

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

When I received an e-mail telling me that I was being honoured with an award from the New Israel Fund, I found myself feeling conflicted.

I want to share what went through my mind and my heart at that moment.

Firstly, it warms my heart and it is very encouraging to know that someone recognizes and appreciates my work in a little corner in the heart of the State of Israel. I never thought that my long-standing activism in such a small place, with a segment of the population on the margins of Israeli society (Palestinian women in Israel) dealing with an even more difficult and marginal issue (domestic violence) would win recognition.

My work comes with many hugs and smiles, tears and love, and sometimes even small victories. But recognition is definitely something that is missing from what I do, so thank you for giving me this moment.

Secondly, whether or not we wish it to be true, Palestinian society inside Israel is part of the State's fabric. There are those who try to differentiate it — whether socially, ideologically, or nationally - and I understand and accept this as well as the disappointment and bitterness among the younger generation of Arabs toward Israel – both as a result of the government's policy-led discrimination, and by the incitement for hatred both by the country's leadership and by the general population. Side by side, living with that disappointment, there are those who continue to give a life of shared society a chance and struggle for a better tomorrow. They don't give up so easily.

Personally I feel that these two struggles, two dichotomies --differentiation and shared society - are important to me, and I have put an end to the war between them. I hope for the day when a Palestinian citizen of Israel feels equal, a real partner, while still holding on to her or his own Palestinian national identity.

With this kind of partner, we can build a future together.

Believe me.

Thirdly, and this section didn't make it into my original speech, but the reality we face is a harsh one and we cannot afford to ignore it. On my way to London, just as I was leaving home, one of the women (at the centre) called me and told me that a body of a woman from Lydd was found in a nearby forest. A few minutes later, a journalist called me to tell me that a 39-year-old karate teacher was shot to death in the town of Tira. I told myself, "Why are you duping yourself, Samah? We haven't been able to put an end to murder in our society, and your dream of celebrating a full decade without a gender-based murder is growing ever more distant with every new body discovered."

This past year, eight Jewish women and seven Arab women have been murdered, either by gunfire, stabbing, burning, or strangulation.

Not a single headline in the Israeli media discusses gender-based violence. Not a single leader condemns these murders., unlike those that are condemned daily and automatically

when they are as a result of the occupation. (These criminals who murder women are, obviously, not "neutralized," disarmed, punished and brought to justice"

I came here tonight to tell you that a society that has lost its moral compass, and which lives peacefully with the distinction between the blood of a woman and the blood of a man, can easily lose its humanity completely when it decides that the blood of a Jew is worth more than the blood of an Arab. And like we have recently seen, the blood of a black man (whether he is an Ethiopian Jew or an asylum seeker) is inferior to that of a white man. Racism does not discriminate the ugly face of this part of Israeli society will not change without the work of similar organizations being recognized tonight, the ones that dare to place a mirror up to this mirrored face. Once to reflect its racism, once to reflect the occupation, once to reflect hatred, and once to reflect all forms of violence.

But as painful as it is, we have no other way to get rid of these stains without proposing an alternative vision: a simple, clean one. And like every mother who is in charge of making sure her home remains clean, our mission is to search out the source of the evil, the incitement, and the hatred in our own home.

That is our starting point.

And finally, recently I have been asked several times what it is that Jews who do not live in Israel can do to help. I have no doubt that you, good, caring, humans, have the best of intentions, and I truly believe that you want us to move forward in Israeli society and that it would be difficult to do so without you. What I ask of you right now is to take a big chance and dare to listen to new voices. I ask you to believe in us: the small organizations, the ones that are just getting their feet off the ground with tiny budgets and never-ending motivation. Yes, in some sense I represent a rather radical organization that challenges the establishment and my own society — often times hurting it. But do not be afraid to support us. Do not give in to your comfort zone. We desperately need radical, determined women and men dealing with gender equality, social justice, democracy and human rights. People who are not afraid of pushing society in the correct direction, such as the Dafna Fund who supported us in our first steps and the U.S. Embassy. Years upon years of mainstream, feel-good social activism that dares not challenge the establishment has pushed Israeli society to the right, all with the support of the government. The results have been, well, not so great. So to those of you who are asking yourself what to do: please do not give up on us, especially on days, like today, when we need you the most.