

Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sinijlawi (JDF): “Dialogue will bring about new leadership and new peace talks”

(Tel Aviv) “I have dedicated more than 30 years of my life to pursuing dialogue with the Israelis. And I believe that that time has been the best investment I have ever made”: **Samer Sinijlawi**, Palestinian activist and politician, President of the Jerusalem Development Fund (JDF), a non-profit organisation committed to improving life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, introduced himself with those words.



There could have been no more appropriate venue for our meeting than the Rabin Centre in Tel Aviv - in memory of Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 together with Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat for the signing of the Oslo Accords the previous year. Only a year later, on 4 November 1995, Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, a Jewish extremist. The occasion was a meeting organised by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) over the past week. **From Intifada to dialogue.** Having spent so many years dialoguing with Israelis, he remarked half-jokingly: “I am used to meeting every Israeli who wants to get to know me: from the Left, from the Centre, from the Right. I always say to them: ‘I know you better than you know yourself, because you don't talk to each other, while I talk to all of you’.” Samer has a history in political activism: on the streets at the age of 15, “throwing stones at tanks” during the 1987 Intifada, five years in Israeli prisons, released at the age of 20, International Youth Secretary in Gaza and the West Bank for the Palestinian Fatah party. Today he is an opponent of Palestinian President Abu Mazen, who “has been in power for 60 years”, because, he explains, “I firmly believe that only a change of political leadership in Palestine and Israel can promote dialogue and the resumption of peace negotiations.” This conviction was further strengthened after the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October and after his visit to the Kfar Aza kibbutz, just 3 km from the border with Gaza.



“I condemn all of this, it goes against our moral values, it does not belong to the Palestinians and it is against Islam,” said Samer in no uncertain terms. “There is no ‘Mother Teresa’ in this conflict. None of us, neither Israelis nor Palestinians, can draw a moral red line. I make no distinction between the life of

the child in Kfar Aza and that of the child in Gaza a kilometre away. To me they are both children and the death of either is a tragedy. I have learned to shed the same tears for both, because I am a human being before I am a Palestinian or an Israeli.” Thus, he stressed,

“I don't want a Palestinian State that is born on the bodies of 1,200 Israelis killed on 7 October. I don't want it.”

“I want this State to come into being in accordance with moral principles and the rule of law.” Samer prefers to talk about the future rather than the present or the past. And for him, the future is “Tel Aviv, with whom we must cooperate to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough, and not the international community.” **New narratives.** He does not theorize about one- or two-state solutions. “We have to forget about the international community and focus on the Israelis. If we can reach their hearts and minds, something positive will happen. If not, we will get nowhere. The lip service we continue to hear from Europe, or sometimes from Washington, does not help.” What is needed, he says, are “new narratives” about the conflict. “We are transmitting completely erroneous ideas to our children. For me, as a Palestinian, the first thing is to be proactive and recognise that Jews have historical rights to this land. I certainly do not share the Zionist narrative that we abandoned this land. They left it for 3,000 years and then they returned. But Jews have to explain to their younger generations that they were never alone here. There have always been 'others', and those 'others' are us. In one way or another, no one can claim an exclusive right. We have a common history. And if we have a common history, we should be able to create a common future.



But we have to start with the creation of a common narrative that will unite our younger generation, in education, in the media, everywhere. Starting with the Holocaust: “Palestinians,” says Samer, “must be aware of the Holocaust, whose memory must be respected. Opposing narratives will get us nowhere.” The activist is confident that “dialogue can produce new leadership, and thus the emergence of a 'Day After' for both Abu Mazen and Netanyahu.” **‘Day after’ for Gaza.** “We also need a 'Day After' for Gaza.” Samer explained: “The new Palestinian Authority will have to make sure that it is able to rein in what is left of Hamas, take the keys to Gaza and impose a demilitarised status on those remaining from Hamas. As Palestinians, we have to act as a state, recognise ourselves as a state and tell others: 'Now treat us as a State!'. “My generation, which was born here - Samer concluded – “knows the Israelis and has the DNA of this conflict, the solution to which does not depend on arguing over one square kilometre of land on either side. Who will remember that square kilometre in the future? We have to protect the thousands of people who are dying on both sides. This is worth far more than a strip of land.”

Daniele Rocchi