

“How will this continue? How will it end?”

Gaza Voices: EP5 - Hala Omar & Samah Qauraea (Kawara)

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[00:00:00] **Sen:** You are listening to Gaza Voices, a place to connect to the real, lived experiences of Gazans on the ground, following the events of October 7th, 2023. In this special episode, we reflect on one year of war in Gaza, with the voices of Hala Omar and Sama Kawara, two doctors currently living and working in Gaza and the current conditions.

[00:00:37] As medical professionals, as colleagues and friends, They recorded their experiences and reflections of living through the violence and the intense pressure of the war that surrounds them. This conversation took place on August 21st, 2024 at Nasser Hospital in the city of Khan Younis in the south of Gaza.

[00:00:57] This show is a collaboration between Palestinians and allies around the world. We aim to amplify the voices of people impacted by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza at this moment in history and to underline the personal cost of survival under siege.

[00:01:17] My name is Sen Zhan. I'm one of the narrators for this podcast. You'll hear me and the voices of Palestinians and diverse allies as we bring in additional information over the course of this show to support the context of these voices from Gaza.

[00:01:41] **Hala:** My name is Hala Omar, and I am a Gazan from Rafah city, displaced now in Khan Yunus. And we are doing this record for Gaza Voices program in order to broadcast our voices as Gazan to the whole world. We are doing this episode with my friend, Samah.

[00:02:05] **Samah:** Yeah, I'm Samah Kawari. I'm a 28, uh, a doctor work in Khan Yunus and also I'm from Khan Yunus.

[00:02:14] **Hala:** Actually, we, we are colleagues. We're working in the same department in Nasser Medical Hospital, and also we were colleagues in mid school. Me and Samah knowing each other for more than 10 years, from the first year in mid school in 2013.

[00:02:38] Could we Get to know more about your personal life. Get to know more about you as a person.

[00:02:49] **Samah:** So I am the middle child for my parents. My sister and brothers are married and I am now at home with my parents. I am a family person. I love my nephews and nieces. They are all around me all the time. And I love my friends so much.

[00:03:09] So I enjoy this part of my life, being a family and a friend person. I also have so many hobbies. I like drawing and painting and singing. Yeah, just like that.

[00:03:23] **Hala:** And you love your work very much.

[00:03:26] **Samah:** Yeah, yeah, I love my work so, so much, yeah.

[00:03:31] **Hala:** Can you tell us about your life before 7th October?

[00:03:38] **Samah:** Uh, yeah. I can hardly remember my old life actually.

[00:03:43] **Hala:** Yeah,

[00:03:44] **Samah:** exactly. It's been a long time.

[00:03:47] **Hala:** Yeah, I think this is the case with most of us. We hardly remember our life before 7th October because it has been too long. It's almost a year. We are close to a year of a war. A year of non human life, unfortunately. So let us try with each other to remember how our life was.

[00:04:15] To remind each other. Let's begin with Our daily routine, our simple daily routine, how we start our day and then how we close or finish the day.

[00:04:28] **Samah:** So I remember my first thing in the morning when the alarm get, when my alarm work. So I wake up from my own bed, my cozy bed, and then I would go to my own bathroom and then go to the hospital trying to that.

[00:04:48] Kitchen, trying to prepare the morning coffee and then I start to prepare for the work. I go out and I wait for a taxi and I go to the hospital and attend my morning meeting which I was enjoying a lot and then go to rounds and see patients and the day end about 2 p. m. After that, I would go out with my friends.

[00:05:15] I have so many options for lunch. I have so many options for places to go, restaurants. Sometimes we prefer to go to a restaurant in the downtown. Sometimes we prefer to go to the beach. And like that, I go home at about 6 p. m. and sit with my family, drinking a tea with my parents and my brothers and nephews.

[00:05:40] I enjoy this part very much and I miss everything in my old life.

[00:05:56] **Hala:** Another thing, remember when we used to go to Gaza City? Yeah. When we meet together. Oh my God, I miss,

[00:06:03] **Samah:** I

[00:06:04] **Hala:** miss that, these

[00:06:05] **Samah:** times so much.

[00:06:07] **Hala:** Yes, we have friends from Gaza and from north. Yeah, every month we had like a meeting. We gathering in a cafe, in a beach, in Gaza City. Yeah. And bring the lunch from a restaurant.

[00:06:21] Balmera. And we used to get confused which restaurant we will order food from. Italiana or Balmera. This is

[00:06:32] **Samah:** a confusion. It makes us confused. And then

[00:06:35] **Hala:** after lunch, we used to walk. All the way at the beach side. Then to go downtown Gaza and the Rimal. Remember, uh, Knafah Nabulsiyah? Yeah, Knafah Nabulsiyah.

[00:06:53] What was the name? Abusul. Yeah, that's Abusul. This is the best Knafah Nabulsiyah in Gaza Strip ever.

[00:07:10] **Sen:** Abu al Sud shop was well known in Gaza, famous for its Knafeh Nabulsiyah. This version, from the West Bank city of Nablus, uses crushed noodles or semolina, a sweet cheese filling, topped with a simple rose water flavored syrup.

