



Interview: Israeli Human Rights Group B'Tselem Documents Torture Of Palestinian Prisoners

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Thank you so much for taking the time and joining us today. It's great to speak with you.

Sarit Michaeli (SM): Absolutely.

GG: So, as you probably don't need me to tell you, anytime a group issues a report documenting abuses by the Israeli government or in any way criticises Israel, they're immediately accused of sort of being on Hamas's side or maybe you're funded by Iran or Qatar, or you're a group of terrorist sympathisers. Especially we hear that in the West where people are not familiar with the groups they're talking about. So can you describe, before we get into the report, a little bit about B'Tselem and what its composition is, who funds it, what its background is?

SM: Yes, absolutely. B'Tselem is an Israeli human rights organisation. Israeli, in the sense that we're part of Israel's civil society, and we've been around since 1989 looking primarily at the responsibility of Israel for the violation of the rights of Palestinians. But we are a staff that's made up of both Israelis and Palestinians, all of them united in our support for the universal principles of human rights. But primarily, we focus on doing field research, field investigations, researching and uncovering a whole range of topics and then doing advocacy both in Israel and internationally in order to change this reality.

GG: And just to be clear – oh, sorry about that.

SM: A bit more. So I mean a bit more about B'Tselem's funding, about B'Tselem's background. B'Tselem stems from, as I said, from Israel civil society. And we are quite similar to most other Israeli human rights organisations in the sense that we're funded primarily by institutional donors. Many of them are foreign and very supportive governments of democracies in the West. We come from this background of liberal Israeli thought and

politics that used to be quite prevalent when we were established in the 80s and today, I would say, when the dominant discourse in our society is very much a right wing, I would even say a far right discourse, now we're considered far more extreme and far more a minority than we have been. But I still also [inaudible] base of support from thousands, tens of thousands of Israelis who – we're not a membership organisation, so they don't pay membership dues, but they send us small donations, they send us supportive emails, they share our values. Those Israeli citizens are also Israeli Jews and also Palestinian citizens of Israel. So I think over the years, we've gained the reputation of an organisation that is willing to tell the truth, exposes wrongs, treats or focuses primarily on our own government, on our own country's violations and overall is absolutely committed to the truth and to facts. And I think, as I said, overall, I think certainly internationally, people trust us. Inside Israel, we're viewed by many Israelis as probably the same things you just described, and by other Israelis as maybe naïve, but some would call us terrorist sympathisers, some would call us self-hating Jews, and some would call us naïve. But many people still understand that within a country that claims it's a democracy, we would argue very much against this self-identification. There has to be self-critical human rights reporting. And maybe one final thing. In recent years, B'Tselem has begun to describe the situation on the ground throughout our region, between the river and the sea as an apartheid regime. This, and I'm sure you would not be surprised, has not made us more popular within our own society, but I think that in the last year or so, and certainly in the last few months, more and more Israelis have been getting to cotton on to this reality of apartheid.

GG: Yeah, I actually want to get to that in just a little bit, the reasons for that position. And also, I always think it's so notable how many prominent Israelis, including former defence ministers and members of the intelligence services, including Mossad, have also expressed that view, even though here in the West it's characterised as some sort of taboo view, to say that Israel is similar to an apartheid state. I hate to even ask, but just kind of leave this, to quickly dispense with this. You are a human rights organisation and when it came to the attack by Hamas on October 7th and a lot of the barbarism and savagery that was committed inside Israel on that day, both in the report that I want to talk to you about, but also in general, the position of your group has been to condemn a lot of those acts as barbaric violations of human rights as well. Is that true?

