

**“For me, Palestine is paradise.”**  
***Exclusive interview with Leila Khaled***  
*Recorded on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2014*  
*First published [here](#).*

*Frank Barat for LMADO: How are you Leila? What are you doing nowadays in Amman?*

Leila Khaled: I am fine as long as I am a part of the struggle for freedom, for our right of return and for an independent State with Jerusalem as capital. I know it is not going to happen in the near future, but I am fighting nevertheless. Here in Amman, I am the chief of the department of refugees and Right of Return in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (P.F.L.P).

*LMADO: You are a Palestinian refugee, one of six million. Do you still think that you will return one day? And what do you make of the conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who are denied their most basic rights and yet, are sometimes criticized for trying to improve their lives in Lebanon as this might affect their right of return to Palestine?*

LK: The Palestinians were distributed to different countries. Each country has had an impact on the people living there. Those in Lebanon, in the 70s and 80s, until 1982, were the ones that helped the armed struggle, that helped defend the revolution. Israel was attacking and invading all the time and occupying parts of the country as well. After 1982, the main mission of the Palestinians was to achieve their rights, their civil and social rights, which they are deprived of in Lebanon. This will enable them to be involved in the struggle for the right of return. The Palestinians in general take the Right of Return as a concept and as a culture. Any Palestinian will tell you that he fights for his social and civil rights, but this means that he is preparing himself for his return. The two are inseparable.

*LMADO: The question of the refugees, in the negotiations, has, in the last decade, become more and more obsolete, something that is no longer an inalienable right but something that can be negotiated. The same applies to the last round, the “Kerry negotiations”. What do you make of this? And what do you think is going to happen after April 29<sup>th</sup> when the negotiations are supposed to end?*

LK: The PFLP and myself personally have been against the negotiations since 1991. The problem is that the two parties are sticking to their guns. The Israelis think that Palestine is the land for the Jews all over the world. The Palestinians are sure that the land belongs to them and that they were forced out in 1947/1948. When this conflict moves from one stage to the next the two sides are considered as even in their power but the fact is that we are not (this is just an illusion). The leadership chose to go for the Oslo accords, thinking that this was a step forward in achieving the main rights of the Palestinians. Some people believed this, but they discovered, after twenty years, that it was nonsense. It brought catastrophe on us. There are more settlements than ever, twice more than before Oslo, the number of settlers has doubled, more land is being confiscated, and, of course, the Wall has been built. The apartheid wall. Israel is an apartheid state. These negotiations, now, are meant to help Israel and not the Palestinians. We have already experienced what Israel means by *negotiate*. Israel never respects its promises, its obligations, and simply continues its project of making Palestinians' lives hell. My party and I are against this last round of negotiations too, of course. Especially now. The Americans are supporting an Israeli project that will only help Israel. There was an agreement, sponsored by the Americans, which said that you had to stop settlements in the West Bank and that 104 prisoners should be released on three different dates. Now, the Israelis have said no, we will not abide by this agreement and we will not release the last batch of prisoners. By the way, those people who are released, are often put back in jail shortly after anyway. This is what the Israelis refer to as the rotating door policy. The

politicians say that the prisoners should be released but they are then rearrested. Many of them are already back in jail. It is very clear from this that the Israelis are not ready to make peace with the Palestinians. They are also taking advantage of the fact that the Arabs are occupied with many other issues, and do not support the Palestinians. Nobody is therefore going to condemn Israel when they flout the agreements they sign.

Also, what does Kerry want? What is his plan? Nobody knows. It's all verbal. Nothing is written. The leadership should refuse what Kerry offers. By the way, Kerry did not go back to Ramallah with another offer. Which means that the Palestinian Authority (is going to use its second option and go back to the U.N. Then, today, in the news, the US has again said that it will object to such a move. What does this all mean?

