

Palestine: “Help us stop the tragedy!”

Sumaya Farhat-Naser on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank

Event organised by “Swiss Standpoint”

(Own report) On 13 May 2025, in the well-attended rooms of “Swiss Standpoint” in Frauenfeld, Palestinian Dr Sumaya Farhat-Naser spoke about the situation in Gaza and the West Bank and her involvement there. The speaker gave a knowledgeable overview of the catastrophic humanitarian situation. At the same time, she impressed the audience with her level-headed, peaceful and egalitarian attitude towards the world.

At the beginning of her lecture, Dr. Sumaya Farhat-Naser* quoted former UN Special Rapporteur Professor Richard Falk to describe the current catastrophic situation of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank: While the Israeli government speaks of a right to self-defence in the complete destruction of the Gaza Strip, any reaction by the Palestinians is considered a terrorist act.

Recently, a leading Israeli politician described the Palestinian population as “human animals”. This marks a new stage in the spiral of escalation. It denies the Palestinians their humanity thus questioning their rights as human beings. So, even the most inhumane acts can be justified. Such statements place the inhabitants of Palestine outside the realm of human rights.

Europe’s silence

Dr Farhat-Naser was particularly concerned about the silence of Europe and the USA on the current events in the Gaza Strip. Official statements such as “the situation is unacceptable” are not enough. Despite all the declarations, weapons continue to be supplied. There are no clear statements or reactions from the West



Sumaya Farhat-Naser during her lecture. (Picture mt)

that would stop Israel’s actions. But this is possible.

In a brief review, the speaker outlined the historical background: both Israelis and Palestinians lived in the same country. A democratic agreement would have to be reached. Various proposals had been and still were on the table. However, in the 1940s and 1950s, facts had been created: 65% of Palestinians had been driven from their homes. There were 41 massacres, and 510 villages were destroyed. Those responsible, such as *Menachem Begin* and *Ariel Sharon*, later became prime ministers of Israel. Officially, they are considered “heroes”, while the Palestinian residents who resisted are labelled “terrorists”.

In connection with the mass expulsion of the original Arab population, the UN established the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) in 1949 to alleviate the misery of the refugees. This was done with the option that the refugees

* *Sumaya Farhat-Naser* (1948) is a well-known Palestinian human rights and peace activist and author who visits Switzerland regularly. She gives lectures, leads seminars for young people and plays an important role as a bridge builder and “translator” between German-speaking countries and Palestine.

Sumaya Farhat-Naser was initially a professor of botany and ecology at Birzeit University in Palestine. From 1997 to 2001, she headed the Palestinian “Jerusalem

Centre for Women”, which cooperates with the Israeli women’s organisation *Bat Shalom* in the “Jerusalem Link”. In 1989, Sumaya Farhat-Naser received an honorary doctorate from the Faculty of Theology in Münster. In 1995, she was awarded the *Bruno Kreisky Prize*, in 1997 the *Book Prize of the German Association of Protestant Libraries* and the “Mount Zion Award” for Reconciliation in Jerusalem, in 2000 the *Augsburg Peace Prize* and in 2003 the *Profax Foundation Prize* in Küsnacht.

could return after a political agreement had been reached. Today, 76 years later, the 7 million refugees in Israel and the surrounding states still need support – and a political solution is still a long way off.

UNRWA is currently under political pressure, being discredited and its work massively obstructed. As a result, an essential lifeline for millions of people is being cut off in the current war situation.

Gaza Strip

Dr Farhat-Naser reported (as of mid-May) that 85% of all buildings in Gaza had been destroyed, including almost all clinics, sewage treatment plants, mosques, churches, three universities, etc. Among the killed are 230 doctors and nurses. Journalists were being killed. People were living in constant fear and hunger. Some 300 children had starved to death. Farhat-Naser receives her information directly from the Gaza Strip.

There is sheer terror in the Gaza Strip: Hamas leaders are located by AI, and rockets are then fired automatically. For every Hamas leader killed, statistically 300 uninvolved victims are killed “accidentally”. Ms Farhat-Naser was repeatedly asked how the residents could endure such atrocities. She pointed to their strong faith in God. The people interpret their situation as follows: “If God puts us in this situation, then that is what he wants”. Solidarity among the people also plays an important role.

When asked about the Israeli government’s possible plans, Ms Farhat-Naser hypothesised that the aim was to bring everything under absolute control. One plan could be to flood the tunnel systems in Gaza where an estimated 50,000 people are believed to be moving, with poison gas or water, thereby killing everyone inside. So far, the Israeli government has refrained from doing so because of the 59 Israeli hostages, who are also believed to be in the tunnel system. Subsequently, the remaining Palestinian population could be resettled by the Israeli army, with US support, in six or seven sealed-off and monitored special zones. These special zones would be monitored using eye scanning and AI. Only selected individuals would then be granted access.

