

RESPONSE TO HANAN ASHRAWI
Cranbrook Peace Foundation Annual Dinner
November 14, 1995

Ronald R. Stockton

I have been asked to comment tonight as a Political Scientist. I will be brief and to the point. I want to do three things: I will tell you some anecdotes; I will tell you what has to be done before peace is achieved; and I will tell you why Mrs. Ashrawi, and her daughter, are at risk.

First, an anecdote from Mrs. Ashrawi's book. For those of you who have read the book, this is the story that leaps out.

When Mrs. Ashrawi was a girl, her father was jailed for being a Palestinian nationalist. Hers was a proper family and having their father in jail was a disgrace. She describes what happened when she went to school:



My sisters and I went to school in shame and anger. My social studies teacher started class by asking me to stand up and face my classmates. Then she addressed us all: "In this unjust world of ours, only the good and the brave go to political prison. We are all very proud of Hanan's father, who has just been arrested, because this means that he is a man of principle and courage. Hold you head up high, Hanan, for prison is an honor that is bestowed only on the worthy.

Her classmates clapped, and she wept.

A second anecdote: A year ago I was in Mrs. Ashrawi's home town of Ramallah visiting the Quaker High School, her alma mater. I met a teacher there, a young American female, who told me about a lesson she had taught one day on Gandhi and his strategy of non-violent resistance. Halfway through the lesson, there was a clash in the street between soldiers and neighborhood boys. The boys threw stones, the soldiers responded with gunshots and tear gas. As she continued her lesson, the classroom was filled with overflow shouts and tear gas from what

was happening just yards away. Everyone was choking and crying. One of the students raised her hand and asked a question: Why are we studying this?

A third anecdote: Two years ago I met a prominent Palestinian. I asked him what he thought of the Oslo Accords and the handshake at the White House. He told me the following: Imagine that you have two sons. They go away on a trip and you receive a report that they have been killed. Then one returns and you realize only one died. Are you happy or sad? Of course, you are both. That is how Palestinians feel. We have lost much but, one part that we thought was lost forever is to be returned to us.

Those are the anecdotes. Now I want to talk to you about the status of the peace talks, as seen from the perspective of what Israelis call the Peace Camp--those who would carry the peace process through to its culmination. There are those on both sides who feel the land is theirs by divine right. My observations do not apply to them.

THE PEACE CAMP

I am reminded of Saint Paul's definition of faith: Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. I am pleased to report that we are well beyond faith. There are three agreements signed and being implemented on the ground; the PLO has recognized Israel and agreed to live in peace with it; Israel has recognized the PLO and agreed to let the Palestinian people seek their own destiny free from Israeli control; there is a Palestinian government in place with elections on the way; the Israeli army is out of most of Gaza and has begun withdrawing from West Bank towns; and HAMAS may even join the process.

We are well beyond faith, but we are far from peace.

What do the peace camps want that has not yet been achieved? What does it take to get to yes, to that point where peace seems assured? The Palestinians have five issues, the Israelis one. In my assessment, unless all six things are met, there will be no peace and what has been achieved so far will come unraveled. I present these points to you not as an Israeli or a Palestinian, not as an advocate, but as an analyst. The issue is not what we want but what it will take to stabilize an unstable situation.

From the Palestinian perspective there must be five things:

First, Israel must return to its 1967 boundary, with mutually agreed upon modifications.

Second, the Israeli settlers in the Palestinian lands must withdraw or be under Palestinian authority. Extra-territoriality is not acceptable, as if settlers were diplomats not subject to local law. The land must be returned to Palestinian use. At the present time 40% of Gaza and over 60% of the West Bank are reserved for exclusive Israeli use. This is not a stable situation.

Third, there must be a Palestinian state. This does not mean an "entity" with self-government. This state might unite with Jordan or be a part of a wider federated system as discussed by Prime Minister Peres. But first there must be a state.

Fourth, refugees in camps in Lebanon and elsewhere must be allowed to return. At the present time, in all the three agreements signed so far, there is not a single word for the refugees except a promise to discuss their situation in the future. This is not acceptable and will produce instability.

The fifth point is the hardest: The walled Holy City of Jerusalem must be shared in some way and the Palestinians must have their capital in East Jerusalem. Let me emphasize once again that these observations are empirical, not normative. I am a political scientist offering an analysis, not an advocate.

Jerusalem is the key to peace. Perpetuating exclusive Jewish control over the Holy City and over Islamic holy sites, and maintaining Israeli control of the Palestinian populations of East Jerusalem *will and is* transforming a political dispute into a religious dispute. The result will be explosive and volatile and has the potential to spiral out of control with consequences that cannot be predicted and with a level of violence that is beyond anything we have seen so far.

For the Israelis, each of these issues is more difficult than what has been achieved so far. We should anticipate strong and determined resistance.

If these are the concerns of the Palestinian peace camp what are the concerns of the Israeli peace camp? There is only one: If we work out all these problems, will be able to live in peace?

This is not a question about personalities or commitments. Nor does it ask whether vigilante extremists can be stopped. They cannot and the Israelis know that. The core of the question is whether the Palestinian people will collectively feel that they can live in peace with Israel, considering how much they have lost. Have the future history books been re-written so

that, to quote one of the last public statements of Yitzhak Rabin, "our handshakes will be so common that nobody will take pictures."

THE FUTURE

I told you that Mrs. Ashrawi and her daughter were at risk. One risk is obvious: Mrs. Ashrawi has faced death threats from both sides and has had a gun fired at her point blank, a gun that jammed. That threat goes without saying.

But there is another threat, one more significant than losing her life. Mrs. Ashrawi's daughter Amal (which means Hope) was once asked, if she could live anywhere in the world, where would she want to live. Her answer had the elegant simplicity of a child: "I would live nowhere but Palestine. It's my home, where I belong, and where I know who I am." Sadly, Amal's hope for the future is not guaranteed.

If the peace process fails, Mrs. Ashrawi and others will be discredited and swept away. More significantly, their people--Jewish and Palestinian--will be swept away. This applies particularly to the Palestinian Christian community, which is objectively more vulnerable than either Jews or Muslims.

This is a painful subject to raise in a room filled with so many people of good will from the Abrahamic faiths, people of peace who would never lift a finger against their neighbors.

But we must not overlook the fact that the Christians of Palestine are caught in the middle. They have played a prominent role in the history of their people. But their future is not secure. Their numbers are falling fast. They are viewed suspiciously by others. And the militant statements of some American Christians against Palestinian national rights have compromised this original Christian community and made them seem traitors and enemies to their own people.

Mrs. Ashrawi has put her life at risk for her people, but she has also put her life at risk for her daughters, for her unborn grandchildren, and for the unborn grandchildren of the Israelis.

For her, peace is not a slogan or a song. It is not about being interviewed on *Nightline* by Ted Koppel, or being the featured speaker at a banquet, or writing a book. For her--as with Yitzhak Rabin--peace is about guaranteeing the safety and survival in their homeland of those not yet born.

This was later reproduced in *Washington Report on Middle East Peace*.