

**Speech by Valerie Morse (Peace Action Wellington)
at the Rally for Sheikh Jarrah on Cuba Street Wellington on 15th May, 2021**

Kia ora tatou

Whaia te iti kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe me he maunga teitei. (*Seek that which is most precious, if you should bow let it be to a lofty mountain*)

He mihi ki te Tangata Whenua hei tiaki i ngā ahi kā o Aotearoa. (*Greetings to the Tangata Whenua who guard the home fires of Aotearoa*)

I don't want to talk about facts and figures today. Other speakers, far more knowledgeable about the situation have done that. I want to talk about our emotional response to this situation.

The last few days as I continue to read of the escalating Israeli violence and preparations for war - I have, perhaps like you, been through a series of emotions.

My first feelings were of overwhelming despair. They were a feelings of déjà vu – of here we go again – another human slaughter, more children and young people – with their lives in front of them - dead in the streets.

Many of you here today have been through decades of struggle for a free Palestine. The sense of despair and helplessness can feel at times overwhelming, that things have gotten worse in Gaza and the West Bank. The open air prison that is Gaza, the bantustans under daily attack in the West Bank seem unending.

But as the days passed, my despair has subsided. It has been replaced by righteous anger and radical hope.

abated. It does not mean I don't grieve for the loss of life and potential. It hasn't and I do.

It means that I refuse to accept in my heart and my head that this is the way things will continue to be. I refuse the idea that nothing will change. I refuse to accept the idea that the tanks and the guns of the Israeli and US militaries will be victorious over true justice and real peace.

I can see a new world ready to emerge. I can see Palestine alive and breathing – everywhere. And I can see that the apartheid state of Israel is failing. The contradictions of that state are fracturing it irreparably.

In the last five years in the US, Black Lives Matter has emerged to demand racial justice. For some watching it seems that this is a a recent reckoning born of the murders of George Floyd, Trayvon Martin and others, or perhaps from the generation before of Martin Luther King Jr and the Civil Rights movement. But in reality their struggle started from the moment of enslavement 250 years ago and has never stopped. Now we see movement in that struggle – we see wins – but

those wins don't happen from months of campaigning. They happen from generations of people committed to freedom.

This is the same for Palestine. We see the resistance in the streets Sheik Jarrah, we see the resistance in Gaza. It is generations of struggle against colonisation, against terrorism, against land loss, against brutality.

We see the resistance across the globe, and for me, in part that is where my radical hope sits at the moment. Inside the US, the consensus supporting Israel at all costs is breaking down. And it is breaking down because of the organising work of people in communities. It is the joining together, of standing in solidarity and demanding change.

While at this moment, the Biden administration continues to express its unwavering support for Israel, members of his own party – women like Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar – are speaking out.

It sometimes feels as if change is impossible until it happens – and then all of a sudden it is obvious, inevitable and unstoppable.

Just like Black Lives Matter, when things for African Americans appear as if they cannot get worse, as if the cold blooded murders of young men will continue to go unacknowledged and unpunished – they radically shift and change. For Palestine that means US support for Israel will no longer be a foregone conclusion. This is not a dream or a hope. It is a plan: the plan of groups and people across the world who are unwilling to rest until Palestine is free. And it is already generations in the making.

I stand with you today, grieving for those suffering in Palestine, and honoured to be among so many who have struggled so long and hard. Let us hold fast to righteous anger and radical hope in our hearts, and let's keep on organising.

From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free!