I do think that we need first to consider the nature of the State of Israel. Secondly, we have to understand more about their projects and plans. Thirdly, we know that the Israelis are much more powerful than us in some respects. But we are also powerful. It all depends on our people. We have the will to face the challenges that the Israelis are putting in front of us. There is an English saying that says: "When there is a will, there is a way". We still believe that this is our right and that we have to struggle for it. We have struggled, we are struggling, and we will struggle. From one generation to another. Freedom needs strong people to go and fight for their dreams. That is why I do not think that there will be a settlement now. The Americans always want to prolong the negotiations. This will not help.

*LMADO: If negotiations do not bring peace to the Palestinians, what will? What should the leadership do?*

LK: Resist! That's how you achieve your rights as a People. History has shown us that. No People achieved their freedom without a struggle. Where there is occupation, there is resistance. It is not a Palestinian invention. We are actually going to call for a conference to be held under the auspices of the U.N, just to implement the resolutions taken by this body on the Palestinian question. Resolution 194 calls on Israel to accept the return of the refugees. Fine, let's put the U.N on the spot. Let's have a conference reminding people of this. The problem is that the references to any negotiations that have taken place were drafted by the Americans, which we know are biased towards Israel.

*LMADO: P.L.O stands for Palestine Liberation Organization. Do you think it has lost its true meaning? Bassam Shaka in 2008 told me that the P.L.O, before anything, needed to go back to its roots as a liberation movement.*

LK: No liberation is achieved without resistance. My party has not changed. It has stuck to its original program. We are calling to escalate the resistance. People talk about popular resistance. It does not only mean demonstrations. Using arms is also popular. We have people who are ready to fight.

*LMADO: What does peaceful and non-violent resistance means for someone like yourself, who chose armed resistance as a mean for liberation?*

LK: Resistance takes more than one face. It can be all kinds of resistance. Non violent and violent. I am ok with those who choose non-violence. We are not going to liberate our country by armed struggle only. Other kinds of resistance are necessary. The political one, diplomatic one, the non violent one. We need to use whatever we have got. For more than 10 years now, people have been demonstrating in Bil'in, in Nabi Saleh....protesting the wall and the annexation of the land. How is Israel dealing with it? Violence, tear gas, bombs... Do you think it is acceptable to have an army with a huge arsenal, against

people holding banners? I am ok with using all means of resistance. We cannot say that non-violent resistance alone will achieve our rights. We are facing an apartheid State, Zionism as a movement, the Americans, and in general, the West, which supports Israel. When the balance of forces changes, then we can start thinking about negotiating.

*LMADO: It is always easier to advocate for armed resistance when the general public knows who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed. Your actions in 69 and 70 were about that, correct? To put Palestine on the map. Do you think the educational process of showing another face of Palestine, showing that the Palestinians have legitimacy and are in the right, has been done enough since the 70s?*

LK: Let's take the example of Vietnam. Or of Algeria and South Africa. People needed time to convince the whole world of the just cause of their struggle. It took time. In the end, the world realized that those who are oppressed have the right to resist the way they want to. Nobody can impose a form of resistance on us. We chose armed struggle. We did not achieve our goals. Then the intifada broke out and the whole world took us seriously. We gained the support of people all over the world. Still, we did not reach our goals because the leadership was not brave enough at that time to escalate the intifada, to take it to another level. Israel was ready to accept to withdraw from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But our leadership failed us. The intifada was the choice of the people. If you go back to the beginning of the resistance and holding arms. It was a necessity for the Palestinians after 1967. We depended on the Arab countries to restore our homeland. But they failed us too. Israel occupied more of Palestine. So we decided to take our destiny into our hands. By waging an armed struggle. Nowadays people are waiting but they realize that these negotiations will get us nowhere. Our past experiences with Israel have shown us that they cannot be trusted. They do not respect their words. Threaten us all the time. Abu Mazen is not a partner for peace? Who is? Sharon? Netanyahu? This right-wing government? This is not a government, it is a gang, essentially, which represents the settlers, the fascists, the racists. The lie began last century. That this was the land of the Jews. The bible gave it to them. Is this democratic? The world in 1948 accepted this lie. God promised us the land! As if God was an estate agent. This is a colonial project. This is the main issue of the conflict.

