

SALEM BARAHMEH

Salem Barahmeh is the executive director of the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy, an independent organization based in Ramallah that advocates globally for Palestinian freedom and rights. He grew up in Jericho and is from one of the indigenous Jericho clans whose roots in the Jordan Valley reach back centuries. He shares his thoughts on the current debate regarding the threat of annexation:

Jericho is my hometown. This photo shows my daily view of the Jordan Valley as I grew up in my grandparents' house. From the moment I became conscious of the world around me, I realized that the valley didn't belong to "us." I've had the privilege of traveling the world, yet there are places only a few kilometers away from home which I've never been allowed to visit.



Salem Barahmeh's grandfather's house where he grew up.

I was confronted by this reality when I was 19 and tried to visit Kalia Beach on the northern shore of the Dead Sea. The beach is in the West Bank and only 15 minutes away, but it's owned and run by Israelis. It "should" be open to us. But as soon as I arrived, I was racially profiled and denied entry because I am Palestinian.



My father had to deal with this reality and so did my grandfather. The settlements built around Jericho and throughout the Jordan Valley were not built by Likud or other right-wing parties in recent years, as one might think. They were built in the 1970s under the Israeli Labor Party. The policy of land theft, settlement construction, and annexation is generational.

Ask any of the residents in the Jordan Valley how they feel about annexation and they'll tell you that they thought we were annexed long ago. This is why we can't help but ridicule the growing alarmist, existential chorus that is getting louder the closer we come to July 1. It's not about us. If it were, you'd have listened years ago. This is about you, the international community. It's about keeping alive a grand illusion that allows you to sleep at night rather than address systematic oppression. The facade of the two-state solution is more important to you than the daily suffering of millions of Palestinians.

I don't know what will happen on July 1 and which lands Israel will "legally" annex – the settlements, the Jordan Valley, or anything in between. But I know this: the continuum of Israeli policy driving towards the vision of Greater Israel will proceed – incrementally. Israel will cement the one-state reality under which we live.

The world should not be moved by what happens on that day. It should be outraged because we have been living under a system that affords freedom and rights based on ethnicity. As Palestinians, we are either unfree, unequal, or both, living under Israeli rule in a one-state reality that penetrates every aspect of our lives. This situation has been our generational reality in the Jordan Valley and throughout Palestine, as well as for the millions who are awaiting return.

If the world is more interested in maintaining this reality because it feeds a convenient grand illusion, then it is complicit. This is not just about fighting annexation, which we should and will continue to do. This is about dismantling a system of apartheid that requires systematic solutions and the creation of a new social contract for those who live between the river and the sea, where everyone can be free and have equal rights, so that future generations will never again have to grow up under this system.