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They are the Righteous of today and the hope of tomorrow

# Mourning the dead, calling for ceasefire and an end to the cycle of violence

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Publication date: Tuesday 26 December 2023

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**Friday 22 December morning, around 100 Israelis including numerous young people gathered in the Independence Park outside of the US Embassy in Jerusalem to mourn those killed in Gaza and to call for an immediate ceasefire. The vigil included a recorded message from a Palestinian who fled Gaza, written memorials about those who have been killed, poetry, music by a Gazan who was killed, and more.**

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"The death toll will only continue to rise if no action is taken. From our devastation for those already killed, we demand that this war end." **Maya Rosen**, a participant in the vigil.

The vigil comes at a time when Israel is severely repressing and punishing any recognition of the suffering in Gaza or of the Palestinians who have been killed since October 7th. This most directly impacts Palestinians who have sought to mourn their family or friends, or who generally dared to speak out about the atrocities committed in Gaza. Many Palestinians across Israel have been arrested, threatened, and forced out of work for social media posts or statements. Israeli Jews have also faced repression in this crackdown.

"In the current environment, there is no space to speak to the suffering, loss, and deprivation experienced in Gaza since October 7th, and the nearly 20,000 people, the majority of whom are women and children, who have lost their lives," said **Itamar Israeli**, another participant in the vigil.

Those gathered came to express their pain about all victims who have perished in this war – Palestinians and Israelis – and to demand an immediate ceasefire, at the doorstep of the US Embassy and down the street from

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Benjamin Netanyahu's residence.

In coordination with the vigil in Jerusalem, some 25 parallel vigils are planned across the world this weekend, including in New York, Chicago, Boston, Pittsburgh, Toronto, London, and Zurich.

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### Statements from attendees:

**Erez Bleicher**, from the vigil's opening statement: "We are here to publicly grieve the 20,000 Palestinians lost in the Gaza Strip, to personally mourn our friends killed in the airstrikes, to bring their living memories and the fact of their death to the doors of those responsible, and demand a permanent ceasefire now. Joe Biden and Benjamin Netanyahu we are standing in direct sight of the US embassy in Jerusalem and meters from the Prime Ministers' house because we hold you and your governments directly responsible for the 20,000 Palestinians killed and the ongoing mass expulsion of Gazan. We are here determined to publicly honor their memory and in the hope that this memorial can be even a fragile shelter for the many thousands of Gazans who have been lost. We demand the right

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to publicly mourn them as we simultaneously grieve Israeli members of our communities killed on October 7th. We will not allow our profound grief for the 1200 Israelis who have been killed to justify more death. We know that the only way to end this collective anguish is to build a future of mutual prosperity beyond occupation, closure, airstrikes, ground invasions, and massacre."

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La jeunesse l'affirme : Le deuil ne connaît pas de frontières. Cessez le feu !

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**Abigail Szor:** "There are no winners in war. I am here today because there are names, faces, and stories to those killed in Gaza. I have friends there who have lost many relatives in this horrible and painful war. My good friend lost her mother, and I am speaking here, because she cannot speak, because her words would endanger her life. The idea and the policy according to which it's possible to determine the fate of an entire people, to seek revenge, to kill and be killed and through this bring victory is flawed and mistaken. The choice stands before us whether to continue to sacrifice many lives and to bring more death and loss or to agree to a political solution which is the only way we can ensure true and stable justice, security, and calm. Beyond political faith, what guides me, perhaps more than ever, is my friendship with my friend from Gaza. This alone is sufficient to unequivocally make clear to me that this reality need not be our destiny. This war is terrible and will not bring about a solution or victory for anyone. My only hope is that it ends immediately. We have to imagine and create a better reality in the memory of those who are no longer with us and for those who are still alive."

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**Yossef Mekyton:** "Khalil Abu Yahia, my dear friend, a determined optimist and one of the most decent people I have ever known, was murdered, along with his entire family, in southern Gaza by an Israeli bomb. But right now the political repression is so extreme that even a simple expression of grief over a Palestinian friend who suffered so much and was murdered is cause to be fired, interrogated, judicially attacked, arrested, and fined. A society which doesn't have room for grief and sorrow over the loss of life - even if it's the life of someone who is not 'your own' - is rotten to its core. I will cry over Khalil for many years to come. Today I am taking my stand to do so also publicly, and politically."

**Oneg Ben Dror:** "With every day that the massacre in Gaza continues, a part of our humanity dies, too. Palestinians are being slaughtered, imprisoned, severely tortured, and hunted down simply for speaking out, expressing grief, or attempting to maintain their livelihood. It is our collective responsibility to do everything within our power to stop the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement of the Palestinian people. Do not acquiesce to the horrific dehumanisation of Palestinian lives. We all must act now."

*Photographs: Omri Eran Vardi and Aryeh Leib*

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