

Chapter 35 Primary Source Activity



In the tense world of the Middle East (textbook pages 916–917), one eloquent spokesperson for the Palestinians was Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi, a university professor and political leader who has worked for peace and human rights. Ashrawi is an unusual leader—a Christian Arab woman in a Muslim society generally dominated by men. Here she describes how, as the intifada began, Israeli soldiers came to her university.

◆ *As you read, consider what it is like to live amidst political turmoil. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

An Encounter with the Israeli Army

This time the pounding of military boots was intercepted by the irregular beat of explosions, gunshots, and the rapid fire of Uzis. I took a few steps. The university gateman panicked. “Dr. Ashrawi, come back! It’s too dangerous,” he yelled.

“Just keep the gate closed. Don’t open it for anyone.” I willed myself to move forward, head high, eyes looking straight ahead. . . . The soldiers stopped; I stopped. We looked each other in the eye. . . .

Suddenly there was a look of recognition between me and the officer in the front line. He was my neighbor from the military governor’s office across the street from my house in Ramallah. I also recognized the soldiers for what they were: kids, teenagers, some of them even younger than my students. . . .

“Don’t come any closer. I want to speak to the officer in charge.”

“I’m in charge,” responded the officer. “We must go in and arrest the students who were demonstrating and throwing stones. Besides, we have a list of wanted people and we believe that some of them may be inside.”

“You can’t go in. This is a university campus and the army has no business on university campuses. You must respect that.” . . .



“This campus always gives us a lot of trouble. Some students have been killed here. We must close it down.”

“Instead of closing down the university, stop shooting students. You’ve already closed down the university sixteen times, and your soldiers still kill students.”

“They invite trouble. They go out and demonstrate and disturb the peace. They force us to shoot them.”

“They’re no different from students all over the world. They want to protest and to express their opinions freely. That’s no reason to kill them. Do you shoot Israeli students when they demonstrate?”

“That’s different. Don’t try to play smart with me. Your students threaten the safety of our soldiers.”

“Then your soldiers shouldn’t be here. They provoke confrontations. Besides, if they would leave the students alone, then the demonstrations would end peacefully and no one will get hurt.”

“It’s our job. We have to maintain law and order.”

Source: *This Side of Peace*, by Hanan Ashrawi (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

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Questions to Think About

1. What is the Israeli army officer’s first demand at the university gate?
2. What is his final threat toward the school? What does Dr. Ashrawi answer?
3. **Identifying Assumptions** Both the officer and Dr. Ashrawi make certain assumptions about the other’s attitudes and views. What are they?
4. **Activity** This incident took place in 1987, at the start of the intifada. Make a time line for the period from 1945 to 1995, showing significant events in the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors.