



Raising the Bar in 2026

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This past year I continually heard myself repeating the same phrase: "My bar is really low." I was describing advocacy work at the United Nations and the multiple issues confronting the world: conflicts and wars, gender-based violence, climate change, racism and incitement to violence, food insecurity, economic instability, rising nationalism, eradication of religious freedom, increasing poverty, natural disasters across the globe... the list continues. I often responded saying, "My bar is really low. Today, can we at least just stop killing children?" That's a low bar, right? Should be easy to meet. Should not even have to be discussed, a nonissue, "Let's stop killing children." The global community can't reach even that bar.

I have struggled to write this article. I don't want to go to the place this takes me. I don't want to believe that we as humanity can allow such atrocities to continue. I resist hearing again the voice I heard on December 4, 2025. In truth the voice has never left me. The voice has become a tattoo on my soul, always in my heart and mind. It is not a loud voice, not an angry one. It's just the voice of a little girl. The voice of Hind Rajab.

On December 4, 2025, I sat in the dark in the Trusteeship Chamber of the United Nations. I was attending a special viewing of the documentary film, *The Voice of Hind Rajab*. The docudrama tells the story of a six-year-old girl who was fleeing Gaza City with family members when their vehicle came under attack. Five of her family were killed immediately; Hind's teenage cousin placed a call to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society



and subsequently dies in the next attack. Hind took the phone. At first, she thought her family members were sleeping as she asked for someone to come rescue them. The film contains 70 minutes of Hind's actual recorded voice pleading for help. The Red Crescent could see her location less than eight miles away. However, international complexities in an active combat zone prohibited entry or safe passage. Finally, an attempt was made but the ambulance, within eyesight of Hind's vehicle, was attacked, killing both paramedics. Help would not arrive.

Twelve days after Hind's call emergency workers were finally able to enter the combat zone. They located the vehicle and found the bodies of six-year-old Hind and her family. The vehicle was riddled with 335 bullet holes.

Hind's voice stays with me. Somehow, I am struck more by her plea, by not speaking of guns and bombs but the universal fear of children, "Please hurry and come get me soon. It is almost dark and I am afraid of the dark." A child's voice, speaking with a child's clarity. In our war.

I am reminded of the Global Ministerial to End Violence against children held in November of 2024. This was the first such ministerial. It was sponsored by UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and governments including Colombia. I was invited to participate. A psychologist working with children in Palestine spoke of their angst about her coming. A young girl pleading, asked "why do you have to go, is this more important than us? What is the meeting even about?" When the psychologist replied saying, "well it's a meeting to end violence against children," the child asked, "You have to have a meeting about that?"

Yes, sometimes we have to have a meeting about that. The voices of children call us to stop talking and meeting. They call us to take action. To raise the bar.

It's time we do. I pray this is the year we listen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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