



## FOR PALESTINIANS, EVERYTHING STARTS AND ENDS IN AL QUDS

**Amal Jadou**



Born in a refugee camp near Bethlehem, Ambassador Amal Jadou was active within Fatah's youth movement. She earned a bachelor's degree from Bethlehem University in 1995 and a master's degree from Birzeit University in 2000. Ambassador Jadou pursued a PhD at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, which she completed in 2009, and a graduate fellowship in The Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School. She began working for the government in March 2005 as foreign policy adviser to the prime minister. Currently, Ambassador Jadou is assistant minister on European Affairs at the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Prior to this position, she served as the deputy chief of mission in Washington, DC.

**ORSAM: Your Excellency, firstly, we are honored to host you at ORSAM and pleased to have an interview with you. Considering the current Israeli initiatives and the current settlement policy, I would like to hear the Palestinian perspective on the importance of Al Quds in this prolonged Palestinian-Israeli conflict.**

**Amal Jadou:** For Palestinians, everything starts and ends in Al Quds. I can say, Jerusalem is the spiritual, political, social, cultural and economic capital. It is the crux of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Politically speaking, East Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Palestine within the framework of the globally accepted two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. Palestinian position is very clear and in line with international law. However, Israel does not respect international law and aims to undermine its status systematically.

**How about the current Israeli policies and current initiatives?**

Currently, what is happening in Jerusalem and around the holy city, especially in the vicinity of Al-Haram al-Sharif (Al-Aqsa Mosque) is extremely worrying. Additionally, for the past two years, Israel

has been involved in continuous attempts to change the status quo that has been in existence from the times of the Ottoman Empire. Israel adopts a systematic and organized policy towards changing the internationally accepted status quo. Every morning, Israel closes the gates to the city before Muslim worshippers from 7:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. and keeps only Moroccan Gate open to allow extremist Jewish worshippers and settlers who enter the vicinity of the Mosque to chant, desecrate and incite against the mosque. These people come for a reason and they are trying to break the status-quo that existed. They are deliberately trying to create a new right for the Jewish community in the mosque itself. I also know that there are some groups in Israel who are calling for demolishing the mosque and building a synagogue in its place. On certain occasions, Israeli soldiers have entered the very mosque itself and attacked Palestinian worshippers. This is a flagrant violation of international law.

**Israel's parliament also passed a controversial law legalizing almost 4,000 settler homes built on privately-owned Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank in February. How do**

**you evaluate the current policy of settlements and settlers' violence against the local population?**

There are already more than 600,000 settlers in about 140 settlements built since Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The settlements are considered illegal under international law. From our perspectives, Israel is adopting a policy of colonialism that aims to build more settlements to prevent any future Palestinian State from emerging. Now, Israel continues with its alarming policy of settlements. This policy really undermines the two-state solution because it breaks the contiguity of the territory of 1967 borders. Just have a look at the map of the West Bank. Settlements leave Palestinians living in small Bantustans. Settlers are famous for being violent as they attack Palestinian villages, uproot trees and attack holy places. They are crazy. Now Israel is trying to pass a new bill in the Knesset in its second reading to ban the "Azan" call for prayer. This is another violation of the freedom to worship.

**The issue of new settlements, as you pointed out, breaks the contiguity of the land that the Palestinians claim for their**

**state. Therefore, it is a real threat for the land, which has also been granted by international consensus. As the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, what kind of initiatives are you carrying out to prevent these dangerous settlements at international level? And, have you been able to maintain a kind of international support so far?**

We have been working hard at the international arena and at the UN to pass resolutions to ban settlements. We had a success with passing UNSCR 2334 that emphasized the illegality of settlements and which differentiates between the occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel. Now we are working hard to find a mechanism for implementation. We also work closely with regional organizations like the EU to label settlement products and to hopefully ban them from entering European markets. We have been raising the issue of doing business in settlements with all countries raising awareness on the negative legal implications of dealing with settlement enterprise. Palestine is trying to besiege the settlement initiatives both politically and economically.

**Moving onto the current regional politics. Although**

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**the Middle East has never been a stable region in the last decades, since the so-called Arab Spring, regional countries have entered a new phases of regional and internal crisis. How do you evaluate the current situation in the Middle East?**

Our region is full of conflicts right now. We have conflicts in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya and other places. Our hearts go to the people of Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and all the people who are suffering in our region. In the midst of all of this remains the Palestinian issue. We believe that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict stays at the heart of all conflicts in the region. We do not fool ourselves and think that by resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict we will resolve all conflicts, however, we strongly believe

that resolving our conflict can contribute tremendously to the stability of the region and strip terrorists from reasoning to enlist young people.