[00:07:29] **Samah:** We didn't deprive ourselves from anything. This was our

[00:07:33] **Hala:** life. Yes. Those were happy times.

[00:07:36] Our precious moment, actually. Yes.

[00:07:55] This journey was like a regular thing. Now it's like a miracle to have it another day. To go to Gaza City, this by itself is just a dream. No one can cross the border from the south to the north.

[00:08:14] **Samah:** These places we talk about, it's no longer exist.

[00:08:17] **Hala:** Yes, it's no longer exist. The

[00:08:19] **Samah:** owners, the owners of the It's demolished

[00:08:21] **Hala:** or destroyed.

[00:08:23] **Samah:** The owner, they are matured.

[00:08:25] **Hala:** Yeah, yeah. Even the streets, the whole streets, the neighborhood, the Riman neighborhood are completely destroyed. You can't even recognize these streets anymore. We don't know the future of that. Yes, maybe we don't get to see Gaza or visit Gaza again. We don't know that. If

[00:08:52] you can describe Gaza in a few words, how you can describe it now and how you can describe it before the war?

[00:09:05] **Samah:** Gaza now, it is like, it's like a slaughterhouse to me. It's a prison and a slaughterhouse. It's nothing less than that to me.

[00:09:17] **Hala:** Gaza before, it's like the dream. I think that Gaza was alive, and it's now like A dying body.

[00:09:31] They suck the life out. Yeah, they sucked the life outta Gaza.

[00:09:37] **Sen:** A few days into the war, Halah and Sam's beloved Rema neighborhood, described as the beating heart of Gaza was raised to the ground by intense Israeli bombardment. A once vibrant hub reduced to Ashes. But that was just the beginning. Hala and Sama lived south of Rimal, Sama in Khan Yunus, and Hala in Rafah, two cities in Gaza separated by about a 20 minute drive.

[00:10:06] Khan Yunus is located in central Gaza, while Rafah sits at the far southern end near the Egyptian border. Throughout the conflict, These areas shifted roles at times providing temporary refuge only to later become zones from which people were forced to flee Israeli bombardment. Early on as Israeli Bombardments intensified residents from Northern and central Gaza were ordered to move south with hundreds of thousands seeking shelter in Rafa.

[00:10:35] However, as Israeli forces moved further into the south, including Rafa, those who had taken refuge there had to evacuate once more. Fleeing back north. Both Hala and Sama's neighborhoods became sites of repeated devastation and forced displacement as airstrikes and ground invasions spread across the Strip.

[00:10:57] In February 2024, Sama and her family were forced to flee Khan Yunis after Israel's siege of al Nasr Hospital. By May, As Israeli forces initiated a ground invasion of Rafah, it was Hala's turn to evacuate. Although Sama and Hala were separated by different parts of Gaza, they relied on each other's homes for refuge during these uncertain times.

[00:11:22] **Hala:** We know each other for more than 10 years. And before the war, we never visit each other's homes. I never get to know your family. Maybe I saw your mother once or twice from far. And you also didn't get to visit me in Rafah. But how is everything changed now? Samah was living in Khan Yunus. Then, she forcibly displaced in Rafah, that's in February or the last days of January, yeah?

[00:12:03] Yeah, yeah, yeah. 27. Yes, when we came to my home, or, uh, for the first time, when she get to know my family, my mother and my niece and my sister and my brother. When she slept over in my house. When my mother make us a lunch, her favorite is like fried chicken.

[00:12:28] **Samah:** I sleep in your

[00:12:29] **Hala:** bed. Yes, we share the same bed, same food and everything.

[00:12:34] Same

[00:12:34] **Samah:** clothes.

[00:12:35] **Hala:** Yeah, we wear It's like she's part of my family. And the same thing happened with me when I displaced from Rafah. I remember, I remember before leaving Rafah, when the imminent invasion of Rafah, the news about there's an invasion and I was. So terrifying of leaving my home and I remember calling you so I told you about if you can afford me a tent to live in if we displaced from Rafah then you tell me something this is I will never forget in my whole life.

[00:13:18] You told me you can come, you and your mother and your sister, to

[00:13:24] **Samah:** my house.

[00:13:27] **Hala:** You can get me a room in your house and we can live together. I honestly, that moment, I feel like I'm the luckiest person on earth. In the middle of this suffering, I feel like I'm the most lucky person. Lucky person in the whole world to having such a friend, not a friend, you family, and you deserve it.

[00:13:51] This

[00:13:51] **Samah:** is because you deserve it.

[00:13:55] **Sen:** In addition to trying to stay alive themselves, their responsibility as doctors meant Sama and challah were also fighting to save the lives of the growing number of casualties flooding into the hospitals. By August 2024, at the time of this interview, Sama and Hala were working together at al Nasr Hospital in Khan Yunis.

[00:14:16] Some areas of Khan Yunis were designated as safe zones, with many, including Sama and Hala, seeking shelter in al Nasr Hospital itself. However, much of the city now lies in ruins after months of Israeli bombardment and heavy fighting. In August 2024, Hundreds of thousands more were forced to flee Khan Yunis as Israel launched a 22 day ground invasion.

