

Gaza & the World Episode 4 featuring Dr. Ghada Karmi

This is a transcript of the [videotaped conversation](#) conducted with Dr. Ghada Karmi, for Just World Educational, on November 11, 2025.

[Helena Cobban]

Hello and welcome everyone. I'm Helena Cobban, the President of Just World Educational, and I want to welcome you back to our video podcast "Gaza and the World." Today, I'm delighted that our guest is the veteran British-Palestinian justice activist, leader, and thinker, Dr. Ghada Karmi, speaking with us from London. It's great to be in conversation with you, dear Ghada. It's been such a long time.

[Ghada Karmi]

Thank you and hello to you.

[Helena Cobban]

So, with our Gaza and the World project, we're exploring the many interactions between the ongoing genocidal crisis in Gaza and the deep current shifts in the global balance of power. Dr. Ghada Karmi is someone who is from the Nakba generation, who had a strong career in London as a physician and a medical historian, and who between 2002 and 2023 published four deeply thoughtful books that explored not only her own personal experiences as a member of the Nakba generation and a justice activist, but also the broader realities faced by Palestinians inside and outside the homeland and the very complex set of choices that they must make. Her most recent work of non-fiction was *One State: The Only Democratic Future for Palestine-Israel*. Ghada, can you hold that up so people can see it?

Thank you. So, that was published in 2023. Since then, Ghada has also published a substantial work of fiction, *Murjana*, which is a personal medical mystery set in the heart of Baghdad in the year 830 of the Common Era. What an achievement!

However, today, Ghada, we'll be talking more about your non-fiction contributions to the global discourse, including, of course, your service as one of the six jurors of conscience who last month delivered the final judgment of the Gaza People's Tribunal in Istanbul, Türkiye.

For listeners and watchers here, if you visit our website, www.justworldeducational.org, you can learn all about this project and our other projects, including our weekly Palcast audio podcast hosted by Yusuf Aljamal and featuring his guests from on the ground in Gaza. Do sign up at the website for all our regular updates.

So, Dr. Ghada Karmi, we have such a lot to discuss. Firstly, I thought, throughout your life, you've been an active campaigner for justice in Palestine, both in Britain, the home of the Balfour Declaration, and also globally. Let's start with developments in Britain. What changes in attitudes and policies did you see there before the genocide in Gaza, and what have you seen since October 7th, 2023?

[Ghada Karmi]

Well, as you pointed out, I grew up in London, and I experienced the attitudes, popular attitudes, by the way, amongst ordinary people, not just amongst the official level, that's the government and institutional level, but amongst ordinary people. I grew up in a pro-Israel atmosphere. It took until, I would say, the late 1970s, perhaps, before the Palestinian voice could be heard, and our side of the story began to find an airing.

But up until then, it was really very pro-Israel, as I say, at popular and at official level. Now, that was more or less the case until October 7th, punctuated by, interrupted by, each time the Israelis assaulted Gaza, as in 2008-9, as in 2014-2021, each time they've assaulted Gaza, perhaps less so the West Bank, but Gaza, there was a definite pro-Palestinian swing at popular level. And for a while, people criticized Israel and blamed Israel for what was happening.

However, each time, it all settled back again to the usual pro-Israel default position until October 7th [2023]. After October 7th, I am witness to a fantastic change at popular level. I hasten to stress that, because at official level there has been no change in the pro-Israeli position, I'm afraid.

And on the contrary, the British government stands accused of aiding and abetting the genocide in Gaza. It's-- There's no question about that. But at popular level, it has been remarkable.

It's been a 180-degree turn, turnaround. People are very concerned about Palestine, about the whole Palestinian issue. They come out every, regularly to demonstrate, massive demonstrations in this country, Britain.

It's unimaginable that such a thing would have happened. For two years now, regularly, there have been mass popular demonstrations against the Gaza situation. And these have been very well attended over two years.