For Farhat-Naser, the military operation in the Gaza Strip is motivated by economic interests in the rich oil and gas reserves off the coast. The US “floating port” off the coast of Gaza is also

less about humanitarian concerns than economic interests.

Corrupt leadership

When asked why there was no real diplomatic or political resistance from the Palestinian population, the speaker highlighted the “domestic political” situation. She accused the Palestinian leadership of undemocratic behaviour. No democratic elections had been held for 18 years.

This was attributable to the political leadership of the Palestinians. The head of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas, who is now almost 90 years old, would not allow a successor to be elected, but instead, under Israeli influence, would appoint a deputy who would then replace him without democratic elections.

Of the 15 different political parties, only two played a significant role: the PLO and Hamas, both of which had been played off against each other by Israel for decades. Furthermore, Hamas itself was an Israeli creation, financed and led by Qatar. Israel was pursuing a strategy of “provoke until they react, then strike”. Hamas therefore plays an important role as a constant source of unrest in Israel’s strategy towards the Palestinians.

At this point, Farhat-Naser referred to the EU’s duplicitous role: on the one hand, constantly and everywhere demanding democracy, while on the other hand preventing genuine elections in Palestine. She said she missed the voices of Europe and the US and their demands for democratic elections. She herself described the Palestinian Authority as totally corrupt. Free elections were urgently needed so that the people could finally express themselves again.

Situation in the West Bank

Farhat-Naser then went into more detail about the situation in the West Bank, where she herself lives. She said that the entire territory is now largely fenced off. Every day, Palestinian residents must pass through 900 huge iron gates controlled by Israeli soldiers to get from one place to another. Children go to school, parents go to work, etc. The opening hours are arbitrarily determined by the Israeli occupation. As a result, many people are unable to get from one place to another on time.

Every day, Jewish “settlers” engage in land theft from the Palestinians, tolerated by the Is-

raeli military. These so-called “settlers”, mostly from Eastern Europe, stole the land by force of arms. For years, the original population has been gradually displaced. Their living conditions have deteriorated year after year. The residents have been deprived of their livelihoods. Added to this are arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, including torture, also sexual torture. Currently, 14,000 Palestinians are in prison. Added to this is the current policy: in the West Bank, 19 large refugee camps for displaced Palestinians are being dismantled and refugees are wandering through the country without any supplies or support, losing the aid provided by UN-RWA.

Financial resources are also being withdrawn from the Palestinian Authority. Since the Oslo Accords, the Israeli government has been collecting taxes for the Palestinian Authority. However, the tax revenues collected are being withheld under flimsy pretexts. Teachers and doctors have not been paid for the last 18 months. It seems as if the Israeli government is exploiting every possible means to make life impossible for the indigenous population.

Israel: an apartheid state?

This inhumane attitude is also reflected in Israeli administration and legislation, as Dr Farhat-Naser's remarks made increasingly clear. A kind of apartheid system has evidently become established. Israeli driving licences contain inconspicuous notes indicating whether the Israeli owner is Jewish or Palestinian. The new Basic Law contains passages that speak of a Jewish empire stretching from the Euphrates to the Nile. The two-tier society is also evident in everyday life: there are two water supply systems, one

for Israelis and one for Palestinians. While some always have enough water – 24 hours a day – the supply for others is limited to three-week intervals. Palestinian houses can be recognised by the water tanks on their roofs. Even roads are now divided. Palestinian residents have become second-class citizens.

What next?

When asked how she copes with this inhumane situation and where she sees a way forward, Dr Farhat-Naser referred to her (Christian) faith and three principles: all people are born free and equal. Everyone is unique and different. Everyone has a wonderful core. She emphasised that hatred corrodes the soul and perpetuates the cycle of violence. It is important not to allow oneself to be provoked. In the worst case, one must “overlook” rudeness directed at oneself and not get angry but try to talk to the other person. This is important to be able to say to yourself, “I have done what I could”. It is about actively seeking peace.

During the discussion, the speaker explained her attitude with a few examples. For her, it is about people. She has many Jewish friends, even though contact is very difficult today. She reads important Jewish texts with Palestinian children. She builds bridges and teaches people to develop understanding.

Dr Farhat-Naser impressed with her personality and her commitment to a world of understanding and coexistence – despite all the unspeakable adversities. The participants left the event feeling hopeful rather than angry or desperate. There was much to learn from this impressive woman.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)