[00:14:41] And, as recently as September 10th, faced a destructive missile attack nearby on Al Mawassi, a tent city and so called humanitarian zone. But for those working in the hospital, there is a responsibility to care for the dying and wounded. They cannot leave their patients behind.

[00:15:05] **Hala:** So let us talk about what, where we are now and why we are here now. Actually, we are in Nasser Medical Complex. We're recording this episode in our doctor office because it's the only place. We could find to be calm, to be just quiet a bit, not totally quiet, but just quite a bit. So what Nasser is representing to you now and what what it was representing for you before the war?

[00:15:40] I actually want to ask you this question since you are living here all the time. Actually before the war Nasser was just a place where I work. That's all. Actually now Nasir Hospital is like, it's a shelter for me. It's like home. I spent 24 hours in Nasir Hospital. I lived here. I sleep here. I wake up in the morning here.

[00:16:14] I get shower here. I prepare food here, everything in my daily life. Yes, get lunch, yes, get lunch here. I do everything here. And you also lived here.

[00:16:28] **Samah:** I remember that. Every day when I take it as a shelter here, I would think like, who could imagine I would live in a hospital? 24 hours, just like it was my home.

[00:16:42] I would never imagine, no one can ever tell like this would happen. And now, after all this time, after just more, more time, it's like the usual thing of day. To live here. This is our new life.

[00:17:06] **Hala:** You spent most of December and January here in Nasser, yes? Yes. During the military operation in Khan Yunus? You are, you were one of the doctors who lost in the hospital for the last minute. Can you tell us about that experience and about those days?

[00:17:30] **Samah:** Yeah, like everyone I know in my family and my friends, like they telling me you should get out of Nasser.

[00:17:37] It will be sieged soon and the evacuation, it's coming near Nasser day by day. You are in a risky situation, you have to go out. But all the time I feel like I'm responsible for these patients and the people here and who are just staying in Khan Yunus. And in Asr Complex Hospital, actually one of the major hospitals.

[00:18:05] South. Yeah. Like in the European, there's European hospital, the Gaza hospital, and there's Nasser hospital. Yeah. Rafa has no major, no major hospital. So it, it was working all the time, but, uh, there was shortage in doctors and equipments.

[00:18:22] **Music:** Yeah.

[00:18:22] **Samah:** And the staff. So I feel. Like responsible.

[00:18:26] **Music:** Yes.

[00:18:26] **Samah:** Yeah. I tried so many times just to leave, but actually I can't.

[00:18:31] I just, uh, every time I trying to leave, like I see the patient and sometimes family of the patients say, they say that I am the only hope and I can't leave the hospital. There's some patient on oxygen. There's some patient need dialysis. There's some patients with a risky situation like hyperkalemia and CBAs and CBAs.

[00:18:53] You cannot just like, leave. Leave them alone. Yeah.

[00:18:57] **Hala:** Even if that means risking your life. Yeah, yeah, no. And putting your life in a danger. You actually put your life in a danger when you last for the last minute. Yeah. And, uh, when they invade the hospital, they first, uh, the IDF first warn Nasser Medical Complex to evacuate.

[00:19:22] Before they invaded. We, at that time, we can't believe that they will invade Nasser Medical. Yeah. We were denying that.

[00:19:31] **Samah:** They wouldn't do it. Despite they have hit hospitals so many times. Yes. But it's like, it's Nasser complex, it's a major hospital. No, they cannot invade it. But they actually did it.

[00:19:44] **Hala:** They won't live or they won't let themselves without a hospital, without a medical care.

[00:19:51] But they did it. Yeah, they did it.

[00:19:54] **Sen:** Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis was one of the largest hospitals in Gaza and the final active hospital during the Israeli incursion into that area in February of 2024. While hundreds of wounded patients and thousands of others sheltered there, the IDF besieged the hospital and fired upon it repeatedly.

[00:20:16] They prevented ambulances and wounded and sick people from reaching the medical complex and snipers reportedly shot at people in the vicinity. By the time the army withdrew, the hospital was severely damaged and unable to function. Hospitals in Gaza have faced repeated attacks by Israeli forces. As of September 2024, only 17 of 36 hospitals in the region are partially functional.

[00:20:45] Under international humanitarian law, in the normally agreed upon rules of war, hospitals and other healthcare establishments should not be attacked, and this protection extends to the wounded and sick. The staff and medical transport. Eventually on February 27th, 2024, Sama fled with her parents to Rafa.

[00:21:10] **Hala:** And you get out through the, what's it called? A humanitarian corridor. Yeah, what they

[00:21:15] **Samah:** called a humanitarian corridor, which wasn't a humanitarian at all. So I remember the moment very well. It was just one of the, my, uh, the, one of the scariest moments. I remember they tried to beat us in a line, in the corridor, by shooting above our heads, telling us bad words and telling us to keep in a line.

