**We for Gaza**

It’s not easy for me to describe my feelings when I read this petition for the first time, but I dare say this was the most accurate description I have seen concerning the hardships and suffering of my people in the besieged Gaza district. Equally importantly were the requests at the end of the petition, which reflect so strikingly the urgent needs, on all levels, of a population subjected to so many agonies. These requests were addressed primarily to the international community in general, and to the European Union and the United Nations in particular, and by following the we4gaza.org website on a daily basis, one cannot but help to feel confident about a successful follow-up.

In addition to outlining the humanitarian basis for the petition and making a strong logical case for urgent action, the authors have not only demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the situation, but also a clear understanding of the principles at stake – and the courage to stand by those principles.

Frankly, another thing that attracted my attention was the beautiful photograph selected to depict Gaza. It’s actually much more than “just” a photo because it offers a view of both the near and the distant, so no one can gaze on it without sensing an invitation to go there, to walk its streets, and find the perfect little café, teeming with life despite so many obstacles. It cannot help but to remind us that the petition involves a very different kind of invitation, one to fulfill our duties as human beings by doing everything in our power to help the people of Gaza, especially the children, by restoring their ability to live real lives again.

I am both happy and honored to say that I have been to Gaza, albeit only once and only for a week. That was in October 1966, when Gaza was a much smaller city, but nonetheless a city full of life. I went there to attend the first conference held by the newly established Palestinian Writers Union. I have never forgotten the long discussions I was able to have with members of what was then the new generation, young people who had experienced the first Israeli occupation in 1956. They were so proud of their struggle in those days, for despite having been mere children at the time, they had not only learned to defend themselves but also found ways to provoke and harass the Israeli occupiers, most of whom never knew that their tormentors were little boys and girls still too young for high school. I wonder how many of those young Gazans are now grandmothers and grandfathers recounting their experiences to the current “new generation”.

The struggle continues, and in many forms. This petition is one of them: clearly the product of people with serious and dedicated minds, it also speaks to the genuine decency of those who have a conscience – and listen to it. Please allow me to express my profound thanks to those who started and all of those who have signed their names to the petition, and all those who will. These are the people who offer hope that a better future awaits all peoples of the world.

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