

Introductory Remarks*

By Hassan Asleh†

We will not forget and we will not forgive... We entered darkened mazes five decades ago and no longer know how to identify ourselves, and I don't know how we can be Arabs in a state that has defined itself as Jewish ... I do not know of any other minority who has suffered such destruction of memory... in the midst of these circumstances it has been hard for us to arise, but not impossible. The Zionist establishment has and is still oppressing us and I name what happened in October 2000 as aggression. We emerged frightened, delirious, repeating expressions of heroism and valor. We wanted to run away from everything and hide behind everything.

The martyrs recommended the following to us:

- Hold on to our national belonging
- Hold on to our national memory
- Hold on to our national unity
- Work and education are the beacons of our way

What most elicited sadness in the days immediately after October were the tents erected in our yard for speaking about peace and coexistence. What is the value of coexistence if your personal safety is threatened and your entire existence is in danger of being uprooted?

Isn't this a blatant repudiation of the martyrs' blood, if not a humiliation to our dignity and the martyrs' dignity?

Where are our national institutions? We cannot live in this country without a national economy, without which we will continue to be dragged by our noses.

We worked hard to boycott the elections. Barak tried to bribe the martyrs' families. If not for the Prime Ministerial elections and the community mobilization around us, Barak would have returned to his position and we would not have obtained an official commission of inquiry.

We, the martyrs' families, did not expect anything from the Or Commission. Even if we assumed that the Or Commission would have recommended bringing one or the other of the killers to justice and they were tried and sentenced, we would find hundreds of intellectuals, society and the state and tens of Knesset members seeking pardons from the president.

We chose civil confrontation in order to keep the wound aflame;
To remain in a state of confrontation with the method which we ourselves chose;
Using the Victims' Families Committee as a media platform;
To hold the Zionist community morally and politically accountable and to uncover its racism;

* This text is a summary of remarks made at the "October 2000: A Memory for Protest" conference held in Nazareth on 2 October 2004. The conference was hosted by Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, the Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens in Israel, and the Victims' Families Committee in remembrance of the October 2000 protests.

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To expose the conspiring face of the establishment, particularly to put an end to the state of imagination with which we deal with our painful situation.

We must encourage the establishment of our own judicial body to attend to our issues. This body will draw conclusions specific to us.

We encourage the establishment of a national framework to explain our position, for we are a national minority which has not received international recognition.

We encourage mass community mobilization.