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Israel's daily newsmagazine

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views



**Arnold Roth** - Arnold's daughter Malki was murdered when a Palestinian suicide bomber stepped into the crowded Sbarro pizza restaurant in Jerusalem in August 2001. [The Malki Foundation](#), in Malki's memory, helps provide care for severely handicapped children in Israel and their families.

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## A small town in Holland

By Arnold Roth March 15, 2004

*Originally published by the Australian Jewish News.*

Court proceedings fascinate me. Nearly forty years ago as a teenager on holidays in an Australian country town, I sat spellbound through the first day of a murder trial, the first I had ever seen. I walked out convinced of the need to become a lawyer.

From my home in Jerusalem, I traveled to the Netherlands last week to take part in a hearing of a different kind. The two decades I spent practicing law left me considerably less awestruck this time by what I saw.

Israel is building a long and expensive security fence. The UN General Assembly voted to ask the International Court of Justice in The Hague to consider the legal implications of "illegal Israeli actions." I wondered, when I first read these words in the court papers, how some of those UN delegates managed to vote without giggling.

Malki, my daughter, was murdered in a Palestinian Arab terror attack in August 2001. She was fifteen. Since then, my wife Frimet and I have grown more and more involved in writing and speaking publicly.

I joined a group of Israelis who, like us, are experiencing murder by terrorism (the use of the present-continuous tense is appropriate) and went to The Hague, not to participate in the ICJ hearings but to speak to the media gathered there.

Even before our El Al flight rolls to its gate on the Amsterdam tarmac, the ritual pulling of Israeli mobile phones from pockets is in process. Everyone on board knows within seconds of still more Egged bus passengers incinerated and shrapnelled to death in Jerusalem while we have been crossing the Mediterranean. Our children are safe and well, thank heavens, but eight passengers on that bus will never reach any destination again. A teenage girl who lived on our street until her family moved to one of the newer Jerusalem neighborhoods is among the injured. For Israelis, it's always close.

There is no time to unpack or wash up. We go straight to the communications center set up for the week by one of the

Dutch pro-Israel organizations, located in the center of The Hague a few minutes walk from the elaborate structure that will host the next day's hearing. A quick huddle of the eighteen members of our group as we prepare to get off the bus, and I'm appointed the group spokesperson to tell the press why we're here.

We walk into the hall -- and encounter a show-stopper. A vast montage of photographic portraits has been fixed to the wall. The faces of 927 Israelis murdered in the thirty-some months of this ghastly Arafat war are arranged in no apparent sequence, a tremendous number of them teenagers, children and infants.

Every one of us climbs onto the dais and begins searching for a child, a wife, a brother, sister, boyfriend. For some of our group, this takes a little longer since they need to locate every member of what had once been a living, loving family. Avi finds his two little sons and their mother, killed at point-blank range by a machine-gun-toting 'activist' who broke into their kibbutz home. Rachel takes longer; her husband's picture is at one end of the display; those of her only two sons are at the other. Meir needs to find his father, his mother, his two sisters and his baby brother. This takes some minutes.

Someone adds eight fresh blank squares to the display. None of us needs to hear the explanation. A few minutes later, the ambassador, taking a cell phone call, looks shaken as he announces to us that his commercial attache's brother-in-law was killed on that Egged bus.

If you set aside what binds us - the murder of people we loved - our group is diverse. Most are Jewish, but we include Druze and Christians. We speak French, Dutch, German, Spanish, Arabic, Italian, Russian and English. We include managers, professionals, shop-keepers, students, unemployed and a retired senior IDF officer (he happens to be a Druze). I don't know about our politics because we don't discuss it among ourselves. We rarely speak about the security fence or our ideas for how peace can happen. Basically, we're your idiosyncratic Israeli cross-section, in The Hague to speak about terrorism and little else. We are united around the idea that no matter how you try to justify it, there's no possible argument in favor of terror - and everything is justified in stopping it.

The media are present in large numbers over the next two days. Most of us have multiple opportunities to stand in front of cameras and reporters and say what we came to say. The questions we're asked by BBC, New York Times, Associated Press, Al-Jazeera, tend to be superficial and repetitive. It's hard to keep track of how many. I lost count after my twenty-fifth interview.

All the members of our delegation give testimony to a silent, overcrowded hall - an 'alternative hearing' of three hours, the

answer of Israel's friends to the proceedings across the way in the Peace Palace.

The demands of being on the front line of the media's attention meant we didn't come to cry in public. But there were intense and difficult private moments when the tears forced their way through. I shared breakfast with a woman whose only child, a beautiful teenager slightly older than my Malki, was blown apart in a discotheque. Even with her non-native English, her quiet dignity and understated manner made her a more eloquent and powerful speaker than the politicians elbowing their way onto Dutch television and into the papers.

While there's a consensus today among Israelis that the security fence is, on balance, a necessary thing, criticisms are not hard to find. The internal debate in Israel, as on most issues, is a vigorous one. I found it constructive to mention to journalists that Israeli society at all its levels is sensitive to the problems created by the new construction. The ongoing flexibility and accommodation shown by Israel's official arms, including its military and the courts, are not well known or understood outside of Israel. They gain Israel very few points in the battle for public opinion. This hurts. Israelis, it seems, are again being held to a standard that's neither fair nor logical.

In the week before The Hague hearings, I was interviewed twice by television journalists at the security fence. I was taken to Jerusalem's Abu Dis neighborhood close to where a wailing Palestinian Arab woman had been widely photographed a few days before, arms reaching skywards, despair evident in her body language. Standing there myself, I could see that the wall comes to a complete stop some meters away. It's not finished. It locks no one in. You can walk around it. The locations of gates and cross-overs are still being determined; the path has been moved and will be moved again. The Israeli courts are busy hearing objections and appeals. We have a legal system that provides real recourse for Palestinians and Israelis. It's not easy to learn these things from media reports and published images.

No one in Israel pretends the security fence is a perfect guarantee against terrorism. To paraphrase Churchill on democracy, the fence is the worst form of protection - except for those others that have already been tried.

These ICJ proceedings will produce neither an answer to terror nor an end to the deaths of children. No solution to the conflict between Israel and its neighbors is going to be found in The Hague.

But for the first time in a long while, the voices of the Israeli victims are being heard.

*Views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of israelinsider.*



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**Wailing Arab women**

oldcitycat - U.S.A (03/15/2004 09:16 IT)

**None of this was shown in the Dutch media!**

KimHartveld - Son, Netherlands (03/15/2004 14:46 IT)

**What Israel needs to do**

Miryomo - Ohio, U.S.A (03/15/2004 21:07 IT)

**Re: None of this was shown in the Dutch media!**

JacobBlues - NYC, U.S.A (03/15/2004 21:09 IT)

**Re: Re: None of this was shown in the Dutch media!**

Ribbett101 - Toronto, Canada (03/15/2004 21:31 IT)

**Re: Re: None of this was shown in the Dutch media!**

goyemguy - Dublin, U.S.A (03/15/2004 22:10 IT)

**Re: None of this was shown in the Dutch media!**


dikayasobaka - Boston, U.S.A (03/15/2004 23:01 IT)

**Re: What Israel needs to do/Miryomo**

oldcitycat - U.S.A (03/16/2004 02:05 IT)

**God Bless you Mr.Roth**

rachelamb - houston, U.S.A (03/17/2004 18:07 IT)

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