SM: Absolutely. We were absolutely shocked, but not just morally shocked, we also felt the need both to say that this kind of treatment of human beings, it just erases humanity, but also that it's a crime. So it's not just a moral abomination, it's also a criminal act. And B'Tselem was supportive of the recent announcement by the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court's calling for arrest warrants both against Israeli leaders, but also against Hamas leaders. I'm not trying to create any sort of balance in this situation. I certainly think the situation isn't balanced or symmetrical. But I think it's important to stick to human rights concepts and to this sacred notion that human beings and that civilians have to be protected, that you cannot attack civilians no matter what the circumstances are. And in fact, it also, I think, informs everything we say and do. The recent reports that B'Tselem issued on Palestinian prisoners and the way they are mistreated by Israel – again, people who are

absolutely hated by many Israelis. But this basic concept of human rights, human dignity, the way that you have to act, I think informs all of the work that we've been doing since really this horrific day of October 7th and to this day.

GG: One of the things that I've noticed is, and I used to notice this back when I was talking about abuses by the US government in relation to the war on terror, torture and rendition and kidnapping and due process free imprisonment, a lot of the things the Israeli government is now doing, but people would often say, oh, these are terrorists, they sort of deserve it, they don't deserve basic considerations. Or even certainly in the Israeli context, when I talk about the work you've done in the documentation of abuse of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention camps, the argument is often made, well, look in war anything is expected, but also even everything is justified. My question that I always have for people who have that view is if that's your view, namely that anything and everything is justified in the name of war, when you're fighting a kind of enemy that you regard as existential or threatening, even up into including, say, anal rape, as things we've been hearing have been occurring in Israeli prisons to Palestinian detainees, on what basis then do you condemn the acts of Hamas on October 7th? In other words, if you take the view that, look in war everything in anything goes, and that's just the way it is, and we can't pretend that there are any limitations, what basis do you have then for condemning what Hamas did on October 7th? I'm curious as to whether that question is confronted or addressed in Israeli discourse, and if so, how is that reconciled?

SM: Well, I think I should also say in the interest of describing the reality in this country fairly, that many Israelis, but not the majority probably, are absolutely mortified and shocked by the things that have emerged recently; the news, the stories, the probably quite realistic information that has emerged about the treatment of Palestinian detainees by Israeli soldiers and by the system. So it's not 100% of the population, but I should say, and again, I think we should be honest about the status of our society that many, many Israelis have, at the very least, expressed a lack of interest or carelessness about this kind of totally unacceptable treatment of prisoners. And the human rights argument is going to be the very basic thing of regardless of what a person has done, there are certain rules that we have to adhere to. Also, when it comes to the laws of warfare, it's not just about how you treat prisoners, it's also about how you act, how you engage in warfare. You cannot do anything. The fact that your opponent or your enemy is actually violating international law does not allow you to do the same thing. Those are very basic principles that from our perspective have to be applied under all circumstances. I understand that politically, in our current environment, there have been so many factors that have been at play, to just push Israeli society further and further into what we have referred to as a moral abyss. And this isn't just the horrors, the trauma of October 7th. It's also a quite coordinated and deliberate campaign on behalf of the Israeli far right to justify any sort of treatment of Palestinians. In our report, we show how, for example, when you're talking about the treatment of Palestinian prisoners now in Israeli detention, the seeds of what we are seeing at the moment on the ground where, you know, as we describe the the Israeli prison system is has been turned into a network of torture camps for Palestinians since October 7th. But the backdrop, the seeds of precursors have been in public view, since the establishment of this current government, since the appointment of the

minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, a matter of national security. His vision is racist, an inspiration for this. So I think beyond the totally horrific situation we've all gone through in this country, it's been ten months now since October 7th, the war – I'm not even comparing it, because the way we have ravaged, we have destroyed, killed, 40,000 Gazans in our war of revenge is incomparable to what has been going on in Israel since. But there is this basis of trauma. I just think it's very important to remember that there is also political campaigning. The Israeli far right is not willing to and has never been willing to grant Palestinians any sort of human rights, regardless of what they have done. And I should say, I mean, the human rights argument is very clear on the treatment of prisoners, certainly on torture. Torture, which we argue and show is committed extensively in the Israeli system, is prohibited no matter what the circumstances are, under any circumstances, it's totally prohibited. So the basic human rights position is regardless of what a person has done, they could be guilty of the most horrific crimes, you're still not allowed to torture them. But I'm setting aside this argument for a moment, talking about the people we've spoken to for this report. The witnesses we interviewed are not not Hamas suspects. They're not Gazans who were arrested in Israel on October 7th or who were arrested with evidence that they're Hamas people. I don't want to use the word proof, but the indication of this is that Israel released them and because we spoke to them after they have been released, so clearly Israel does not associate or does not claim that they have been perpetrating these types of crimes, yet still they have experienced the same kind of treatment that all other Palestinians are receiving in the Israeli prison system. And in fact, we don't know, we don't have the research to prove what is going on in places that house people, Palestinians, that Israel actually has charged or has evidence against for being involved in October 7th. We have spoken to Palestinians who describe the general conditions. So from our perspective I think, A) there are these basic moral principles, that we should do all we can to adhere to and then there's the additional realistic fact that there's also a lot of lies told in order to essentially promote a project that I think a lot of Israelis don't agree with. Even Israelis, and I would like to think that the Israelis who are absolutely furious and angry and wishing for revenge for October 7th, don't want to live in a totalitarian fascist country that is planned for us by Itamar Ben-Gvir and his people, and with the approval, of course, of Prime Minister Netanyahu. So I think that there's a need to understand that it's not just about punishing people who harmed us, it's also about this massive additional political project. And maybe just to add one other comment on this, I think it's very much also related to the fact that from the perspective of the Israeli far right, the settlement lobby, etc., the reason they are currently demanding no hostage deal, a continuation of the war indefinitely, is because they have their own agenda. They want to continue to fully occupy Gaza and resettle it. And what they're doing is, and what unfortunately many Israelis are doing, is getting carried away in this cycle, this crazy revenge process, which is actually planned to lead us in a very, very horrific direction, to a terrible outcome.

GG: So I want to delve into the specific revelations in your report and how you went about documenting them. But I just want to stick for one more second on the kind of broader moral and ethical questions and the concept of human rights. Because for me, when I look at what has been the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic for quite a long time, well before October 7th, it certainly intensified and heightened, become more visible since then, the analogy for me is

the war on terror in the United States, because that was the first sort of focus on my journalistic career for the first ten years. Obviously, the 9/11 attack was also a gigantic trauma psychologically and emotionally for Americans. I was in Manhattan on that day. I'll never forget it. It was like it was yesterday. And what ended up happening is...

SM: I was living in New York at the time.

GG: Oh, yeah. So you were probably my neighbour. So you remember that well. I mean, people I think people have forgotten. People didn't live through it. Especially, which every year becomes more and more people, it's kind of shocking, but it's true, that that's ancient history. And that was such a trauma on Americans, on the United States, the sort of, you know, it was targeted in New York and Washington, the centres of American power. And over time, very, very quickly, the American government started doing things that I had always thought and been told were completely anathema to American values, to what the United States believes in, what the United States stands for, not just things like torture, and kidnapping people off the streets of Europe and sending them to Syria or Egypt to be tortured, interrogated, all of which was true, but just the very idea that people were being accused and treated as guilty without any trial. So any attempt that you would kind of make to suggest that this was wrong, you would immediately be faced with the objection, look, these people are terrorists. They deserve whatever they get. And it turned out that the United States, in fact, had detained and imprisoned both, in Guantanamo and CIA black sites a large number of people who ended up being innocent, guilty of nothing, and who were released, as you just said. And I think the reason why that could happen, why people weren't open to the idea that they should object to this, is because there was a kind of dehumanisation of Muslims in general. Like, look, these are people who are savage. These are people who really aren't human anymore. They're kind of subhuman or more barbaric than human beings are, and therefore don't deserve the protections of human rights because they've been stripped of their humanity. One of the passages in your new report says, quote, "The reality described in the prisoner's testimony can only be explained as the outcome of the ongoing dehumanisation of the Palestinian collective in Israeli public perception". Can you talk a little bit about how that has been accomplished and what you mean by dehumanisation?