Now, I often point out to people that it's not as if this is the only occasion, this is the only conflict when people come out and protest. However, it's the only one, to the best of my knowledge, where the protests have continued and continued until today.

[Helena Cobban]

So that is fascinating. This is a way in which we can see that the ongoing genocide in Gaza-- and we're talking on November the 11th, the genocide is very much ongoing, although it's ongoing at a lower level than it was six weeks ago, for example. But a really vivid example of how the Israeli brutality in Gaza and the resilience of the Gaza people have inspired this worldwide movement.

And now we have, obviously, several things happening at the political level in Britain. One is the grotesque crackdown that the Starmer government has launched against, in particular, the Palestine Action movement. And then the other is the emergence of these new parties, George Galloway's party, Jeremy Corbyn's party, I'm a little bit fuzzy on the details, but new parties that are avowedly pro-Palestinian. And it's part of this broader situation of the two-party system appearing to crack up. Have I got it right? Or could you set me right on some of this?

[Ghada Karmi]

No, no, no, you've got it absolutely right. I think it's worth pointing out to the viewers that the original Palestine Action was an organization that I and several friends set up in the early 1970s. We called it Palestine Action.

And it was an activist group. I would say it was a lobbying group, dealt with information, etc. So it's very interesting to me that the name anyway, has been resurrected in this modern group of people who have been attacking weapons-making factories for Israeli companies.

And they have not ever attacked a human being, anyone, any animal or any human. They attack the weapons-making, the factories, etc. So they really are quite an extraordinary group.

Now, there's no question that the British government has been very anxious to protect Israel. And, you know, all these actions, like making, proscribing organizations, like Hamas, like Palestine Action, although they're both very different. These are all actions of people who want to shield Israel from the censure, the criticism, the antagonism that would otherwise be even stronger than it is now.

So that's been ongoing. And, you know, it operates at every level, the censorship, the only way you could describe it is censorship. It operates through academic institutions, where many universities have been prevented from setting up meetings with pro-Palestinian speakers or people who just put the case that's opposite to Israel.

This sort of thing is frightening. And the censorship in the media-- of course, the media deserves a whole podcast, I think, on its own, because the media was responsible for maintaining the genocide, for even making it acceptable. And that goes on today.

So people have to be very, very careful what they say in the media, in the British media. Otherwise, they're then accused of the weapon that the Zionists have found so effective, and that is smears of anti-Semitism. So yes, it's a very scary situation.

And yet, it's a very schizophrenic situation, because you've got the official position, the official activities to try and protect Israel and to punish anybody who criticizes Israel. And at the same time, you've got on the popular level, a tremendous, supportive surge of support for the Palestinians. It's very, very curious.

In my experience, I've never lived through a time like this.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, I think we've seen some similar things here in the United States, where, for example, in response to the popular movement in support of the people of Gaza, Donald Trump, but prior to him also President Biden, took extraordinary steps to curb free speech. I mean, normally in this country, the protections for free speech are stronger than they are in Britain. I mean, we have this thing called the First Amendment.

But now, using this weapon of claims of anti-Semitism, they have really cracked down on the freedom of speech and expression and inquiry in universities... and then Donald Trump has made it part of a broader attack on universities. So, the conflict started in Gaza, in essence, but it's spreading worldwide. It has spread worldwide. And all of us, in a sense, are the victims of it, or the potential victims of it, in many countries around the world.

So, I want to move to the experiences you had with the Gaza People's Tribunal, which was this just very visionary and different kind of way of trying to hold the government of Israel and its supporters to account for their genocide in Gaza. A civil society project that, I guess, was based on something that Bertrand Russell did during the Vietnam War, when he got leaders of civil society organizations together to look at the immorality and illegality of the American War in Vietnam.

So, you were a member of the Jury of Conscience. Talk a little bit about what that experience was for you, because you had to pay close attention to all these outrageous atrocities, you know, that the Israelis have committed in Gaza. At a personal level, that must have been extremely difficult for you, but then also, you know, being part of a global movement was presumably something that fed your spirit and kept you going.

