

Language about Gaza: Ten Urgent Suggestions

When talking about mass violence, language matters. Word choices can be a matter of life and death. The language of war is frequently dehumanizing and euphemistic. This can make it easier to kill. We must use clear, accurate, honest language, describing flesh and bone impacts as directly as possible. We must use language foregrounding the humanity of all those harmed. We must resist simplistic, binary *us vs. them*, *good vs. evil* narratives circulated by governments and media outlets that humanize some while dehumanizing others.

The following are suggestions for writing and talking about violence in Gaza and Israel/Palestine. Find more suggestions at www.wordsaboutwar.org.

- 1. Don't repeat talk of *barbarism, savagery, or animals*.** It's racist and Islamophobic.
- 2. Killed, murdered, or dead?** Many have described Palestinians as *dead* while Israelis are *killed, murdered, or massacred* ("At least 70 killed in Israel; 198 dead in Gaza"). *Dead* and *deaths* erase causality and responsibility for killing. Remember, war is killing, war is murder.
- 3. Humanize equally:** Don't say " Hamas killed Israeli *children and families*" while "the Israeli military killed Palestinian *civilians*."
- 4. Avoid passive verbs** (*were killed, were murdered*). Say who is doing what, who is killing whom. "The Israeli military killed Palestinians... Hamas fighters killed Israelis...."
- 5. Don't use sports metaphors.** War is not sport. There are no "teams." Sports metaphors hide war's human damage.
- 6. Don't use *surgical or precision strikes*.** War is never surgical, hygienic, or clean.
- 7. Don't use language implying collective responsibility and/or punishment.**
- 8. Don't conflate a government with a people.** Don't talk about Palestinians or Israelis as homogenous groups.
- 9. Don't use *terrorism, terrorists, war on terror*.** The terms are public relations. They have no clear definitions, have Islamophobic connotations, and do not get applied to terror inflicted by states. Name the actions of groups using violence. Use: *acts of mass violence, attacks on civilians, and militants*.
- 10. Is *War* accurate?** *War* is an intense armed conflict between states or groups. Considerable evidence suggests the following terms apply (*War on Gaza* is another option):

Ethnic Cleansing: " [a purposeful policy](#) designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas."

Genocide: "[acts committed](#) with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Note: When referring to the ***humanitarian crisis*** in Gaza, be explicit that the Israeli government bears responsibility for creating it through its genocide of Palestinians.