[00:21:41] And they were just shooting above our heads. We have so many women and children and elderly people, like, why shooting above our heads? There's no need for that. It's just, it was a risky moment that I feel like I felt like my life was about to end.

[00:22:02] **Hala:** They just like to torture us. Yeah, yeah. I see the army,

[00:22:05] **Samah:** I see the weapons, I see the I remember you told me

[00:22:10] **Hala:** that the soldiers enjoying torturing the people.

[00:22:13] Yeah, yeah. They

[00:22:14] **Samah:** were telling jokes actually. Sometimes they were telling jokes about us. And telling us, this is what your government have made, this is what your government want you to face, and Hamas, and like that.

[00:22:30] **Hala:** I think this is a very difficult situation you faced.

[00:22:35] **Samah:** I actually, it was a very hard moment.

[00:22:44] After that, in this corridor, humanitarian, they have arrested so many nurses and doctors in this humanitarian corridor. Like, why they would do that? Why would you take a nurse who actually spent all his time in just a hospital? And there is some doctors that we don't have any news about until now, since January, since February, and we don't know anything about them.

[00:23:12] Some of our colleagues like sent free recently.

[00:23:27] **Sen:** Health care workers have been targets in the war in Gaza. The Gaza Health Ministry stated that Israeli forces have detained at least 310 Palestinian health care workers since October 7th without charge. Meanwhile, Healthcare Workers Watch Palestine has documented 259 detentions and 31 cases of torture and abuse by Israeli authorities.

[00:23:53] This was supported by a Human Rights Watch report from August 2024. which documented testimonies of doctors, nurses, and paramedics who described torture, rape, and abuse in Israeli jails. In May, it was reported that Dr. Adnan Al Bursh, the head of orthopedics at Gaza's Al Shifa Hospital, died in an Israeli jail.

[00:24:18] After more than four months of detention, groups advocating for Palestinian prisoners say he died as a result of torture. In July, Dr. Iyad Rantisi, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital's maternity department, also died under torture in Israeli custody. A September 2024 report released by the Palestinian Health Ministry stated that Israeli forces have killed a total of 998 health workers in this latest onslaught.

[00:24:51] That equates to three health care workers killed every day, with one in every 20 health care workers now dead.

[00:25:14] But the attack on the health care system goes beyond the confines of hospital walls to the To the borders of Gaza itself, where life saving medical aid has been denied entry by Israel. On May 1st, Doctors Without Borders stated that items, including oxygen tanks, generators, and refrigerators, continued to be blocked.

[00:25:36] In early September 2024, several UN missions to deliver polio vaccines for children in Gaza were blocked. Within this environment, Hala and Sama's daily work in the hospital took on entirely new challenges.

[00:25:53] **Hala:** So what are the problems the medical field is facing now and has been facing during the war in general?

[00:26:03] And what is your special experience, your personal experience as a doctor?

[00:26:09] **Samah:** So I remember the beginning of the war that there was a shrinkage in transportation. I used to go back and forth on foot about one hour walking. Actually, it was a risky thing to do. It was very risky. So, in my hospital, at the beginning of the war, there was a scarcity and shrinkage in doctors.

[00:26:38] So many were displaced. So many flee out. Some were dead and some were captured.

[00:26:46] **Hala:** And some doctors choose to work in the nearest hospitals. Yeah. Yeah, like me. Yeah, in the nearest hospital to the house. Yes, I am from Rafah and before the war I used to work in Nasr, Khan Yunis. So I can't, in that time, I can't get every day from Rafah to Khan Yunis.

[00:27:07] It's a very long and risky road and transportation are not affordable. So I choose to work in the hospital nearby my house, which is called Al Emarati Hospital. And so many doctors do the same, but you, I used to call you the courageous doctor because you keep doing what you do every day. I felt responsibility because I

[00:27:36] **Samah:** was, I'm from Khan Yunus.

[00:27:40] And Yunus, so Who would go to the hospital? Who would see the patients of Khan Yunus or the patient of this area? New area if I wouldn't do that. Yeah, like it's a responsibility.

[00:27:56] **Sen:** Despite feeling the responsibility, Hala and Sama and many other doctors were forced to move from hospital to hospital as Israel's airstrikes damaged medical facilities and And continued incursions, forced evacuations.

[00:28:12] In late May, 2024. Al Emarati Hospital, the last major hospital in Rafah, as well as several other clinics, were forced out of service during Israel's assault on the southern city, leaving only two small field hospitals in the al Mawassi area, inadequate to deal with the mass casualties and suffering among Gazans, much less the normal medical needs of more than 1 million people fleeing from the offensive.

[00:28:42] **Samah:** Also, there's so many issues since the beginning of the war. It's the medication, the medicines. There was a shortage in the medicine. And since the beginning of the war and still happening like any, you don't have options. You don't, you only have one option and you cannot.

[00:29:02] **Hala:** You have to practice medicine in these very limited resources.

[00:29:06] Yeah. And these very bad and hard conditions. And these very depressed situation. Like you can't. You, a doctor, you're just not a doctor. You're a human, after all, and you have a family, and you have your issues, and you have your Every one of us, every one of us have his own issues. Your own fears, your own depression, your own Sometimes you are very depressed even to go to work.

[00:29:27] And burned out, yeah. Yes, and burned out to see any, to work, to see any patients.

[00:29:34] **Samah:** There is something here. That's the environment of hospital we used to live before the war. It's not like now. It's this environment we live now is not a usual, or it's not a usual picture of hospital. Yes. So, uh, in the beginning of the war, I remember that the hospital was crowded.

[00:29:58] By patients that is, that the load of patients was double or inbuilt. Yeah. We, we run out of beds, we run out of oxygen sources. Patients

[00:30:10] **Hala:** were, were corridors. Yeah.

[00:30:11] **Samah:** Yeah. Like you can imagine that you, uh, a patient die just because a shortage. Oxygen source. This is the, this is the simplest, uh, uh, right to a human, a patient.

[00:30:24] We are

[00:30:24] **Hala:** not talking about a mechanical ventilation or invasive ventilation. No, we are not. Just oxygen therapy.

[00:30:29] **Samah:** We are talking about a ward bed. Yeah, a regular ward. An oxygen therapy, like it's, it's, it's like ABC in medicine in hospitals.

[00:30:44] **Sen:** With basic equipment in short supply, you know. And hospitals overwhelmed by trauma patients, those with other medical needs, such as pregnant women or individuals with chronic conditions, often struggle to receive the care they need.

[00:30:59] Chronic diseases have gone untreated, and many women have been forced to give birth without any medical assistance, with some reportedly forced to undergo C sections without anesthesia. The devastation and trauma of this war, and the wars preceding it, has also left the mental health of the population in tatters.

[00:31:21] But Gaza's medical community has little capacity to help navigate the mass trauma and provide psychological support to those in need. Healthcare professionals on the front lines of war are far from exempt from the mental strain of the conflict as they bear witness to daily death and destruction under increasingly desperate circumstances with little time to sleep and care for themselves.

[00:31:47] The mass displacement from Overcrowding and destruction of critical water and sanitation infrastructure, which frames Gaza's current environment, creates the perfect storm for outbreaks of infectious diseases in the large number of people whose immune systems have been weakened by hunger and stress.

[00:32:08] **Samah:** We also faced a problem of displaced people. These people who were displaced from their areas. By the army, uh, their own, uh, their, uh, new shelter was the hospital because of there is no other place prepared with water or electricity. There was no camps prepared or any area prepared with, uh, water or, uh, or toilets, for example, or bathrooms, the hospital, and safety.

[00:32:39] Yeah. There is no safe place. The hospital is the only safe place and the only place who offer water for them. And there's this spring, a new problem. There's nothing called infection control right now. We cannot practice infection control. There's scarcity in disinfectant and sterility.

[00:33:02] **Hala:** Even alcohol gel.

[00:33:03] Alcohol gel? You have alcohol gel in every

[00:33:05] **Samah:** Where? In every corner.

[00:33:07] **Hala:** In every bed. There is no alcohol gel. So I saw, by myself, I saw many patients died from infections. Yeah. Especially the Hepatitis B, Hepatitis A virus.

[00:33:22] **Sen:** Hepatitis A is a liver infection, which is spread through consuming contaminated food and water.

[00:33:28] Or through direct contact with an infected individual. Since the onset of the conflict, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, has reported 40, 000 cases of the disease. A stark increase compared to just 85 cases reported during the same period before the conflict began.

[00:33:50] **Hala:** For me, I work in an nephrology a lot of interstitial patients are dying from infection in their axes because of sterility, sterility, yes, the sterility and their hygiene and bad hygiene in hospitals and even in Yes.

[00:34:09] And epidemics for new organisms and the new viruses. No one know what before. No, it's

[00:34:15] **Samah:** caring about just like analyzing these new viruses or, uh, mutations and viruses. Yes. We face new skin, skin infections and rashes. We like, what's this? We didn't see it before. Face.

[00:34:30] **Hala:** Yes. We didn't see it before. Just like

[00:34:32] **Samah:** Ingo, we faced, we faced right now and few months, a few months ago.

[00:34:37] Like, every person in Gaza have impetigo.

[00:34:42] **Hala:** And it's not a regular impetigo, we used to see it as before.

[00:34:45] **Samah:** Like, it's spraining all over. We used to see it in the face. Yes. Right now, it's all over the body.

[00:34:54] **Sen:** According to the World Health Organization, more than 150, 000 people in Gaza have contracted skin diseases since the start of Israel's war on Gaza.

[00:35:05] This includes reports of over 95, 000 cases of scabies and lice since the start of the war, more than 9, 000 cases of chickenpox, 60, 000 cases of skin rashes, and 10, 000 cases of impetigo, a highly contagious infection of the skin affecting mostly infants and children. In addition to these diseases, others have soared as well, including diarrhea, upper respiratory tract infections, and meningitis.

[00:35:37] Serious and preventable diseases have surfaced, such as polio, leading in some cases to deadly paralysis. The resurgence of these previously vanquished diseases underlines the importance of vaccination missions in Gaza, which have been difficult to carry out due to Israeli blockages. In addition, with the shortages of war, patients with long term conditions or diseases like cancer have very limited options for treatment, if any at all.

[00:36:09] **Samah:** We used to have the Turkish hospital for oncology which were demolished in the beginning of the war and the oncology patient have to face this problem. They were displaced so many times from one hospital to another. We have limited, very limited chemotherapy. Yeah. Yeah. This is the only thing we have.

[00:36:32] And Hala, I want to say something about the huge amount of new oncology patients.

[00:36:38] **Hala:** Yes, the new cancer patients. Yeah. A lot of lung

[00:36:43] **Samah:** masses that we cannot, we don't have a pathology lab for diagnosis. Don't have biopsy, yeah. Yes, it's a very easy Yes, this is a,

[00:36:58] **Hala:** this

[00:36:59] **Samah:** is a

[00:37:00] **Hala:** Disastrous, yes. The number, the huge number of oncology patients, the old and the newly discovered oncology patients.

[00:37:08] With no treatment, with no treatment. The whole world is letting them facing death. Just waiting for their death. Like they don't forget the, the closing problem. It's a slow death and it's very torturing for them and for their family. It's very difficult. For people of Gaza, to die in such a way. I feel sometimes that we are dying by every way.

[00:37:41] Just by bombing, by diseases. Let's call it a prison. No. It's

[00:37:47] **Samah:** worse than prison. Like, you are sieged, but you don't have the right of health. You don't have the right of safe life. You are threatened all the time. This is not a human life.

[00:38:06] **Sen:** With many doctors in Gaza displaced, killed, or arrested, and medical supplies at an all time low, the Strip's healthcare system reached a breaking point months ago. Al Nasr Hospital has been overwhelmed, lacking beds, hygiene equipment, sheeting, and scrubs. Many patients are treated on the ground without access to disinfectants.

[00:38:32] Ventilation systems are off due to a shortage of electricity and fuel. Amid this chaos, preventable deaths continue to rise steadily.

[00:38:45] **Hala:** So let us talk about another aspect of this brutal war against Palestinians, which is the famine in the north and the scarcity of food in the south. How was your experience in that phase?

[00:39:02] **Samah:** So since the beginning of the war, Rafah crossing were closed. The only source for food. Were closed and there were the, the, the available amounts of foods. Eating resources were just keep, uh, uh, declining with the progressing of the war. So at the end, the, this moment, everyone scared happened. There was no, there was no fresh food in the, in the market.

[00:39:32] There were no food, uh, except the, the eggs, the cans. Food. Yeah. Yeah. There, there was several months is in the war, like about six months is the only food the Gaza we can have is canned food situation. Like I am, as a doctor, I faced so many cases with malnutrition, their health, yeah. And children and in, in adults, this is very weird in adults.

[00:40:00] To have like the system, the multi organ failure and multi organ shutdown just because of malnutrition and hypoalbuminemia and hyperpertinemia.

[00:40:11] **Hala:** Also the water. We have a water supply that comes from Israel. They cut it off at the beginning of the war. I remember the Israeli Defense Minister called us animals, called us savages, and we should cut off water, electricity, and we treated like animals.

[00:40:40] **Music:** Yeah.

[00:40:41] **Samah:** And you have to use, like, the minimum amount of water in doing everything. This is a huge issue we live. And, like, the water for drinking, like, wow, it's very hard to get.

[00:40:55] **Sen:** Two days into the war, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Galant said Israel was, quote, fighting human animals. As he announced a complete siege on Gaza, this kind of rhetoric later became central to South Africa's case accusing Israel of genocide at the UN World Court.

[00:41:16] With food, water, and fuel supply cut off, hospitals were filled with patients suffering from acute malnutrition, particularly among children. A September 2024 report by UNICEF said 50,000 children are in need of immediate treatment for acute malnutrition, requiring medical professionals and nutrition workers.

[00:41:40] A similar report from UNICEF in September 2022 reported just over 300 children in a similar condition of malnutrition. A figure that was then, and still is high, when compared with standards in Western Europe and the United States. In August 2024, a UN independent investigator on the right to food accused Israel of carrying out a starvation campaign against Palestinians.

[00:42:09] Additionally, Israel's relentless bombardments destroyed around 700 water wells that 90 percent of the population depended on.

[00:42:33] For us, observing the war from the outside, it's easy for these numbers to turn into sterile statistics. But each one of them has a person behind it, with family, friends, and a life before the war. Hala and Sama share some of the personal toll this war has had on them.

[00:43:01] **Hala:** So, I think this is a difficult question, and you feel free if you don't want to answer it. But if, did you lose anyone in this war? Any dear person?

[00:43:16] **Samah:** So, I, I lost my best friend. At the beginning of the war, just, it's just very hard. I knew, I knew to receive.

[00:43:27] **Hala:** Our colleague Inas.

[00:43:28] **Samah:** Yeah, our colleague Inas. I used to work with her for about one and a half year in the ER, like all the time.