Talk about it.

[Ghada Karmi]

Yeah, no, no, absolutely. First of all, the whole project itself, the concept, the concept behind it, the idea that at the official level, people who have particular views and feelings, very strong feelings in the case of Gaza, are witnessing this official wall of support for the perpetrator of a genocide. And it's very heartening to be part of an initiative which gives voice to the rest of us, which is really how I saw it.

So, I thought it was really, it was very good. It was great. And I was very appreciative of the honor of being invited to be amongst the jurors, and listening to testimony.

Now, of course, you're right, in having to do the job properly, as people may know, who are familiar with the idea of tribunals, the judges have to listen to testimony given to them by various individuals about aspects of the situation that they're expected to judge on. And this is what happened. Really, I would say for two or three days, I and my fellow jurors, there were, I think, five of us, or five or six of us, had to sit through from the beginning of the day to the end of the day, testimony after testimony of suffering of different dimensions to the assault by Israel on the people of Gaza.

It was harrowing. Really, that's the only way I can describe it. It was harrowing, painful.

But of course, it was necessary. We had to do that. We had to do that.

And when finally, at the end of the hearings, we sat together as a jury, and tried to sum up and go through the various things we'd heard, and what sense could we make of them, and what were we going to do with our verdict. I can only say we were very lucky. We bonded.

That's the only way I can put it. We saw eye to eye. We were very different, very different people.

But we saw eye to eye on all the issues. And it wasn't hard to reach a consensus on what the nature was of the evidence we were receiving, and what our recommendations would be. And I can talk about it a bit more, if you'd like.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, yes, one of the aspects of the final judgment that you made that I found really interesting, and we'll be posting the text, I think it's already on our website, for everybody to see. One of the aspects I really admired was the way that you didn't just say that, you know, from everything that you'd heard, Israel was clearly committing genocide, which requires intent on the behalf of the government. Or bodies committing it.

But you picked that apart and looked at, you know, domicide, which is the destruction of homes, ecocide, which is the destruction of the ecology, scholasticide, and all the different ways in which the Israeli authorities, with the full support and participation of my government, and probably also yours, although I grew up British, I'm now American. I think that was a real contribution to identify those different forms of genocide. If you could also speak a little bit about your recommendations to the governments of the world, which, I mean, it needs to be underlined again and again, all the governments that have signed the Genocide Convention are under an obligation to intervene to end genocide.

[Ghada Karmi]

But, you know, governments... Of course, of course. Look, I learned a lot, quite apart from being distressed and feeling sad and so on, I learned a lot about the different ways in which Israel had aimed at the destruction of a whole society, a way of life, a history, a geography.

It was remarkable the number of ways in which that destructiveness was demonstrated to us by one scholar after another. And in particular, I really want to stress the aspect of what this particular researcher called domicide, which I have to say had not occurred to me in that sense. That is the destruction of homes, not buildings, these are homes, and how the idea of home is so important to human beings.

It's so necessary to build security, to build relationships, any kind of communal activity is based on homes. So I could only... Only one word went through my mind as I listened to this, diabolical.

This was a diabolical project, the Israeli project to destroy Gaza so fundamentally, so irreversibly, can only be called diabolical. And so I learned a lot. Now, coming through, of course, all this and all the impressions we'd had, and we were rather overwhelmed, really,

we were able to identify that there was one important fundamental reason why all this had been happening.

And it was very clear to us, even if it hadn't been clear before, I can't speak for my colleagues, it was always clear to me, that the problem with Gaza and the problem which Israel has caused for the people of Palestine and for the region is Zionism. It's an ideology of Zionism, which rules the policymaking of Israelis and dictates these really diabolical things that they do to the Palestinians and to the surrounding Arab states as well. It's Zionism.

