



# Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel

By Alice Walker

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In 2006, Alice Walker, working with Women for Women International, visited Rwanda and the eastern Congo to witness the aftermath of the genocide in Kigali. Invited by Code Pink, an antiwar group working to end the Iraq War, Walker traveled to Palestine/Israel three years later to view the devastation on the Gaza Strip. Here is her testimony.

Bearing witness to the depravity and cruelty, she presents the stories of the individuals who crossed her path and shared their tales of suffering and courage. Part of what has happened to human beings over the last century, she believes, is that we have been rendered speechless by unusually barbaric behavior that devalues human life. We have no words to describe what we witness. Self-imposed silence has slowed our response to the plight of those who most need us, often women and children, but also men of conscience who resist evil but are outnumbered by those around them who have fallen victim to a belief in weapons, male or ethnic dominance, and greed.

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### Editorial Review

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Following visits to Rwanda in 2006 on behalf of Women for Women International, Walker was nearly overcome with the aftermath of the genocidal violence, particularly aimed at women and children. On behalf of the antiwar group Code Pink, she traveled to the Gaza Strip in 2009 to witness the suffering caused by the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In this slim volume, she tells the stories of women and children brutalized by war. She recalls visiting villages reduced to rubble, listening to women mourn the death of their children, sharing modest meals, and sharing stories of her own struggles growing up in the South, the U.S. civil rights movement, and learning the importance of connections to friends and family. She links modern-day atrocities to older cruelties, including the Holocaust and the Trail of Tears. Finding resilience in the midst of atrocities, Walker uses her own voice, as poet and activist, to speak out against injustices in the world's trouble spots. --Vanessa Bush

#### About the Author

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, ALICE WALKER is the author of more than thirty books including *The Color Purple* and *Sent by Earth*. Her writings have been translated into more than two dozen languages. From her essays concerning the civil rights movement to her cries for intervention on the Gaza Strip, Walker continually and eloquently calls attention to ignored injustices around the world.

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