

Commissioner's Book Club: Discussion guide

I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey

By Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish

Introduction

The prompts and questions that follow are meant to encourage discussion and support reflection. Human rights-related books highlight challenging issues and topics—take care of yourself in the ways that you need while you dig in.

For more suggestions, including different ways to reflect and share, check out [the Book Club How-to resource](#).

Author Bio

Born and raised in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, Dr. Abuelaish has overcome many personal hardships, including poverty and violence, to become an outspoken, prominent and beloved educator and public speaker on peace and development in the Middle East. His personal doctrine is that hate is not a response to war. Rather, open communication, understanding and compassion are the tools needed to bridge the divide between Israeli and Palestinian interests. “All can live in harmony,” he says. “And all can reach their full potentials spiritually, emotionally, physically and intellectually.”¹

¹ “Meet the Founder,” Daughters for Life Foundation, accessed March 5, 2026, <https://daughtersforlife.com/about-us/#founder>.

Summary

I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey is a memoir by physician and peace activist Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish that traces his life from childhood in Jabalia Refugee Camp to his emergence as a globally recognized advocate for human dignity and peace, even while living under the most dehumanizing conditions. Abuelaish recounts a life in Gaza shaped by displacement, poverty, closed borders and the daily humiliations of occupation, while also describing his relentless pursuit of education and medicine as pathways toward dignity and possibility.

After Israeli forces shelled his home in a 2009 attack, killing three of his daughters and one niece, Abuelaish confronts unbearable grief while refusing to let hatred become the final manifestation of his loss.

In Dr. Abuelaish's own words: "If I could know that my daughters were the last sacrifice on the road to peace between Palestinians and Israelis, then I could accept it."

Linking the book to human rights in B.C.

The protection of civilian life is a foundational principle of both international human rights law and international humanitarian law. *I Shall Not Hate* brings these principles into sharp relief by documenting life in Gaza under conditions of displacement, poverty, restricted movement and repeated violence. Abuelaish's account of checkpoints, permit systems, inadequate access to health care and the killing of members of his own family echoes concerns long raised by international human rights bodies about the protection of civilians, freedom of movement and access to food, medicine and basic necessities in Gaza. The 2009 UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza conflict found serious violations of international law during the 2008–09 assault described in the memoir, including failures to protect civilians and restrictions affecting medical care and basic survival.² Abuelaish wrote this book in 2010 after this Gaza conflict; in the 16 years that have followed, there have been countless acts of aggression and violence, and well over 100,000 deaths in Gaza.

² "Report of UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza conflict – Mission head (Goldstone) – Press conference," United Nations, September 2009, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-198178/#:~:text=The%20mission%20concluded%20that%2C%20among,that%20or%20any%20other%20time>.



The book also invites reflection on how international law understands genocide and atrocity prevention. The UN Genocide Convention defines genocide to include acts such as killing members of a protected group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about a group's physical destruction, in whole or in part. The International Court of Justice has found that Palestinians in Gaza are plausibly experiencing genocide as it is defined under the Genocide Convention and require protection. UN human rights officials and experts have warned of acts or conditions that may amount to genocide or create a serious risk of genocide. These include the mass killing of civilians, the destruction of homes and infrastructure and the deprivation of food, water, medical care and safe movement.³

In Canada, conversations about genocide also require us to consider this country's treatment of Indigenous Peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) describe acts of cultural genocide and genocide in Canada against Indigenous Peoples. However, the international legal definition of genocide omits "cultural genocide": that language was removed after opposition from several states, including Canada. This, despite the fact that states like Canada were themselves pursuing policies of forced assimilation, child removal and cultural destruction.⁴

Finally, the memoir raises questions about human rights protections and the role of public institutions in responding to human suffering. Human rights protections are not upheld by law alone; they depend on the willingness of people and institutions to hear, document and respond to suffering when it is named. Abuelaish's story insists on the human dignity of Palestinian life in the face of narratives, actions and policies that can make such suffering invisible. The promise of "Never Again," which helped shape the post-Holocaust human rights framework, reminds us that human rights protections and peace work is not only about remembering the past, but about recognizing warning signs and responding to human suffering in the present.

³ "Gaza: ICJ ruling offers hope for protection of civilians enduring apocalyptic conditions, say UN experts," United Nations, January 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/gaza-icj-ruling-offers-hope-protection-civilians-enduring-apocalyptic>.

⁴ "Residential School History," National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, accessed March 2026, <https://nctr.ca/education/residential-school-history/> "Reclaiming Power and Place," National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, June 2019, <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>.



Discussion guide questions and prompts

Here are some questions to ignite discussion or thought on the connections between the book and human rights. The provided prompts are not the only or complete answers, but some ideas you might want to incorporate into your conversation:

1. Displacement and the concept of home

Abuelaish reflects on forced displacement, writing that to be pushed from one's home is to be marked with "the scar of expulsion for life." He also recounts Israeli bulldozers destroying homes to widen roads for tanks, leaving families powerless to stop it. What does the memoir suggest about home as more than a building or a location? How are concepts of home, land and belonging connected? What is lost when people are forced from the places that ground them—culturally and emotionally, across generations?