[00:43:38] Everyone knows me and her, Samaha and Inas, Samaha and Inas. Together. Yeah. And one day I just felt like, They received a face was pregnant. Yeah. Yeah, she was pregnant in her six, six months. And like I hear that she died and her son, who is about three years old, Hassan, she were hugging him when they both get killed by uh, the IDF.

[00:44:09] and lost all her family in law with her, died. And her husband Ali become a paraplegic patient. So it's a very hard thing to receive and to live with. And it's not fair, it's a not fair life when Ines is dead. I think it's not, it's not fair.

[00:44:30] **Hala:** It's not for our colleague, yes, Ali. And Ali, yeah. Who lost all of his family and severely injured and become paraplegic.

[00:44:38] **Samah:** He is an

[00:44:39] **Hala:** orthopedic doctor. It's very sad.

[00:44:55] So, what about our life now? What about our life now? I, I think our life now is, can't be called alive. It's like

[00:45:07] **Samah:** a ghost. It's not alive. It's like

[00:45:09] **Hala:** A nightmare.

[00:45:10] **Samah:** Yeah, a nightmare. It's all about surviving. You feel like you are threatened all the time.

[00:45:16] **Hala:** I remember, uh, Sirius, I watched before the war, it's, it's called Walking Dead.

[00:45:23] **Music:** Yeah. It's

[00:45:23] **Hala:** about apocalypse, you know, yeah. End of the world. And it's about disease, attacking people, making them die, then arise again as a monster and feeding on a human flesh. Then it's all about, you know, Surviving. How people survive by their own. There's no governments, there is no societies, there is no organization.

[00:45:52] It's all about their own. I feel like it's hit me a lot. I feel like we are in our version of walking dead. You can't think about anything else except of surviving another day.

[00:46:10] **Samah:** I

[00:46:10] **Hala:** agree

[00:46:10] **Samah:** with you a lot. I feel like our life now, we, it's very, if you ask any Gazanian, Gazans, they will tell you they are like in some series and you just live in it and sometimes you think every moment in the series you will feel someday.

[00:46:31] Yeah. Every hard time your neighbor face or someone you know face, It may come to you and is very easy to come to you. And this is very terrifying.

[00:46:46] **Hala:** So how it feels now after 10 or 11 months of work?

[00:46:53] **Samah:** It's a very hard feeling. Like everything have changed. This is now our new life. There is no future, no prospect in our new life. It's like a horrifying life. So you have no control about anything in your life. You live moment by moment. Everything you can just lose in just one second.

[00:47:22] You see it in front of your eyes every day. Your dreams and every plan you have made in your old life, this is not happening now. Your dreams like put in some shelf or something, it's in the past. And now you have the chance. No vision for the future. Every moment you live now, it's unknown. We live in the unknown.

[00:47:49] **Hala:** Um, I think the most terrifying thing in the world is the unknown. We don't know how this will end. will continue and at the same time we don't know how this could finish and who could finish it and how it could be finished. Yes. Like we lost

[00:48:09] **Samah:** hope in

[00:48:11] **Hala:** everyone,

[00:48:11] **Samah:** in

[00:48:13] **Hala:** everyone

[00:48:14] **Samah:** who can solve this problem.

[00:48:16] **Hala:** Yeah, we can solve this

[00:48:18] **Samah:** problem.

[00:48:18] Yeah, we lost hope. We just want to live safely and we want the right to live and we can't get this right. And there's something weird happening here. Like the Gazan people have like this weird coping mechanism. People just continue here their life with minimal things they can have. They continue to work.

[00:48:44] They continue to live and have families and married and having children. And like, they just like this situation, this insane situation we face, this is the only coping mechanism they have. They just want to continue to, uh, have a normal life despite everything they face. This is not a normal situation.

[00:49:08] **Hala:** Maybe some people can call it resistance or resilience. Yeah, some people call it resistance. Or some people can call it coping mechanism. I see it like the survival instinct. Any situation you put a human being in, All he would think about is how to survive one day more.

[00:49:37] **Sen:** Sama and Hala are still in Gaza, working in Khan Yunis. While thousands were able to flee, the majority of those in the strip do not have the means to escape. As of July 2024, The UN estimates that about 2.1 million people remain in the Gaza Strip. One year into the war, what life will bring for them remains uncertain.

[00:50:07] **Hala:** Did you try to leave Gaza in the war?

[00:50:11] **Samah:** Leaving Gaza is actually a very hard decision and it needs a lot of thinking. To me, it needs a lot of thinking. Thinking and planning and like, it's not a very easy, not in decision or even if you made the decision, it's not easy to take. What about you? I mean, it's a

[00:50:32] **Hala:** long story.

[00:50:34] Actually, I tried. I tried me and my family, but it's a very difficult and complicated process. The corrodation fees by the Egyptian intelligence, me and my family, it will cost a fortune. And of course, I wouldn't take it out. by myself and leaving my family in the war. For me, this is something I wouldn't do.

[00:50:56] You feel like you're in a prison. Yeah. You're like, yes, you're trapped. You can't leave. You can't, you can't stay. You can't live. You can't go out and do anything. Yes.