SM: Yeah, absolutely. And I think it's a key point, because as I said, what we're seeing in terms of the prison system and how the Israeli prison system treats Palestinians is really just a precursor for additional developments. Yes, I mean, I think, when you think about the way Israelis engage with Palestinians and especially with Gazans, for the past 20 years, there's been an ongoing conflict and war. There's never been a moment of de-escalation. There have been moments of lack of conflict. But the way Gazans have been viewed and presented and certainly also, I think, the way all Palestinians are viewed and presented and possibly the way also most Israelis view Palestinians, is as the enemy in the sense that the animosity or the context of the harm that Palestinians inflict on Israel is always divorced from any sort of history and past of what Israelis have done to Palestinians. And, I think it's very important. And one of the things that we really need to think about is how, from our perspective, and when I say ours, I mean Israelis, I grew up in this country and I spend my days working to try

and change the future of this country, of this place. But, we are never told, and we never accept, and we never want to believe that Palestinians are acting as a result of things that we have done to them, right? It's always much more convenient for us as Israelis to associate, to remember or to view Palestinian actions, Palestinian attacks, the way the Palestinians operate, as things that are totally unrelated to that. Right? It's just because of some sort of murderous instinct that they have. And this is a more and more common thing you will hear in Israeli society. But actually, when we look at what has led to this Hamas attack and what Palestinians are doing, there are clear Israeli policies that have been very much related to this. And this is not just, you know, what B'Tselem has said, in fact, B'Tselem hasn't discussed these issues at length. But many Israelis, I think, are also beginning to understand the kind of reality that has emerged in our relationship with Gaza. In fact, even some of the victims of October 7th have been talking quite movingly within Israeli society about the background, the context, and what is going on. Because clearly this context is relevant to trying to change the future, between us and Gaza. These policies, the policy of separation between Gaza and the West Bank, the policy of completely creating two separate entities in order to prevent any sort of movement ahead in any sort of diplomatic process, the creation of, the turning of Gaza into one big prison, I think those policies are very much understood now by some Israelis, probably not by most Israelis, as very relevant. But it's much easier, obviously, to think about Palestinians as just, and I think the Israeli far right wants us all to think about Palestinians as people who just act because they'll always be this murderous instinct. The media have been essentially controlled by the right or a lot of the media, I should say, because there are still some critical media outlets that are willing to speak out. But the general broad media has relinquished its role as a watchdog. Certainly other watchdogs like the State Attorney's office, the attorney general have relinquished their role as watchdogs in light of all of this dehumanising language, as we heard from the president of Israel on down talking about Palestinians as human animals, essentially. Now, of course, I mean, there is probably no need to even say that, that one doesn't have to gloss over the horrors of October 7th in order to also then adopt this basic perspective [inaudible] B'Tselem that the horrors inflicted upon us don't allow us to inflict horrors on Gazans. But I think that unfortunately, much of Israeli society has really just got carried away in this orgy of revenge. Some people are slowly beginning now to get out or to begin to kind of recover from that mode. Commentators, people in public life, influencers. But some people are still in it, ten months after October 7th. And this is an extremely depressing and very, very troubling prospect for the future of this society, when really a lot of it is just about constant revenge. And what we're seeing also in Israel in recent weeks is kind of like constant rounds of assassinations and then responses and then various other killings where Israel will assassinate and then, like Hezbollah from the north, will respond and kill Israeli civilians. This seems to be unfortunately supported by many Israelis because this desire for revenge is so strong, that they're willing to essentially risk a war that is expected to kill thousands of Israelis as well in order to not de-escalate. This de-escalation is somehow seen as...

GG: Capitulation or appeasement. Let me just ask you, because it's interesting what you say, about this idea that sort of October 7th has been deliberately divorced from the history and the context to try and suggest that it happened because Palestinians are somehow inherently