Now, it was so clear to us that we had to point this out, that this was what it was due to, and that genocide was one aspect of the results of Zionism, but it was only one outcome. All the other ills that have afflicted the Palestinians and the region, I hasten to add, all these stem from this particular ideology. And so, of course, it wasn't too difficult for us to come to our final conclusions and recommendations, that since Zionism is the problem, the way forward which we wanted for the world to take on, and as you say, all the states, not just the ones that actively colluded with Israel's genocide, but all the others either standing by or apparently indifferent, though it is impossible to imagine why anybody could be indifferent at a time like this. All of these have to work together to dismantle Zionism. Now, that meant dismantling all the structures, the institutions that keep Zionism going.

So, in the end, the Zionist state would, of its own accord, be dismantled. Now, nobody talked about destroying Israel or killing Israelis or any of that. Our recommendations were completely logical, and they stemmed from the case we'd already made for the way in which Zionism had been responsible for all these crimes.

And therefore, it is very, very obvious that the only way forward is the removal and the ending of this ideology. And that would involve states coming together all over the world, really, to dismantle and disable all the structures, economic, social, political, diplomatic, all of these aspects which have kept the state of Israel going since before 1948, 1948 when it was created and before, the whole Zionist movement. And, you know, when I look back, this conclusion that we came to and these recommendations, really, the whole report that we drew up tells the whole story, actually. If you look at that, you really understand why there's such a big problem in the Middle East, why there's such a big tragedy for the Palestinians. It becomes crystal clear in a few pages. And so I'm really very pleased, honored, and proud to have been involved in this project.

[Helena Cobban]

I thank you so much for that. That was so, so moving for me, Dr. Ghada. I want to, and actually, this leads directly to my next question, because you're talking about the need to dismantle Zionism as an ideology and a practice, which would, for me, I know you're a bit wary of parallels with Nazism and the Nazi era, but it would be a parallel to the process of denazification that the Allies all went through in occupied Germany after the war, where the aim was not to destroy, not to kill Germans, and not to destroy the institutions of German society, but to denazify them. And then, after the occupation of Iraq, we had a really-- well, you know, the occupation of Iraq was just a terrible war crime in itself-- but they did have a policy of so-called deBaathification, which was horrendously destructive and unsuccessful and led to the rise of Daesh, the Islamic State.

But it's interesting to think of this process of de-Zionization in that kind of a context. So, you have actually had a lot of different forms of engagement with strategic decision-making of the Palestinians, various parts of the Palestinian community. And in your book, in your 2015 book, *The Return*, I was really interested to go back and look at some of the things you had in that book, because that book was about a trip that you made to Ramallah in 2005 to work as a consultant with the Palestinian Authority.

And as you said in the book, I think, you know, you didn't have many illusions that the Palestinian Authority-- like when you went there, you wanted to see the situation. And it turned out that the PA, the Sulta, was far more corrupt and corrupted than you had imagined. And that's kind of how your book went.

So, it seems that you kind of, you went from being prepared to give the two-state approach of the PA and the PLO a chance. And then when you saw what they were doing in, you know, on the ground in practice, you became much more strongly in favor of a one-state outcome. Could you speak a little bit about that?

And maybe your views have changed since then.

[Ghada Karmi]

Well, thank you for that summary and the plug for the book *The Return*, which I hope people will read. Yes. Now, I think I need to put this to correct something you said.

There was no way that I went to Ramallah half or even a quarter believing in the two-state solution. I never have. It's been an asthma to me right from the beginning.

I've always supported the idea of, I suppose, if you like, the reconstitution of Palestine as one state. Because the two-state idea, let me just digress for a moment, because this is really important to me, and it's important for people to understand this. The main objection to the two states, quite apart from the logistics and the difficulty of imagining where the Palestinian state would be and all the settlements and the 800,000 settlers, what you're going to do with them, all these logistical difficulties, even setting that aside, the idea that you would try and resolve this hideous conflict by preserving a Zionist state, which is one of your two states, isn't it? One would have to be Israel. Israel is a Zionist state.

Why on earth would you want to preserve a state with an ideology which has been so destructive and caused so much damage to the Palestinians in the first place and to everybody else, secondly? So why would you do that? I've never, ever accepted that.

