

In Her Own Words

Reflections from Palestinian and Israeli Women Peacebuilders

November 2025



25 YEARS OF WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

A joint resource from the Alliance for Middle East Peace's Women's Leadership Network and Partners for Progressive Israel's Women's Initiative

October 31st, 2025 marked twenty-five years since the passage of the landmark Resolution 1325 at the United Nations Security Council. A quarter century after its passage, ALLMEP and PPI are proud to share this resource uplifting the voices of Israeli and Palestinian women civil society leaders working for peace and equality.

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"I AM THE EYES FOR MY FAMILY": A WOMAN'S CALL FROM PALESTINE

Amira Musallam

I am a Palestinian woman, a mother, and a peace activist. I have lived most of my life under military occupation. I have walked through checkpoints carrying my son in one hand and fear in the other. I've organized nonviolent protests in front of bulldozers and armed settlers. Today, I coordinate Unarmed Civilian Protection in Palestine (UCPiP), a pilot project working to protect Palestinians from escalating settler and military violence, not with weapons, but with presence, solidarity, and courage.

Unarmed Civilian Protection, known as Protective Presence, is the practice of placing trained civilians, both local and international, in communities facing violent threats. The idea is simple yet powerful: when outsiders are visibly present, armed actors behave differently. Violence is deterred, accountability increases, and communities feel less alone.

We are piloting this effort in the herding communities of the South Jordan Valley, places like Al-Mu'arrajat and Ras Al-Auja. Like many Bedouin and rural villages in Area C of the West Bank, these communities face daily harassment from settlers who come with rifles and army backing, destroying tents, stealing livestock, and cutting off water. These attacks are not random. They are part of a deliberate system, an organized strategy to forcibly remove Palestinians from their land and erase them from the map.

And women pay a particular price. Not only because they are caretakers of children, land, and livestock, but also because the burden of survival often falls on their shoulders. They endure the violence directly, while also holding families together in its aftermath; staying awake at night, absorbing trauma, and navigating fear alone. Their vulnerability is compounded by gender, but so is their strength.

During recent participatory workshops we held in these communities, women spoke openly, many for the first time



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In a long while. Years of displacement, trauma, and daily survival have silenced many, not because they lack strength, but because they've lacked space, safety, and the sense that their voices would be heard. In patriarchal structures and under occupation, women are often expected to endure quietly. They discussed what it means to raise children while facing daily threats. What it feels like to no longer sleep at night, not out of insomnia, but to stay alert while husbands and children rest. "I have to be the eyes for my family," one woman told me. They shared how settler vehicles drive circles around their tents and fragile houses, sometimes every day. They talked about what it's like when drones fly over their sheep and scatter their herds, about the fear of fetching water alone. One young woman described being beaten during a settler attack on a local school. She wasn't the only one. Children between the ages of 6 and 15 fled the school that day in terror, carried home by family members.

These stories don't make headlines, not because they lack urgency or pain, but because they happen in remote villages, to women whose suffering doesn't fit into the soundbites of international media. Their names are unknown, their grief too ordinary, too Palestinian, too repetitive for the world to keep caring.

And then, just days after our workshop with the women of Al-Mu'arrajat, as we were preparing to deploy our first UCP team, the community was ethnically cleansed. What does that mean? I will tell you as best as I can.

I don't have words for that moment. It broke me. A few days before, I had sat with those women. I listened to their fears, their courage, and their hope. I told them we would be back soon. And then, suddenly, they were gone. Their homes destroyed, their livestock taken, their lives scattered. I couldn't sleep for days. I felt like I had let them down. Like I had failed to protect them.

This is the work I do, but sometimes, the violence moves faster than we can respond. And it is unbearable.

Still, we go on.

Protective Presence is grounded in relationships, not power. It is built on trust with the communities we serve, not on weapons, threats, or domination. In a system where control is enforced through fear, surveillance, and violence, we offer something radically different: solidarity, visibility, and human connection. Our presence doesn't overpower; it interrupts. It says: someone is watching, someone will speak out, and this violence is neither unseen nor inevitable. It is based on consent from the communities and accountability to them. In our model, Palestinian women are not passive recipients of aid; they are strategists and leaders.

The women in Al-Mu'arrajat and Ras al-Auja knew exactly what protection meant. It was the ability to send

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their children to school without fear. To walk to the well without an escort. To sleep for more than two hours at a time. They told us that the presence of international solidarity activists, especially women, makes a real difference. "When foreigners are here, settlers behave differently," one elder explained. "The army listens more. And the world hears us better."