just more violent or less civilised. I know that whenever I pointed out to Americans or Westerners that prior to October 7th, the Israeli military had bombed Gaza and killed Gazans and people in the West Bank, it killed people on the West Bank multiple times, numerous people prior to October 7th, they're shocked to hear that because the propagandistic framework has been, Oh, everything was perfect there. Nobody was mistreating each other. They were all, you know, in a state of peace. And then suddenly, out of nowhere, simply because they're savages, Hamas decided to attack because that's how Palestinians are. What I wanted to ask you, I don't know the best way to ask this, like, the most kind of the least provocative way, not asking to be provocative, I'm asking to really understand: When I grew up, and there was a kind of Jewish identity instilled within me, primarily culturally, but also to some extent around religious sectors and the like, central to the Jewish identity, certainly politically, was the Holocaust and the Nazi atrocities against Jews. And obviously, I'm not in any way comparing the Israeli attack on Gaza to what was done to Jews in the Holocaust in terms of scale or magnitude or anything else like that. But the way I was always taught to understand it was that the reason that was permitted to happen was precisely because there was an attempt to take a group of people based on their demographic characteristics, argue that because of who they were, they were sort of instilled with a certain set of immutable behaviours or beliefs or traits that were destructive and poisonous and toxic. And as a result, it was not only acceptable, but necessary to strip away their humanity and to disregard standard conceptions of human rights when fighting against them because they were not actually human. Again, I know it's very sensitive in the Israeli context to bring up this example. I'm doing so not to be provocative as I said, because that's what shaped my understanding as growing up as a Jewish child and then adolescent young adult, was this idea that the worst thing that when atrocities really happen is when you start stripping people away of their humanity and insisting that normal human considerations don't apply to them. How is this understood in the Israeli context, and I am always kind of curious about that, is the idea is simply that the Holocaust isn't about the capacity for human evil, but simply specifically about anti-Semitism. And therefore we have to just do everything to protect against anti-Semitism. Or is there any sense that some of these ideas and conceptions about how Israelis speak about Gazans echo, to some extent, what was said about Jews, not just in the Holocaust, but throughout persecution campaigns in history?

SM: I mean, certainly what we saw on October 7th, and since then in Gaza, is the result of ongoing escalations of a long term conflict of so much violence. And those processes tend to push people further and further into more extreme situations. So I never want to say that we've reached the worst situation because there's always further, you know, there's always more that a society could deteriorate. But when you're looking at Israeli society and again, I'm not actually, I'm not talking about Hamas and what they've done because I'm an Israeli. And the main focus for me is what is going on in our own society. I think it's a combination in Israel of many, or of historical processes. It's not just about the ongoing horrific trauma, it's also about a very long term process through which, as I said, political aspirations were promoted in order to reach a political or to reach to obtain political goals. So that's just a general, I think, comment on what led us here, what led us to this awful moment in time. In terms of historical analogies, I think and again, my perspective is that in Israel there's always

been a particular and a universal response to the Holocaust, to anti-Semitism, to Nazism. I mean, you know, my family also experienced on all sides and in probably every generation abroad, the impact of racism and of dehumanisation. And as I grew up, on the principle that this, you know, what we had to go through, what our forefathers went through should never be inflicted upon anyone. But there's also this other way that people responded among the Jewish community and in Israel, which is that never again to us, right? We'll make sure that this never happens to us. I think this is something that it's been informing the Israeli consciousness for clearly decades since Israel was established. I think what we are seeing these days is also the result in these kinds of situations, or in an apartheid situation – an apartheid situation is inherently violent, it's inherently dehumanising, it inherently creates a need to justify the supremacy, Jewish supremacy through different tools. Some of them are dehumanising others, and some of the other tools used to justify an apartheid regime are also the terrorism, accusations of terrorism. I think that in our current society things have gone – I mean, it's very hard to see how we now stop, or stop going in this trajectory and go back to a place where there's more of an openness and a willingness to accept the humanity of anyone. I mean, at B'Tselem, I mean, the name of the organisation is based around the notion of the godly image, in humans, right? This notion of human dignity of thinking about your own godly image, but also about your opponents, your enemies' godly image. It's very hard for me currently, the way this society is going, to be optimistic about moving away from this sort of dehumanisation, unfortunately. I think it would take a massive amount of work. I think first and foremost it would take an end to this war, this eternal war that is being perpetuated, through Netanyahu's refusal to sign a hostage swap that would also include a cease fire. And when you are in this kind of reality where war is just it is this kind of like we've been promised, you know, the total victory. But meanwhile, it's just a total war. Those are the ingredients that all of these bad outcomes are made of, these terrible outcomes, of dehumanising the other. I'm not sure if this is that completely coherent, but I think that for me, really the key issue I'm not as I said, I'm not optimistic about the long term, but the key issue in the short term is a ceasefire and a hostage deal. That's the key to at least stopping this trajectory and maybe shifting to a slightly different trajectory.

