

*Tair Kaminer*

## **Why I refuse**

Documentaton of a statement by the Israeli draft resister Tair Kaminer

My name is Tair Kaminer, I am 19. A few months ago a ended a year of volunteering with the Israeli Boy and Girl Scouts in the town of Sderot, on the Gaza Strip border. In a few days, I will be going to jail.

An entire year I volunteered in Sderot, working with children living in a war zone, and it was there that I decided to refuse to serve in the Israeli military. My refusal comes from my will to make a contribution to the society of which I am a part and make this a better place to live, from my commitment to the struggle for peace and equality.

The children I worked with grew up in the heart of the conflict, and went through traumatic experiences from a young age. In many of them, this has generated a terrible hatred - which is quite understandable, especially in young children. Like them, many of the children living in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in an even more harsh reality, learn to hate the other side. They, too, cannot be blamed. When I look at all these children, at the next generation of both sides and the reality in which they live, I can but see the continuation of trauma and pain. And I say: Enough!

For years now there's no political horizon, no peace process anywhere in sight. There's no attempt of any kind to bring peace to Gaza or to Sderot. As long as the violent military way holds sway, we will simply have further generations growing up with a heritage of hate, which will only make things even worse. We must stop this - now!

This is why I am refusing: I will not take an active part in the occupation of the Palestinian Territories and in the injustice to the Palestinian people that is perpetrated again and again under this occupation. I will not take part in the cycle of hatred in Gaza and Sderot.

My draft date was set for January 10th, 2016. On that day I will report to the Tel Hashomer Induction Center, to declare my refusal to serve in the military - and my willingness to do an alternative civil service.

In conversation with some people I care about I've been accused of undermining democracy, though my refusal to abide by the laws which were enacted by an elected Parliament. But the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories live under the rule of the Government of Israel, though they had no voice whatsoever in electing that government. I believe that as long as Israel continues to be an occupying country, it will continue moving further and further away from democracy. Therefore, my refusal is part of the struggle for democracy - not an anti-democratic act.

I have been told that I am avoiding my responsibility for the security of Israel. But as a woman who regards all people as equal - and all their lives as equally important - I cannot accept the security argument as applying to Jews only. Especially now, as the wave of terror continues, when it becomes clear and evident that the military cannot ensure protection to the Jews, either. It is very simple - one cannot create an island of security in the midst of an oppressive occupation. True security can be created only when the Palestinian people live in freedom and dignity, in their own an independent state alongside Israel.

There were those who worried about my personal future in a country in which performing military service is held to be of supreme importance in the fabric of daily social intercourse. Caring for my future prospects, they suggested that I do serve in the army, regardless of my opinions - or at least that I don't make my refusal public. But through all the difficulties and worries, I chose to declare my refusal openly, for all to hear. This country, this society, are too important to me - I cannot and will not agree to keep silent. That was not the way I was brought up - to care only for myself and my private concerns. The life I had until now has been about giving and social responsibility, and such I want it to continue.

Even if I must pay a personal price for my refusal, this price will be worthwhile if it helps place the occupation on the agenda of Israeli public discourse. Far too many Israelis don't directly feel the occupation, and they tend to forget about it in their daily lives - lives that are eminently safe in comparison with those of Palestinians, or even of the Israelis who live in the Western Negev (Gaza border area). We are told that there is no way other

than the violent military way. But I believe that this is the most destructive way, and that there are others. I wish to remind all of us that there does exist an alternative: negotiations, peace, optimism, a true will to live in equality, safety and freedom. We are told that the military is not a political institution - but the decision to serve in the military is a highly political one, no less so than the decision to refuse.

We, the young people, must understand the full implications of such a choice. We need to understand its consequences for our society. After having deliberated these issues, I took the decision to refuse. I am not scared of the military prison - what truly frightens me is our society losing its humanity.

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*Source:* <http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/events/1452300839> (Download January 9, 2016).