Now Al-Mu'arajat is gone. The settlers came at night and destroyed it.

So I am writing this not just as a head of mission or a peace activist. I am writing as a woman to women everywhere.

I carry their stories with me. The woman who cannot sleep. The daughters were too afraid to walk to school. The mothers who speak in whispers but carry entire households on their backs. Their voices echo inside me when I wake in the night, when I step into a village, when I stand between a settler and a shepherd. This work is not abstract. It lives in my body. It's personal, and it's political. And it has taught me that protecting life in a system built to erase it is not just resistance, it is survival.

We need presence, advocacy, funding, and solidarity. We need you to tell your governments that silence is complicity. That protection is a human right. That these women, who carry so much, should not be carrying this alone.

UNSCR 1325 called for women's participation in peace and protection efforts. In Palestine, we are not waiting to be invited; we are building those efforts ourselves. But we cannot do it in isolation.

If we are to end this cycle, we must begin by protecting the most vulnerable and listening to those who have lived with violence for too long. For me, that means standing in front of a tent at midnight with nothing but my body and a flashlight, knowing that I am not alone.

That someone, maybe you, is watching and caring too.



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FROM CHECKPOINT TO CHANGE: A WOMAN'S JOURNEY INTO FEDERALISM

Dora Bender

It was a hot summer day, the kind that makes you want to break free. And we did. After months of COVID lockdowns, my friend and I packed up our kids and headed out on a guided trip to the springs in the Judean Mountains. We were late, stressed, rushing to meet the group at a gas station somewhere along the way.

And then, without warning, a checkpoint.

We hadn't expected it. We were just two women from central Israel, used to city life, highways, and coffee shops, not armed soldiers and barbed wire. I felt the air leave my lungs as I saw a young soldier, barely older than a boy, standing stiffly, rifle pointed toward the line of cars.

I froze. One thought consumed me: **my daughter.**

Would she one day stand at a checkpoint like this, rifle in hand, staring at strangers through fear? Is that her future?

We passed through.

When we reached the Beitar Illit gas station, what we saw stunned us even more, Palestinians and Haredi Jews side by side, chatting, buying coffee, going about their day. No tension. No hostility. Only then did we realize, we were in the West Bank.

A Palestinian tour guide waved us over, smiling warmly. "Come quickly," he said, opening his car door. "We need to catch up with the group."

We drove through the village of Hussan. Arabic and Hebrew signs lined the main street. Jewish families strolled through the Palestinian village, shopping, running errands. No fear. Just life.

At the springs, water shimmered, children splashed,



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adults laughed. Around 50 Israelis gathered in a place we'd never been taught to go.

That day changed everything!

The guide's name was Ziad Sabateen. Over time, he became a colleague and friend. His Israeli partner, Phil Saunders, became one of my dearest friends. They invited me into their world, a world of bridges, not barriers. I began volunteering with *Path of Hope and Peace* on projects bringing Palestinians and Israelis together.

Phil often challenged me: *"There has to be another way to solve this conflict."* Back then, I still believed in the two-state solution. But the deeper I got into this work, the more I saw how intertwined we truly are. You can't cut a living body in two without causing pain. Federalism began to feel like the path that fits best.

In this land, safety is often imagined as separation, fences, checkpoints, surveillance. But lasting safety doesn't come from walls; it comes from relationships. Federalism doesn't deny conflict; it acknowledges it, then builds systems for cooperation despite it. It allows for local autonomy while fostering shared governance on regional issues like water, infrastructure, and the environment. *"Them" becomes "neighbor."*

Eventually, Phil introduced me to Mario Schejtman, Executive Director of Challenge. I resisted; politics wasn't my thing, but agreed to meet. That meeting changed me again.

We began the Federal Forum, gathering thinkers, writers, and activists to explore federation, confederation, and hybrid models. The discussions were intense, but my hardest challenge wasn't the ideas, it was my place in the room. I was the only woman, not a political expert. My ideas mattered only when they fit neatly into a marketing box.

But something inside refused to stay quiet.

What if this really is the right path? And what if, once again, women are left out?

I tried to bring more women in, but doors stayed closed. Life was heavy. So, I stayed the only woman, studying, listening, asking hard questions. Slowly, I found my voice. My perspective was essential. Gender matters. Diverse voices matter.

