

## Dr. Ruchama Marton, Knesset Conference, 50 Years of Occupation

PHRI's medical work in the occupied territories is first a subversive statement against the governmental mantra that there is no political partner. We have a partner.

**15.02.2017**

Physicians for Human Rights – Israel was invited along with representative of other human rights organizations, to address the conference “Not in a democracy: 50 years of occupation.” The conference organized by MK Ayman Odeh, MK Dov Khenin, MK Ksenia Svetlova and MK Michal Rozin.

**Address by Dr. Ruhama Marton, founder and president of Physicians for Human Rights – Israel**

Everything that was legal was immoral and everything that was moral was illegal, wrote Hannah Arendt in a different period. Her words still resonate today as an accurate description of the Israeli establishment and the occupation.

**It is a situation where one has to choose between morality and law.**

Physicians for Human Rights – Israel has chosen the side of morality.

The organization was the first to introduce the concept of human rights into the Israeli public sphere when it was founded 30 years ago.

Choosing morality in Israel back then, in 1988, meant being a resistance organization. This still holds true today: An organization that does not want to be part of the mainstream, or as I prefer to call it, the **extreme center**. It is not an easy choice and it comes at a high price.

The **extreme center** views human rights organizations as traitors, as violators of social conventions.

PHRI's campaign against torture in the 1990s went against the entire establishment: the legal system, the various security agencies, and even the Israel Medical Association (IMA). The chairman of the IMA at the time said of me: That woman who heads Physicians for Human Rights – Israel is anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic. That statement drew no objection from the thousands of physician members of the IMA. Because indeed, here in Israel, there is a clear border line between social conventions and morals.

PHRI's physicians go out every Saturday to the occupied West Bank, to villages, refugee camps and cities, to hold medical days as part of our mobile clinic. We do not ask the army for permission. We do not want their permission, which also includes the escort of armed people in uniform.

**PHRI's medical work in the occupied Palestinian territories is first of all a subversive statement against the governmental mantra that there is no political partner. We have a partner.** Through the very act of going into the occupied Palestinian territories, we are making a statement that we are in solidarity with the occupied people, and against the occupation. Only after that statement comes our medical work in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In PHRI's efforts of defending hunger striking Palestinian prisoners, we stand in solidarity with those prisoners. Though they are labeled security prisoners, we view them as political prisoners. Our morals require us to fight against the evil that human beings inflict on others, a fight no less important **than** the fight against germs and

viruses. Administrative detention is the evil we fight against, alongside and for the prisoners. Administrative detention is the reason for their hunger strikes. For 50 years we, Jewish Israelis, have viewed our lives as worthy of investment and defense, a view that has not been extended to others, whose lives have been abandoned.

There is a lot of talk about the occupation and people give it different definitions, but as a physician I know, like the physician in “The Plague” by Albert Camus: Whatever you call the disease, people are dying from it and it is my job to save them. I also know that racism flourishes precisely when its existence is being denied, and therefore it is important to be precise and call things out for what they are.

I am here to say that occupation and apartheid are destined to fall, no matter how much they are hidden by definitions and unjust agreements – human beings will always seek freedom. We are here to mark the urge to strive for recognition. **We are here to state that we do not possess “the right” to abandon others’ lives. Therefore, we do not want to collaborate with the laws of the occupation and apartheid. We operate by virtue of our morals, even when they are at odds with the law.**