However, I did indeed go out in 2005, and I did it because I was aware of the problem that I felt was happening to me, that this so-called armchair pundit, people who would never actually go anywhere, they never meet the real people, and they pontificate. And I thought I was in danger of that. And so I decided I had to go and see for myself what the situation was and make what I could of it.

And that's what actually happened. Now, I was dismayed on the one hand by the extent of Palestinian, what can I say, pacification, passivity in the face of this foreign occupation,

Israeli occupation, the fact that people had somehow acclimatized. And that is not to say that they'd all acclimatized, of course not.

And there were resistance and there always been resistance. But generally, daily life seemed to be going along in a particular way. That was my first dismay.

Second dismay was the extent to which the Palestinian Authority was in hock to Israel. It was a creature, clearly a creature of the Israeli occupation. Like all colonial movements, Israel had been able to set up a client body, call it Palestinian Authority, whatever you want to call it. It's not independent. It's subservient to the occupier. And so that was all very clear.

Now, but there is something I really need to point out, which is that I was assigned as a so-called consultant. And I was taken on by the Ministry of Information to advise on media and stuff like this. And while I was there, because I went into the office every day and mingled with workers for the Palestinian Authority, officials, etc.

You know that after a while, I also began to fall for the illusion that we really were a state. This is a Palestinian state that I'm living in. And the Palestinian Authority is the government. And yes, and you know *things are just like that*. I had to really make myself wake up and say, what? This is all pretend.

It's all fake. And so it was a real eye opener. And in terms of the belief that I'd had, that I've always had, that Palestine must be reconstituted, I emerged more certain than ever, that that had to be the way forward.

Although I was also, I have to admit, pretty depressed. And I wondered really how this was going to happen. But I've never doubted the principle.

[Helena Cobban]

Oh, that's so interesting. I think we all need to go back and read your book, which is a sort of-- I think Mourid Barghouti has a book called *I Saw Ramallah*, which was somewhat analogous to yours, but I think his conclusions were very different. But now we have a situation, I can't say after the Gaza genocide, because the Gaza genocide hasn't finished, but sparked by the Gaza genocide, we have a situation where some governments that previously have not supported the idea of Palestinian rights in any concrete form are calling for a two-state solution or calling for recognition of a Palestinian state.

And you have Hamas and the resistance in Gaza reiterating their support for a two-state solution as an interim, as a holding operation. So do you see, if we can solidify a ceasefire in Gaza and get some kind of meaningful Palestinian self-rule, even in a part of Gaza, is that valuable or is that another dead end like the PA in Ramallah?

[Ghada Karmi]

Well, I can understand why you're asking, but my answer really is it's not going to happen. It's not possible to discuss a scenario which is, in my opinion, it's just not going to happen. Because of Israel, you see, the elephant in the room is, as always, Israel.

Israel does not want a two-state solution. They've made that quite clear. They will not countenance something called a Palestinian state.

So you've got that huge, huge obstacle. Now, insofar as Israel has the support and the wholehearted... In fact, they're allies, really, with the United States.

They don't just enjoy the support. They're almost indistinguishable. I think it's like-- [Helena gestures with her two fingers held parallel to each other.] Yes. Now, you see, I can't see anything that Israel would not want happening at all. If you look at the current ceasefire, it's not a ceasefire.

People, Palestinians, are being killed by the Israelis every single day. I think something like over 240 people have been killed by Israel since October 10th. Exactly. Now, you see, there's no ceasefire, really. They're not letting in aid. It's all an illusion.

It's an illusion. So I'm not hopeful, quite honestly. I wish I could be.

It would be good if one could be a bit uplifting and say, you know, sort of, this is the darkness before the dawn. I don't see it like that. I think it's extremely...

We're going through a period of extreme danger for the Palestinians and for the whole Middle East because of this alliance between Israel and the United States, which clearly has taken some sort of decision to, quote, "sort out the Middle East" in the Israelis' favor. And while that is happening, the future seems to me to be very dark. And I think people who claim to know what might happen or what could happen, it's not true.