GG: Just a couple more quick questions, if you don't mind. I want to respect your time. But I think a lot of people, especially in the West, need to hear about this perspective as much as possible. So this report that you published, is called *Welcome to Hell - The Israeli Prison System is a Network of Torture Camps*. And in the introduction to our discussion, we're highlighting some of the specific findings and how you came up with them, so we don't need to delve into those necessarily. But what I do want to delve a little bit more into, and I alluded to this earlier when I was talking about the war on terror and this belief that, oh, these are just terrorists, do whatever you want to them. And even if it were true that they were terrorists, that still would not be acceptable. But most of them, in fact, none of the people at Guantanamo were ever actually convicted. None of the people in the rendition or CIA black site system were ever charged with anything. And a lot of them were acknowledged to have been innocent by the US government subsequently and even released for that reason. When it comes to the Israeli detention camps and you talk about the abuses in them, of course a lot of people think, oh, well, these are Hamas terrorists who participated in and supported October

7th, so who really cares? We already talked about why that's not a good argument, even if that were true. But talk a little bit about what this administrative detention system is, if there's any due process to it, the kind of people that you spoke with for this report.

SM: Absolutely. So I should say several things. First of all, as I said earlier, regardless of what a person has done, they could have committed the most horrific crimes which they should be held accountable for, you cannot torture them. We cannot do this. This is unacceptable. But some of the people we interviewed were imprisoned before October 7th, so clearly no one suspected them of being involved. Some of the people are from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, not Gazans, and some are citizens of Israel yet all were exposed to the same conditions and the same level of both physical violence, but also humiliations and degradation, and all of the other terrible conditions that the Israeli system now has for Palestinian inmates. So this justification that they are Hamas terrorists just does not hold any water. Additionally, a large percentage of the Palestinian detainees from the West Bank are now administrative detainees. So they're never tried or prosecuted or charged properly for anything. Administrative detention is the practice of holding a person based on secret evidence without an actual trial, right? There's a process of sort of mock, sham of an appeal, which is not a real trial. And it's based on an administrative decision by the Israeli military commander, based on, informed by information from the Israeli Security Agency, that then enables Palestinians to be put in prison for a period of six months that is then extendable open ended. And people can and are held for longer periods than six months. And since October 7th, the number of administrative detainees has skyrocketed. A large percentage of Palestinians [inaudible] were now held in Israeli [inaudible] are administrative detainees. And this means essentially they're not going to have a trial. There's never going to be a trial. The only thing they can hope for is to get a sort of quote or a paraphrase based on secret evidence and try and combat that. Now, that's a large number. The other issue is that a lot of Gazans are also held in Israel now in the Israeli detention system based on the illegal combatants law, which it again, is another Israeli mechanism to detain people in some cases under very vague suspicions that they are men of a fighting age without actual evidence. As we said in the report, the majority of people we spoke to have not actually been tried for any offence. They may have been suspected, charged, some of them know, some of them don't know. But most of them were released without actually having to go through a trial. And we're talking about, according to official data, there are approximately 10,000 Palestinians now in Israeli custody. It's more than double the number that was in custody before October 7th. So we're not talking about the rare occurrences where under international law, administrative detention is permissible, right? It's not totally legal under international law to hold people in this kind of preventive detention. But it has to be done in very, very rare cases because it's such a draconian measure. But what Israel has done since October 7th, and many times also beforehand there were hundreds of the Palestinian administrative detainees at any given moment in recent years, also in Israeli detention. It's just take this very, very narrow allowance and expand it to a situation where it's literally possible to put people behind bars without them knowing anything about what they would be suspected of having done. Maybe just to add, I mean, this is just absolutely horrific when any one of us thinks about the connection between what we've done and the kind of punishment we expect to have if we