**Therefore, there are ongoing peace initiatives like the Arab Peace Initiative. There was also another summit last month. How do you see these regional initiatives?**

We do believe in the Arab Peace Initiative. It basically calls for Israel to end its occupation of Arab territory in return for peace with the Arab world. Therefore, ending the occupation of Arab territories will be met by recognition and normalized relations with the Arab world and the Muslim world. The sequence of implementation is essential. Israel needs to end its occupation of

Arab and Palestinian Territory and a Palestinian state is established, then the Arab and Muslim worlds can recognize Israel and normalize their relations with it.

**However, it is also an obvious fact that all initiatives so far failed unfortunately. There was also Israeli – Palestinian Declaration of Principles in 1993. It was designed to set the stage for the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which might pave the way for peace in the region. What do you think about these initiatives? Do you see any possibility to refer back to this declaration?**

Only a good will for peace on both sides, especially on the Israeli side and leadership for peace can achieve the outcome of a two state solution based on the 1967 borders living side by side in peace and security. This current Israeli government that also include settlers as ministers is not interested in peace, but rather in building more settlements and creating new realities on the ground that undermine the two state solution.

**Apart from the regional countries, how do you see the role of the European countries? I think, you regularly meet with your**

**European partners in different occasions. Based on your personal experience, how much do you think that they are sincere in their dedication to a just solution in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? And what are your expectations from European countries for the solution of Palestinian-Israeli issue?**

Against conventional wisdom, the EU had a major role in architecting international consensus with regard to the Palestinian problem. It recognized the PLO as the sole representative to the Palestinian people and started a serious political dialogue with us while the US and Israel were against initiating any kind of contact with us. Moreover, it has been a key defender of the two-state solution which is the corner stone of any future peace agreement. Since the signing of the Oslo Agreements, the EU became the largest donor for consecutive the Palestinian governments. EU donations are largely directed towards state building efforts which clearly indicate European sincere and unwavering commitment to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Now, what we need from the EU and its member states is to apply its own laws and regulations in all its dealings with Israel. We highly appreciate the “Guidelines on the eligibi-

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lity of Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 for grants, prizes and financial instruments funded by the EU from 2014 onwards” of 2013 and the “Interpretative Notice on indication of origin of goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967” of 2015, but what is needed now is not only ensuring full implementation of such guidelines, but rather banning settlement products from entering EU markets. The EU needs to give a clear message to Israel that it cannot benefit from its prolonged breach of international law and continuous violation of international law. Moreover, the time has come for European countries to recognize the State of Palestine as it may be the last chance for saving the two-state solution.

**I am also sure that you have closely followed the last US elections and President Trump’s statements on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. During his campaign, he abandoned the bedrock principle that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will come via two states for two peoples. Then, he tempered his position a little bit in February and did not rule out a two-state solution but**

**implied his administration had no preference. How do you evaluate the role of the US in general and the Obama administration in this conflict? And what kind of challenges and opportunities does Trump Administration present from the perspective of Palestine?**

The role of the new administration is evolving. We are working hard to explain the Palestinian positions and narrative. Mr. Trump is committed to striking a deal and we are committed to the two-state solution based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the Capital of Palestine.

**From your perspective, what is the importance of Turkey for pushing a just resolution of this conflict? What kind of supports does the state of Palestine have from Turkey? You had some talks in Turkey with your partners here and what kind of further expectations do you have from Turkey?**

Turkey is one of the main players in our region. We definitely count on Turkey’s political and moral support for Palestine and for finding a peaceful solution in our area. Turkey supports us at the international arena. It advocates

for Palestinian rights. It raises awareness of the Palestinian issue. On top of that it supports very important projects in Occupied Palestine in various sectors. The positions adopted by its leadership regarding ending occupation and the status of Jerusalem are highly regarded by the Palestinian people.

**Your Excellency, I would like to thank you again for accepting this interview request. I believe these kinds of occasions add value to the relations between Turkey and Palestine. I am honored to host you at ORSAM. Before finalizing our interview, do you have any point that you want to touch upon?**

Indeed, the parameters of a comprehensive and lasting solution are very clear and they have already been declared by international organizations many times. The solution is an independent, sovereign and contiguous Palestine on 1967 borders with East Al-Quds as its capital. It is the only way for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace that can ensure the security of both sides. However, the existing power gap between Israel and Palestine together with the lack of determined international pressure on Israel when it does not recognize international law are the main obstacles.

**Thank you again and we wish you success in your efforts.**

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