[00:51:06] **Samah:** You know, it's a fortune. You need a fortune to live. Yes.

[00:51:12] **Hala:** Do you feel like you are separated from the whole world? Isolated?

[00:51:18] **Samah:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:51:19] **Hala:** Do you keep up what's happening in the outside world?

[00:51:23] What, like, the big events happening in the world now? What is it called? The American elections? The Olympics? The what? Et cetera.

[00:51:32] **Samah:** No, actually, I feel so isolated. And every Gazan feels so isolated. We, like, have more things occupying our minds. What occupies your mind? Like, this surviving mood, and this is, there is the water, the food, the running out, the displacement places.

[00:51:52] Bombing happening here, bombing happening there. Like, where's the IDF now, where's the army now? This is occupying my mind. I don't know a lot about the outside

[00:52:06] **Hala:** world. I actually stopped a very long time ago, especially since the moment I left Rafah, in the middle of May. I stopped keeping up with what's happening in the world.

[00:52:21] Because I feel the world issues, the world problems, the world events, it's not for me. It's for the other people, for the other countries. Like what we know, when you see

[00:52:32] **Samah:** the Olympics. It's a very weird thing you feel. Like, the word is just keeping going up, keeping going, and despite this, it's not our, it's not our problem, Yan.

[00:52:44] I can't just call it our problem. I think it's a human, it's a human problem. It's not normal to watch such brutal thing happening to other, to other human being, and just watch it. Just watching like this, this, and sometimes you just, you don't watch, you continue your life and do Olympics, do elections, do whatever

[00:53:05] **Hala:** you want in your life.

[00:53:06] And you just, and our life has stopped a long time ago. You feel like the whole, the whole world should have stopped with us. Stopped, like, like our life has stopped. Why does the world continue his life? Like nothing happening here. Like it. As

[00:53:28] **Samah:** I said, I feel the world treating us like we are other kind. We are not a human like them.

[00:53:34] I won't forgive myself if I know. That a human live like the life I live today and a human face, uh, the bombing and the killing and the shooting we face every day. Uh, and I am just seeing or, or just make my head, uh, to look at, uh, turn my head to other side. Uh, no, no, I wouldn't forgive myself. And I wouldn't respect myself either.

[00:54:09] **Hala:** So at the end, I just want to ask you if you have anything to say. If you have a message you want to deliver to the whole world.

[00:54:25] **Samah:** I think the message is clear and I think that we want the world not to turn their head off us. And they should keep up with us. They should do their best, the best they can do, just to end this crisis we live every day.

[00:54:50] They shouldn't stop thinking about happening with us and they shouldn't continue their life like there's nothing happening. Because again, this is not our own, this is not our problem. This is a human crisis. No one or no human being should continue their life while they know that there is another human being suffering all this thing like dying because the scarcity of oxygen in hospital or the scarcity on food in 2024 like this is the the century of human rights and we talk about it every day in every interview everyone talking about the human rights And this is happening, and you continue your life.

[00:55:46] **Hala:** For me, I want to say, don't forget us. Our lives matter. Our lives matter as any other life on this planet. We are equals. We are all humans. And every little life, The youngest children here in Gaza is worth enough to do all what you can, to do the impossible, just to stop this war and to save his life.

[00:56:39] **Sen:** Sama has launched a GoFundMe campaign to help her and her elderly parents leave Gaza. As winter job. They are currently living in a tent, and Sama is deeply concerned about their health and safety. With the harsh weather conditions on the horizon, the lack of adequate shelter and medical care is becoming increasingly dire.

[00:57:03] The funds are intended to allow them to reach Egypt. To support Sama's GoFundMe, go to the link in the show notes of this episode.

[00:57:16] On September 16th, Gaza's Health Ministry published a 649 page document identifying 41,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza. These include the names of 34,344 Palestinians killed by Israeli attacks. In the strip of those identified are 169 babies born after October 7th, and. More than 100 pages are filled with the names of victims under 10 years old.

[00:57:51] The remaining 7, 613 people included in this death toll are Palestinians whose bodies were received by hospitals and morgues, but whose identities have not yet been confirmed. But the unofficial death toll is expected to far exceed these numbers. As we heard from Hala and Sama, the attack on Gaza's healthcare system meant a surge of easily preventable deaths, compounded by the destruction of food and water infrastructure, and with thousands still trapped under rubble.

[00:58:24] A July 2024 study published in The Lancet suggests that the death toll could be closer to well over 186, 000.

[00:58:37] If this figure is shocking to you, please consider what you can do to encourage your community to support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

[00:58:55] Throughout the rest of this year, Gaza Voices will bring forward individual interviews like this one to bring human perspective to the war in Gaza. If this episode touched you in some way, we ask that you pass it along to others you know who are looking for new context and more information about what's happening in Gaza.

[00:59:19] Follow us on Instagram and YouTube at Gaza Voices 24. Our website is [www. gaza voices. com](http://www.gaza-voices.com). for listening to these Gaza

[00:59:34] Voices.