violate the law, we always assume that there'll be some sort of trial, that there'll be some sort of due process, but the reality for Palestinians under Israeli detention is that there is no due process because currently also in the military court system, the situation has become so severe that the even the kind of sham theatre of trials that we saw before October 7th is not in existence. But even beforehand the prison system of the Israeli detention system for Palestinians is another tool for domination and control. And we provide in the report a kind of background. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have gone through detention. There is no Palestinian family in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and in the Palestinian diaspora among refugees that do not know someone who has been incarcerated by Israel. This is one of the central, most all encompassing methods of control by Israel of the entire Palestinian people.

GG: And again, I mean, the parallels with the war on terror, which most, a lot of Americans who supported it have come to regret deeply on moral grounds, strategic grounds, legal grounds are so obvious, since that's what the US did as well. They established these military commissions that were designed to give the pretence of a very quick trial. In fact, it was just a sham trial, as you said. Last question, I do want to ask you about the position that your organisation has now formally taken, that Israel has become an apartheid state, a term that you've used several times to describe the government there. Last month I went to South Africa and travelled around the country and had the opportunity to spend some time talking to people and visiting, you know, apartheid museums and seeing some of that history. And I don't want to pose as an expert in South African history or anything, but the South African government going back to Mandela and Desmond Tutu have long been very vocal supporters of the Palestinian cause, empathising with the Palestinian people, seeing their own struggle in the Palestinians. And obviously the government now brought the first case in the International Court of Justice, accusing Israel of crimes against humanity and genocide in Gaza. And when you go there, you just take a, even a visceral look at some of the things that were done during apartheid, the things that were the foundational aspects or characteristics of apartheid, it becomes instantly obvious why the South Africans see in the Palestinians very strong echoes of their own cause. Obviously, part of that as well is that the US and Israel supported the white minority apartheid regime, and they also haven't forgotten that. But I think it's more about the fact that how they understand themselves and their struggle and their own history, they see that very much in the Palestinian struggle as well. Can you talk about why your organisation thinks of why you think apartheid is the appropriate term to describe the Israel and Palestinian relationship?

SM: Yeah. So first I should say that I totally agree with your observation in terms of the way visiting South Africa kind of exposes this to one. But what we've always said is we're not trying to make an exact direct historical analogy between the situation on the ground now and apartheid, although, again, in recent years things are getting more and more shocking. So our assessment of the situation in our region and we're talking about the area of land between the river and the sea, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, is that the entire area is controlled by Israel, and it's subject to – this Israeli control is informed by the basic principle of Jewish supremacy. And then this basic principle is promoted through policies and

