Stop This Vicious War on Gaza

Dear PEN Colleagues,

Dear Burhan Sonmez, President of PEN International,

Dear Members of the Board of PEN,

Dear Fellow members of PEN Centres across the World,

As I am writing this letter to you, a child in Gaza is killed every 20 or 30 minutes, by the horrific Israeli bombardment of the whole cramped small territory, that is the Gaza Strip. The Gazans killed by this bombardment by the mighty Israeli army, up to this moment, are more than 4000, the wounded more than 13,000. More than two thirds of the killed and wounded of the civilian Gazans are children and women, and more than one third of them are children. Gaza has become a slaughterhouse, with people killed, wounded and dispersed to shelters that do not provide shelter; the UNRWA schools and hospitals are bombarded by military jets and heavy shells of tanks. Thousands of buildings have been completely destroyed, dozens of extended families have been wiped from earth. About a million people (half of the citizens of the Gaza Strip) have been urged by the Israeli army to leave their homes and towns. The Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netenyahu said earlier in this war waged against Gaza, that the Nakba (the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948, that led to destruction of Palestine, the dispersal of its people and the establishment of the state of Israel) has not yet come to an end. His defence minister Yoav Gallant described the Palestinians as animals, justifying the aim of this war, to kill as much Palestinians as possible.

The case in the West Bank is not brighter. More than 80 civilians have been killed by settlers and the Israeli army, and more than 1,000 have been wounded, since the beginning of this war. I spoke to my family in the West Bank, and was told that they are horrified by the incursions of the settlers on Palestinian towns and roads in the area. The nightmare of 1948 is hovering over them. A family member wrote on Facebook recently that he woke up one night traumatized, thinking it was 1948 again.
What is happening to Gazans is a genocide, an ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Nothing justifies this disproportionate use of force to what Hamas did on October, 7. The killing of civilians, on both sides, is a war crime, but the killing of innocent lives, the destruction of their homes on top of their heads, the bombardment of hospitals, the forced evacuation of the sick and injured, the cutting of electricity, water and food supplies from Gaza, is an indescribable war crime.

We, at PEN, are promoters of peace and dialogue between cultures and civilisations. There is an unconditional support of Israel by the United States and some European governments, which incited hatred, islamophobia, and silencing of Palestinians and their supporters globally. The propagation of islamophobia, and demonization of Palestinians, had led to the horrible killing of a six year old Muslim Palestinian child in Illinois at the hands of his American landowner, last week.

Our accounts on social media are controlled. We are not given permission to voice our opinions, whatever these are. The award ceremony of Palestinian author Adania Shibli at Frankfurt Book Fair was postponed. Adania was due to be honored on October 20 with the 2023 LiBeratur Award for her novel Minor Detail. But Litprom, the German literary association that gives out the prize, announced it was postponing the award ceremony “due to the war started by Hamas, under which millions of people in Israel and Palestine are suffering.” The silencing of Palestinian voices, and even the demonization of Palestinians in general, is the norm these days.

We live in a time of horror. The only thing that can stop the accelerated deterioration of the situation in the Middle East is an immediate ceasefire, and negotiations that address the roots of this old conflict, that goes back to 1948. The Palestinian people have the right to their own state, and to live peacefully, side by side with the Israeli state. Waging war, and trying to exterminate them by sheer force, will not bring peace and security to any party.

Fakhri Saleh (President of PEN Jordan)