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I noticed men often see maps, lines, and borders, while women tend to see the people and the environment within them. Where they might see a high wall as safety, I see a barrier that breeds fear and hate. Women think in terms of care, not just control, and that's exactly what federal frameworks need.

After four years in the Federal Forum, I see that the most promising path may be a **Regional Federal model** — a *Middle East confederation* starting with practical steps like engaging Jordan.

This approach offers:

- **Shared resources** — water, energy, environment, trade.
- **Economic growth** — joint infrastructure and larger markets.
- **Security stability** — shared arrangements that build trust.
- **Political support** — a coalition of states sustaining peace.
- **Social integration** — cross-border relationships breaking isolation.

Embedding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in a regional framework moves us beyond the limits of bilateral talks toward shared stability and prosperity.

Today, I'm still often the only woman in the room, but I've stopped apologizing. Our stories belong at the center of the solution. If we leave women out, we're not building the future; we're repeating the past.

And we've all lived that past long enough.



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THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM: RECLAIMING THE NARRATIVE, REIMAGINING PEACE

Marsha Lubovny

Everyone talks about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Almost no one listens to the women living at its epicentre. That silence isn't accidental; it's systemic.

In East Jerusalem, Palestinian women navigate restricted access to education, employment, and freedom of movement, facing pressure not only from Israeli authorities but also from conservative community expectations. Ultra-Orthodox women are frequently excluded from public and digital spaces, constrained by strict religious norms that discourage visibility and dissent. In West Jerusalem, both secular and religious Jewish women remain largely absent from positions of influence.

Across the city, women of all backgrounds are too often reduced to three roles: mother, daughter, wife. Their leadership, creativity, frustrations, and aspirations rarely shape public narratives. This is not just exclusion; it is erasure, and erasure comes at a cost for Jerusalem's future.

The evidence is clear: women's participation changes the course of peace. According to UN Women, when women are included in peace processes, agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. Yet in Israel-Palestine, women account for less than 3% of official representatives. The absence of women is not simply about numbers; it is about which perspectives are excluded from defining peace. Feminist scholars remind us that peace is not just the silencing of guns, but the presence of justice, recognition, and equality. To achieve that, women's voices cannot remain invisible.

Digital literacy offers a transformative entry point. In a city flooded with extremist messaging, dehumanising rhetoric, and politicised storytelling, the ability to author one's own narrative is revolutionary. Digital literacy is not just technical training; it is power: power to challenge stereotypes, access opportunities, and reshape how



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communities see themselves and each other.

This vision is already in motion. The grassroots organisation 0202 – Points of View from Jerusalem, which I have the honour of running, provides women from the city's diverse communities with media literacy and leadership training in videography, journalism, public speaking, and storytelling. Beyond technical skills, it's about equipping women to reclaim their narratives and assert their presence in spaces where they have long been invisible. Digital literacy functions as a feminist instrument for peacebuilding: elevating women's voices, fostering dialogue across divides, and bringing long-overlooked experiences into public view.

When women gain these skills, they stop waiting for others to tell their stories and begin telling them on their own terms. A Palestinian woman might film the frustrations of her daily commute through checkpoints. An Ultra-Orthodox woman might podcast about the challenges of balancing tradition and autonomy. A Jewish mother might document the everyday fears and hopes of raising children where deadly attacks are an everyday reality. Individually, these acts may seem small, but collectively they shift the lens through which Jerusalem is seen, bringing nuance, humanity, and complexity to spaces dominated by simplistic, polarised narratives.

The ripple effects extend beyond personal transformation. As women become visible in digital spaces, they start connecting across divides that once felt insurmountable. A secular Jewish woman and a Palestinian mother may disagree on politics, yet when they share stories of sleepless nights, parenting fears, or hopes for their children, they recognise echoes of themselves in each other. Recognition doesn't erase differences; it builds empathy. It allows people to hold disagreements while affirming dignity and humanity. In feminist peacebuilding, this is what we call relational peace: the slow, difficult work of building connections that defy the walls, both physical and mental, that conflict imposes.