practices in four different fields of access to land, freedom of movement, residency and citizenship and political participation. And in each one of these categories, there are policies or practices, there are laws applied in order to preserve, to promote this principle of Jew supremacy. This is how we see apartheid in our region. And this is, you know, as Israelis who are treated as the superior part or party, we also find this reality, something that we simply cannot accept. I'm an Israeli Jew. I grew up in this society. Yes, I do have privileges, but I cannot accept them. And I have to do all I can to resist them in order to facilitate some sort of a future, where all human beings who are living in this area between the river and the sea have the same access to rights, to freedom, to dignity. And this is regardless of whether the political, the diplomatic resolution is a one state, two states or many other options that exist for different political kinds of groupings. The essential issue here is that there needs to be basic equality between all human beings living in this area. And even though we're not making a direct analogy to South Africa, there are some things that are quite striking. And I think one of the issues for me is clearly it's not really about petty apartheid. It's not really about the physical separation. It's primarily about the very clear concerted and systematic takeover of land, right? Taking over land from Palestinians and transferring it to Israeli Jewish ownership, as what we've seen throughout the history of Israel and we've seen it inside Israel itself and inside Israel's sovereign territory and certainly in the occupied territories, kind of [inaudible] outcome, where certainly the indigenous residents of the region are cooped up [inaudible] tolerance enclaves with access to less and less open land and the only option that many of them have is to become essentially wage slaves in our, in Israeli, industry or agriculture, because Palestinians do not have the same access to land and are constantly, slowly, but not even slowly anymore, but losing access to vast amounts of land in the West Bank is really the essential thing. That's where there are very, very clear similarities between the situation in our region and this concept of apartheid. And then this excuse of the Bantustans, right? The nation states that were meant to resolve everything, right? We've taken, as you know, apartheid South Africans argue at the time, we've taken away their citizenship. They are stateless. But we'll just invent these fictitious states that are just completely incapable of actually being real states and providing the needs and use this as an excuse to justify the loss of all political rights and citizenship. And I think this is something that we see here again and again because Palestinians, according to many Israelis and probably also according to – I put it differently. The excuse of the existence of the Palestinian Authority is used by apartheid apologists in order to justify the loss of political rights, the loss of the ability to influence any sort of, you know, have any sort of political influence. But actually the Palestinian Authority, we know, we see it again and again on the ground right now, is completely an institution that does not have any capacity to actually influence anything relevant or has anything relevant to the future Palestinians. The interesting development these days and I think it remains to be seen whether the international community allows Israel to move in this direction, is that we have now an Israeli government that parts of which are not even interested in maintaining the sham of a Palestinian Authority. In the past, Israeli leaders, even Netanyahu in his previous incarnations, have been very happy to have the Palestinian Authority because it's a perfect excuse, right? Today, when you have leaders such as Smotrich and Ben-Gvir who are clearly hell bent on destroying even this basic, you know, Palestinian Authority, even the Palestinian Authority that is actually a

subcontractor of the Israeli occupation, we're in uncharted territory because their project is a much faster and much more ambitious project of destroying any sort of Palestinian political aspiration. Whereas I think Netanyahu's project has been a very slow and incremental destruction of any sort of interests globally in Palestinians. I think this brings us really back to the issue of South Africa, because what we really need is an international solidarity movement that will involve – and I'm not saying that it doesn't exist clearly. I think the only light really in the darkness of the last period is actually some of the growing solidarity internationally. But I think currently when we're looking at the international community and the weight it's essentially allowed Israel to continue the revenge killing of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza and it's simply unfathomable. I simply do not understand how, certainly the US administration is allowing Netanyahu to continue to pursue this war without promoting a cease fire and a hostage deal which is the only way out of this. And this is what we need the international community to do now, just as a first step, in order to de-escalate the situation on the ground at the moment.

GG: Yeah, as you well know, there's extremely potent political forces inside the United States that even if a politician like Joe Biden wanted to and I doubt that he does, sort of impose those limits on Israel, the political cost would be enormous. And just on the South Africa, I just want to share with you, you know, you go to South Africa and you can find in every midsize or large city, the exact neighbourhoods that were once multi-racial or that had a large black population, which were, cleansed of any racial diversity by apartheid and people who were non-white, their homes were bulldozed, they were physically transferred to shantytowns, their possessions were destroyed. And of course, Nelson Mandela, who we now revere, globally, he and his resistance group were both classified as terrorists by the United States government, by the South African government and many European governments as well and 30 years later, we've come to see that actually that movement was just. It may not be identical, but certainly the kind of theoretical foundations are extremely current. I know your work that you're doing in Israel is not easy, especially after October 7th, but I also think it's extremely important. So, I'm so glad there are people in Israel like you who are documenting these things and speaking out the way you are. And I also appreciate you taking the time to talk to us about all of that tonight. It was super illuminating.

SM: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for the opportunity to discuss these issues. Always happy to do it.

GG: Great. We'll take you up on that. Thanks so much.

GG: Thanks for watching this clip from System Update, our live show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. eastern exclusively on Rumble. You can catch the full nightly shows live or view the backlog of episodes for free on our Rumble page. You can also find full episodes the morning after they air across all major podcasting platforms, including Spotify and Apple. All the information you need is linked below. We hope to see you there.

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