- Home can mean shelter and safety, and it can also mean land, history, continuity and a sense of being rooted. Forced displacement disrupts not only where people live, but how they understand who they are and where they belong. Abuelaish's reflections invite readers to consider how the loss of land and home can become both a material and psychological condition—one that extends across decades and shapes families, communities and collective memory.
- Readers may also recognize how struggles over land, displacement and belonging continue to impact Indigenous communities and settler-Indigenous relations in Canada. Oppressive and violent policies, including the residential school system, outlawing ceremonies, rituals and languages and forced displacement have amounted to acts of genocide and cultural genocide in Canada.

2. Violence, chaos and the normalization of war

Abuelaish describes witnessing war as a child: tanks entering the camp, shelling, gunfire, fires, parents fleeing, children separated from their families and people hiding in fields in a state of panic. For him, war was not something distant or abstract—it was immediate, embodied and chaotic. What does the memoir suggest about the impact of repeated violence over time? How does prolonged exposure to war change what feels normal or possible? What happens to a society when violence becomes part of the background conditions of life?

- Repeated violence over decades can reshape the emotional and social fabric of a community. Abuelaish's testimony shows how war is experienced not only as destruction, but as confusion, separation, fear and the collapse of ordinary life. Readers may wish to reflect on the long-term effects of living in a context



where safety is repeatedly interrupted and where the threat of violence is woven into childhood, family life and memory itself.

3. Childhood in conditions of deprivation

Abuelaish recalls a childhood marked by overcrowding, hunger, illness, labour and grief. He writes that, like many Palestinian children, he “didn’t really have a childhood.” How did you feel reading the accounts of Abuelaish and his siblings growing up in conditions of displacement, poverty and war? How are childhood, play and safety altered when survival becomes the primary condition of family life? What stays with a person when deprivation and instability shape their earliest memories?

- Children’s rights frameworks emphasize dignity, development, safety and the right to grow in conditions that allow children to thrive. Abuelaish’s memories remind readers that deprivation can be emotional, developmental and relational.
- The loss of childhood may not always be recognized as a discrete event, but the memoir shows how scarcity, overcrowding, fear and grief can alter the conditions under which children come to understand themselves and the world around them.
- Some readers may relate to this experience of childhood, being one with limited or unpredictable safety and security. For other readers, this idea of childhood may feel incredibly abstract and almost impossible to imagine.

4. Movement, borders and control

Abuelaish describes crossing the Rafah border as a journey marked by humiliation, delay, suffering, and unpredictability. He says that travel in and out of Gaza required documentation, permission, justification, and luck — and even then, movement was never guaranteed. What does the memoir suggest about freedom of movement as a human rights issue? How does it change a person’s sense of self, dignity, or future when basic mobility depends on the approval of others? What happens when movement is not a right, but a privilege granted or withheld?

- Abuelaish shows how deeply freedom of movement shapes daily life: access to health care, education, employment, family, and safety. When people are repeatedly delayed, denied or humiliated in their attempts to move, those restrictions can become a form of control over far more than geography.

5. Making suffering visible

Abuelaish’s story went viral, in large part because the immediate aftermath of his anguish over the killing of his daughters and niece was broadcast live on an Israeli newscast. Abuelaish was a regular correspondent with a news program and was scheduled to call in to the program the day Israeli forces shelled his home. Mere



minutes later, Abuelaish took the call as scheduled, expressing his undeniable pain and shock. Nomika Zion, an Israeli peace activist, described the moment in this way: “The Palestinian pain which the majority of Israeli society doesn’t want to see, had a voice and a face. The invisible became visible. For one moment, it wasn’t just the enemy—an enormous and dark demon that was so easy and convenient to hate. There was one man, one story, one tragedy. And so. Much. Pain.”

- What role does testimony play in human rights work? Why do some forms of suffering remain distant or abstract until they are attached to a face, a voice or a story in which people might see the humanity of another? What stories do we hear as instantly credible, while others are met with distance and doubt?
- Human rights protections often depend on whose suffering is heard, believed and documented. Media plays a powerful role in shaping narratives and visibility. Readers may wish to reflect on how language in headlines and reporting can either clarify or obscure responsibility. For example, when deaths of one people are described passively or with doubt-casting phrases like “reports suggest.” Meanwhile, violence against other people or nations may be reported in more direct and definitive terms.
- These differences in framing can shape whose suffering is treated as credible, which peoples are described in fully human terms, and whose deaths are made to feel ordinary or unremarkable. Abuelaish’s story invites us to bear witness and to pay attention and reflect on how stories are legitimized.

6. Grief and the refusal to hate

Abuelaish suggests that refusing hatred can be one way of breaking a cycle of violence. What do you make of his refusal to hate in the face of such profound loss? How do you understand your own capacity to refuse hatred when you feel hurt, betrayed or angry? What practices or relationships might help someone resist the urge to pass pain forward?

- Refusing hatred does not mean refusing accountability, repair or redress. Abuelaish’s response to devastating harm is powerful precisely because he does not deny what was done to his family nor does he suggest that his peace requires his silence.
- Resisting the urge to pass pain forward can be especially difficult when trust has been broken. In everyday life, this may mean learning how to stay in conflict with people we love without giving up on the relationship entirely—beginning from shared humanity, common ground and a willingness to remain vulnerable. Practices such as honest conversation, community support, spiritual grounding, therapy, meditation or simply taking time before reacting can all help create space between hurt and retaliation. Refusing hatred may



not always feel natural or immediate, but it can be one way of protecting our care for ourselves and one another, while making room for a different future.