*LMADO: The struggle is about ending Israel's settler colonial project, then, ending apartheid. What will happen, in your opinion, the day after? The day after victory? An Algerian like solution, or a South African one?*

LK: We have always offered the more human solution. A place where everybody lives on an equal basis. Jewish, Muslims, I do not care about the religion of the person. I believe in the human being itself. Human beings can sit together and can decide together the future of this land. But I cannot accept that I do not have the right, now, to go back to my city. Like six million Palestinians. We are not allowed to go there. We are offering a human and democratic solution. Nobody can tell me that we cannot decide the fate of our country because we are refugees. What happened to us is a first in history, as far as I know. People being chased away from their homes and another people, coming from very far away, taking their places. The Israelis were citizens of other countries. Israel, thanks to various organizations, before 1948, built an army, Okay, but there was no society. They brought people from outside. Even now, there are huge contradictions in this country and this society. People come from different cultures, some do not even speak Hebrew. We do not want more blood, but are obliged to resist. We have the right to live in our homeland. When the Israelis realize that as long as they do not budge this conflict will be endless, they should accept our solution. Some Israelis have already understood that. That you cannot go on fighting forever. What for?

*LMADO: Can you talk to us about the role of women in the resistance. And do you think your actions,*

*the hijackings in 69 and 70, did more for Palestine, or for women around the world, or both?*

LK: The hijackings were a tactic only. We wanted to release our prisoners and were obliged to make a very strong statement. We also had to ring a bell, for the whole world, that we the Palestinians are not only refugees. We are a people that has a political and a human goal. The world gave us tents, used-clothes and food. They built camps for us. But we were more than that. Nowadays there are plans to end the camps, because they are a witness of 1948. Women, are part of our people, they feel the same injustices. So they get involved. Women give life. So they feel the danger even more than men. When they are involved, they are more faithful to the revolution because they defend the lives of their children too. When I gave birth to two children, I became more and more convinced that I had to do my best to defend them and build a better future for them. I felt for women who had lost their children. So I think my actions had an impact on both, to answer your question. The popular front slogan was: "Men and Women together in the struggle for the liberation of our homeland". The P.F.L.P implemented that by giving a place to women in the military. At the same time, women also played a big role in defending the interior front, the families. Thousands of Palestinian women are now responsible for their families. After all the wars, the massacres, the arrests, the killings by Israel, these women protected their families from being dispersed. Also, women are now educated, they work, they travel, go to university and so on. Before the revolution, it was not like that. Now it is. And it is a must. You can see that women are involved in many aspects of the struggle and society. Whether it is inside or outside Palestine.

*LMADO: Lina Makboul who directed the film "Leila Khaled; Hijacker" implies in her last question in the film that your actions did more harm than anything to the Palestinian people. The film stops right after the question. What did you answer?*

LK: She told me she did this for cinematic purposes. But I did not like that. The fact that people could not hear my answer. My answer was no, of course! My actions were my contribution to my people, to the struggle. We did not hurt anyone. We declared to the whole world that we are a people, living through an injustice, and that the world had to help us to reach our goal. I sat with Lina for hours and hours you know, telling her the whole story. She told me afterwards that Swedish TV only wanted the question.

*LMADO: Do you sometimes reflect on the past? What was done, what could have been done, what could have been done differently, when you see the current state of affairs? What went wrong?*

LK: Recently my party has held its seventh conference and reviewed its positions. We then made a program to widen our relations with the progressive forces around the world, especially on the Arab level. We also decided to strengthen our interior structure. I also learned that I had to review my own positions, my own thinking. Every year, around December, I look back at the past year and then decide to do something for the coming year. This year, I decided to quit smoking, so I did.

*LMADO: Mabruk!*

LK: I made this decision and it was easy for me to implement it.

*LMADO: Why has Palestine, in your opinion, become such a symbol for the solidarity movement?*

LK: Palestine for me is Paradise. Religions talk about paradise. For me, Palestine is paradise. It deserves our sacrifices.