

# Young Middle East voices speak

Nausheen Rajan  
STAFF WRITER

*Have you ever wondered what it would be like living in the Middle East? Each day brings new struggles, which can be frustrating. However, there are many high school students in the Middle East who have to live with the fear of not knowing what will happen and have courage to face it.*

*Luckily, these kids attended an international camp called Seeds of Peace, where teenagers from the Middle East come together for three weeks to exchange ideas.*

*This is a chance to hear all sides of the story and hopefully, to create a step near achieving peace.*

*The Middle East conflict has more depth and breadth than we can imagine, which is why these kids from the camp volunteered to give us a glimpse of what goes on in the Middle East from a new perspective.*

**Age:** 17

**Location:** A small settlement next to Jerusalem, Israel

**School:** Boyar High School



**Ya'ara Mordecai**

## What does being an Israeli mean to you?

Having experienced hours of dialogues with Palestinians, Egyptians, Americans, and Jordanians made me realize that there is no such thing as right or wrong, just different perspectives of looking at a conflict.

Israel is the heart of the Middle East Conflict. We've seen a lot of wars, bloodshed, and terror, and many Israelis live in fear.

I feel fortunate to live in a democratic modern country, where women are equal and the educational options are many. I am blessed in many ways.

I don't know if I would have felt that lucky if I was living in America, where it seems obvious.

## How do you feel about joining the army?

Every Israeli who turns 18 must leave his/her home to serve the army service of Israel. I'll be going to the army in less than a year. Although the Israeli army is so central to the country and may not seem like a positive thing, the army brings with it values of equality, brotherhood, contribution to society, self-discipline, and political involvement. Israel has always been open for negotiations and hopes for peace. These days, things are more complex because the Palestinian nation is divided between the Hamas supporters, who are not willing to even acknowledge its existence, and the Fatah, who are the official ruling party of the Palestinians.

## Will Israel and Palestine ever willingly achieve a peaceful co-existence?

It'll take painful compromises from both sides to reach an agreement, but I hope someday that people will start waking up and look beyond their comfort zone to see the other side as well. I hope people will stop seeing the two sides of the conflict as black or white, good or bad, and right or wrong. At the end of the day, we are talking about a human life. And we should wish both sides will get their full rights, and start fighting on the negotiation table rather than a battlefield, which consists of innocent lives.

## What does it mean to be a Jordanian?

Jordan is safe enough that I do not "live in fear." I do not trust Israel. Yet, my country is in a peace agreement with them, which I respect. The Middle East is changing, but I am still saddened by the lack of Arab and Islamic unity.

## How does Jordan play a role in the Middle East conflict?

For a long time, I have heard of the problems of Egypt and how lucky I am compared to the millions who live in graveyards. I did my best to keep a close watch on the development of the revolution and strongly supported change, as did most Jordanians.

## What are your hopes for the future?

Today there is a lot of hope, but the future may not be as bright. In terms of peace, in order to have any sort of peace, there has to be trust. You have a life that not only includes you, but the side of the conflict as well. You create exchange programs, a social life, and an economic life that includes both.

**Age:** 16

**Location:** Madaba, Jordan

**School:** King's Academy



**Mutasem Aldmour**

**Age:** 16

**Location:** Ramallah-Palestine

**School:** Ramallah Friends School



**Sophia Daibes**

## What does it mean to be a Palestinian?

I'm a Christian Palestinian Arab and proud of it. I'm not forced to wear a veil, I don't live in a tent, and don't go to school sitting on a camel. What separates us Palestinians nowadays is the Arab leaders and the occupation. That's why we all supported the revolutions.

## What is your reaction to the revolutions?

We all want peace, but peace has different standards. We want our land back, we want our refugees that were once kicked out of their houses back. We also want our resources back, water, and electricity. We want people in jail to get their freedom back. We want our rivers and seas back and an airport. Most importantly, we want our human rights back. When all of these things are restored, then our country will be more than ready to make peace.

## What are your hopes for the future?

I hate the divisions in my country, but I know they're all working to achieve the same purpose. That solely makes it easier to me to accept the reality. What you see in the media is just news that got framed a hundred times to show that we are the terrorist and that we are the ones that usually mess up the peace process. We are not terrorists. That's the only thing I want people to know. We are normal human beings who call for peace and wish for stability. I want the West to know that we are also humans, and we would really like to enjoy our rights someday. Try not to believe everything you see or hear. Look for the truth that's hiding in every single corner.

## How did the revolution affect you?

I wasn't in Cairo when the revolution started. We had no way of checking up on our family and friends or even our house, which made us very edgy.

Countless stories were circling about people who were killed or robbed, which worried everyone. Egypt is in the process of recovery and getting back on its feet.

## What is the impact of the Middle East conflict on you?

Egyptians don't live in pyramids. We don't ride camels. And we can most definitely speak, write, and understand English.

Besides the events which occurred in Egypt, there is still the Middle East conflict. I have learned both from interacting with the other side of the conflict and based on my experience.

A commonly misunderstood concept is that there's a difference between listening and just waiting for the other side of the conflict to finish talking. Day after day, I see Palestinians being murdered, and I feel powerless, not able to help my fellow brothers and sisters. Palestinians are being terrorized and accused of being terrorists for fighting for their freedom.

The public eye sees the idle East as something completely different from what it really is. Almost always, I prefer to live here in this region than anywhere else in the world.

**Age:** 15

**Location:** Cairo, Egypt

**School:** Modern Education American School



**Hatem Hegab**