The stakes are high. A 2023 OECD study found that women in conflict zones are 20% less likely than men to have access to digital tools. Without access, women remain invisible in the very spaces where narratives are shaped and decisions are made. Closing that gap is not just a development issue; it is a feminist issue, a peace issue, and a justice issue all at once. Enabling women to tell their own stories is not merely creative, it is political. It challenges systems that prefer women to remain unseen and unheard. It redefines who gets to speak, who is represented, and who shapes the future. Recognition, over time, enables structural change. This is not abstract theory; it is the lived process of peacebuilding from the ground up. It is not about women being brought "into" existing peace processes, but about women reshaping what peace means through the stories they tell and the connections they forge.

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Peace will never be achieved by replicating the systems that have excluded women for generations. It requires rethinking what security and justice look like, not only in terms of borders and weapons, but in whose voices shape public discourse, whose experiences are acknowledged, and whose visions for the future are taken seriously. Women in Jerusalem, across their many divides, carry generations of stories, resilience, and hope. Equipping them with digital tools to become seen and heard is not a side project to peace; it is the foundation of it.



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25 YEARS ON: HOW WOMEN WAGE PEACE WHILE MEN WAGE WAR

Peta Jones Pellach

Only a short while ago, the late Pope, His Holiness Pope Francis, gave his support to The Mothers' Call — a message of compassion, reconciliation, and healing that two movements of women, one Palestinian and the other Israeli, came together to write and carry forward.

United across painful divides, we are two distinct movements but we have chosen to stand side by side. As women, as mothers, and as people of conscience, we can no longer remain silent in the face of the unbearable suffering unfolding around us. On all sides of this war, lives are being lost, families shattered, and the sacred dignity of humanity wounded.

Women Wage Peace is the largest grassroots peace movement in Israel, uniting over 44,000 members from across Israeli society—center and periphery, religious and secular, Jewish, Arab, Druze, and Bedouin—demanding a negotiated peace with the Palestinians. Women of the Sun, our sister movement in Palestine, lifts up Palestinian women: supporting those ready to take on political leadership and engaging the wider community to claim their political and economic rights. We, together, are committed to ending the cycle of violence and building a just, peaceful future.

We believe women's voices are indispensable in peacebuilding. As mothers, sisters, and daughters, we bear the cost of war and hold the power to shape another reality for our children. UN Security Council Resolution 1325, already 25 years old, speaks about the important role that women play in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace-building. It calls for women's participation in politics and diplomacy. It decries gender-based violence. Its goals and values are worthy and yet, its demands have not been met and its values not adopted.

The Mothers' Call begins in a different place. It is not an appeal for women to join the failed diplomatic game that is currently played. It is a vision of the future — one that



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demands a new kind of diplomacy, rooted in hope rather than fear, in a conviction that our shared humanity means we can share a future. It is feminine and feminist: grounded in care, humility, and courage.

Through joint events, peaceful demonstrations, and relentless advocacy, we are weaving connections where others sow hatred. We are building bridges between Israeli and Palestinian women, fostering understanding and empathy, educating the next generation for peace and encouraging women to take an active role in shaping a peaceful future for our region. In our respective communities and further afield, we seek to raise awareness about the human cost of the conflict and the urgent need for peace. And crucially, through public campaigns and demonstrations, we press our leaders to negotiate — making clear that Palestinian and Israeli women form a powerful constituency for peace.

It is this final action – the demands we make on our leaders – that is the hardest to achieve in the current climate, yet we recognize that it is absolutely crucial. Both Israel and Palestine are in the political grip of men who have little interest in peace-making and almost no understanding of dialogue. Breaking through will require persistence and patience. It will require the calm and wisdom of mothers.

Eleven years ago, the women who founded Women Wage Peace declared: “Enough.” Since then, we have been traumatized and wounded, disempowered and silenced through years of war. And yet, our determination has only deepened. The bonds between the mothers of Palestine and the mothers of Israel have not weakened but have been reinforced. While men wage war, we insist on envisioning and working for peace.

We do not ask for temporary pauses or fragile compromises; we demand a lasting commitment to peace — a courageous, historic change that only true leadership can bring. This is what the women of Israel and Palestine want: a future.

The Mothers’ Call is not just an initiative; it is a testament to women’s solidarity across divides and a living expression of the values set out in Resolution 1325. We invite women everywhere — Palestinian, Israeli, and allies worldwide — to join us. Together, we can amplify our voices and create the change our children so desperately need and deserve.

Peta Jones Pellach works in the field of interfaith dialogue and is an active member of Women Wage Peace. Readers can join these movements in their journey towards a just and lasting peace here:

<https://mothers-call.org/mothers-call/>

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