two truths*

By overcoming fear, anger and stereotypes, non-violence allows us not only to see the other as he is but also reality as it is. The reality of this conflict today is that both Palestinians and Israelis are not going anywhere. We have nowhere else to go. Furthermore, history has shown us that we need each other. I am convinced that both nations need each other to exist, to feel secure, and to be free and develop. Rather than the problem we represent for each other, we need to focus on the benefits of being together.

I also believe non-violence is the only viable path to end this conflict because of our background, because of the complexity of belonging historically to the same land. The vision for peace cannot be about dividing us. We need to coexist; we will survive because of the other not in spite of the other. Even the political vision for peace needs to create respectful cooperation between two different identities that belong to the same part of land, and to create full cooperation where both sides can benefit from this relationship rather than separating themselves from each other.

In this process of reconciliation, the international community will play an important role. Yet, today foreign influence often leads to further division. Indeed, foreign politicians and ordinary people alike feel compelled to take sides, especially when it comes to this conflict. One has to be either pro-Palestine or pro-Israel. What we need is a third path—to be pro-solution—voices that resolutely support fair solutions for both communities and recognize the power imbalance. At Taghyeer, we are lucky to count as supporters two great voices and partners for solution: B8 of Hope in Switzerland and Friends of Taghyeer in the US. What makes them unique is that they are each composed of a mix of religions and nationalities. They are wonderful examples of being pro-solution.

## Conclusion

Non-violence is a celebration of my existence. For many years now, I have decided to walk toward the other, every moment of every waking day. I have met with Palestinians, Israelis, and people from all places, all political convictions, including the ones standing furthest away from my own. My experience has produced in me the unshakeable belief that my identity and my rights as a Palestinian will be respected only if I have the courage to express my truth and face the other and his fears non-violently; to recognize the Jewish people's need for security while fiercely affirming my own need for freedom and self-determination.

Today the reality on the ground is that most Israelis and Palestinians never meet. We send our words, including well-intentioned ones, from behind our barricades—our physical, digital, and psychological walls. Behind them, we compete in our suffering and for international attention. Our fear and anger grow and we become ever more vulnerable to external interference. Violence, bullets, and rocks are exchanged, instead of courageous dialogues and possibilities. It is a sad, predictable story.

I refuse to be part of that story, I refuse to be a victim. I decide what to do with my suffering. It is the ultimate freedom no one can ever take away from me. I walk toward a different reality. I decide to walk toward the Israeli people non-violently as a Palestinian, as a human being. I express my truth, my suffering, my hopes, and ask for my humanity and identity to be respected while respecting their own.

I also know that even if we ultimately succeed in securing a free Palestinian state, this will not mark the end of the struggle. Non-violence is a journey without end, it is a painful path that I decide to take every day. It will continue to be full of doubts and struggles. Peace is something we always work for, it is never fully given. The growing divisions and violent extremism within Western democracies are testimony to that.

Non-violence asks for a deeper level of understanding and compassion for our human experience. We will always live with pain, suffering, mistakes, bad behaviours. Our own and those of the people around us. The real question is how we decide to live with this reality, how we respond, every moment. This is why I consider non-violence a way of being. A painful path but, I know this in my heart, the only path worth walking.

If you ask me if there are promises and guarantees on this path, I will say no and I may never see this peace in my life, but non-violence is the way I decide to live and die. I dedicate myself to these two peoples to reach a conclusion that whatever the high price of peace, it will always be much cheaper than the painful price of war.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

**Ali Abu Awwad (Palestine)** is a prominent Palestinian peace activist and proponent of non-violence. He is the founder of Taghyeer, a Palestinian national movement promoting non-violence to achieve and guarantee a non-violent solution to the conflict. Awwad's story and efforts have been featured in over twelve documentaries, including two award-winning films, *Encounter Point* and *Forbidden Childhood*. Furthermore, he was honoured by the global non-profit think tank Synergos as the Arab World Social Innovator in Palestine for "introducing non-violence, reconciliation, and civic participation to Palestinians as a means of empowering citizens to seek social change and find a more equitable solution to conflict". Awwad is currently finishing his memoir called *Painful Hope*, an account of his experiences as well as his strategy and vision for the Palestinian future.