They do not know. We don't know. I've never known a period so opaque as the one we're living in now, where anything can happen.

And by the way, and I note a lot of people who see various areas in which things would change, could change, and are likely to change, in fact, which would help the Palestinians in the end. Take one example, the internal state of the Israeli state. You know, Israel is not a comfortable, it's not a comfortable country.

There is friction. There are economic difficulties. There are difficulties with recruiting for the army.

All these things are true. However, the problem with all of that, with that whole discussion, is that A, it will take, even if it's true, and if it's actually really significant, it will take time. And secondly, it might not even be true.

It might not be as bad as it seems. Many things that appear to be the case at the moment are really temporary. And the question of time is so crucial here.

Time is not on the side of the Palestinians. It's Israel that will use every single moment to kill as many as it can, to expel as many as it can, to steal as much land as it can. That is the race that we have to have our eye on.

[Helena Cobban]

And of course, it's one that's happening in the West Bank, as well as in Gaza, all the things that you said, especially the stealing of land. Obviously, your conclusions are very bleak right now. But from your experience at the Gaza People's Tribunal and the other contacts you've had with civil society bodies and well-connected people all around the world, do you see some hope that, for example, the Hague Group of governments or other governments may actually be able to pose a real challenge to the US-Israeli control of the UN?

[Ghada Karmi]

Yes. Yes, of course. And of course, despite the way I may have put it, there are these areas in which things are happening.

There's no doubt. I mean, not least of them, quite apart from the Hague Group. There's not least of them, the changes you pointed out in one country, one very important pro-Israel country, which is the United Kingdom, where quite rightly, things are changing.

The political landscape is changing. There are four independent MPs who became MPs on the strength of their support for Gaza. Well, that's unheard of.

It's really unheard of in the whole history of this. And you've got new parties which are much more progressive, much more, therefore, pro-Palestinian. So, you've got the younger generation in the United States, particularly the young Jews in the United States, who do not agree with Israel's way of doing things.

They do not approve. Now, these people, and as has been pointed out before by others before me, they and their fellow students will be tomorrow's leaders. Look at the new mayor of New York.

So, you know, all these are hopeful. It's not really to deny that there are not factors of potential success in this. There are, there are, and they're all over the place.

We need to see them, first of all, come together. Secondly, we need to see them grow stronger. And we need to have a complete overthrow-- I really have to use those terms-- overthrow of the current system, which is rotten, which is really rotten, ruled by the West, ruled by capitalism. This is rotten. And these are the results, what we're looking at.

Now, it'll take no less than that to ensure that there is justice for the Palestinians and for other oppressed people in the world. I have no basic reason to be so pessimistic that I can't see a brighter future. I can.

And I just want to make two points. One is in looking at this brighter future. On the one hand, I cannot deny that this could bring about the kind of change we all want to see.

However, time is not on the Palestinian side. This needs to happen much faster, much faster to save lives and to save the land of the Palestinians and to save them from becoming yet another expatriate minority, people like me. I don't want more of me at all in the world.

We all want to go home. And of course, I do not in any way give up on the ultimate necessity for the reconstitution of Palestine, for the fact that the people who live currently in Palestine and all the Palestinians who belong there and were expelled from it, all these

people have to live together in one democratic structure. And they have to have equal rights and they have to be equal irrespective of origin, race, gender.

All these matters are ones I very much believe in.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, I think that's a great note to end on, actually. Dr. Ghada Karmi, I want to thank you for your time and your thoughtfulness and your passion for rights and for justice and for a decent world.

This is the fourth conversation we've had in this series. We'll be releasing new episodes with new guests weekly every Wednesday. I want to invite people to visit the website www.justworldeducational.org and to donate to us if you can.

Once again, thank you, Dr. Ghada Karmi.

[Ghada Karmi]

And thank you. It was a great pleasure.