

Episode 2: Khali Sayegh - The Agora Initiative, Washington D.C.

Guest: Khalil Sayegh, founder and executive director of The Agora Initiative, Washington D.C.

Host: Efe & Mert

Bio:

Khalil Sayegh is a Palestinian Christian born and raised in the Gaza Strip in a refugee family, displaced during the 1948 Nakba. He lived through the Second Intifada, the 2008 Gaza War, and the rise of Hamas before moving to the West Bank and later to Washington, D.C. Today, he is one of the most prominent Gazan voices in the United States. His analysis has appeared in the *BBC*, *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *CNN*, *Le Monde*, and *La Croix*. The Parliament of the World's Religions has described him as a moral leader with a "deep-rooted passion for justice and peace." His quest for truth led him to an outlook in which he "deeply empathized with both Palestinians and Israelis regarding their experiences of the conflict," as the Jewish Federation has highlighted.

Khalil Sayegh holds a Master's degree in Comparative Politics from American University in Washington, D.C., where he specialized in democratization and political violence. He is the founder of *The Agora Initiative*, a nonprofit dedicated to fostering equal rights, security, and prosperity for both Palestinians and Israelis.

In this episode:

Khalil Sayegh shares his deeply personal story of growing up in Gaza as a Christian, living through war, and losing his sister Lara, his father Jeries, and many relatives and friends during the current devastation of Gaza. He speaks about the human realities in Gaza before and after October 7, the rise of Hamas, and what the outside world often misunderstands about Gazans. We discuss his journey from Gaza to Washington, his work with *The Agora Initiative*, and his views on both the global student protests and the local protests against Hamas, which he vocally supports. Finally, Khalil Sayegh reflects on hope, dialogue, and his vision for a shared future for Palestinians and Israelis.

This conversation was recorded on June 11, 2025

Links:

The Agora Initiative: <https://theagorainitiative.org/about> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Khalil Sayegh commenting on the Anti-Hamas protests for CNN: <https://x.com/KhalilJeries/status/1907831500919259231> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

In this episode, Khalil Sayegh reflects on the profound historical trauma of 1948, drawing on a metaphor from the Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish: the loss of the Garden of Eden. The reference comes from Darwish's poetry collection *I Am the Adam of Two Edens*. In this work, the metaphysical metaphor of exile and displacement is paralleled with the defining historical experience of Palestinian displacement and dispossession that so Palestinians endured in 1948: "*I am the Adam of two Edens, I lost them twice.*"

Darwish, Mahmoud. *The Adam of Two Edens: Selected Poems*. Edited by Munir Akash, Syracuse University Press, 2000.

<https://press.syr.edu/supressbooks/530/adam-of-two-edens-the/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Khalil Sayegh also cites a well-known passage from Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine* (1992), in the chapter "**The Palestinians and Western Discourse.**" Said reflects on the paradox of the Palestinian experience of displacement and dispossession at the hands of Jews who had themselves been persecuted and victimized by Europeans: "*Here, then, is another complex irony: how the classic victims of years of anti-Semitic persecution and the Holocaust have in their new nation become the victimizers of another people, who have become, therefore, the victims of the victims.*" Said's formulation does not imply that Palestinians are the "greatest victims of all," but highlights the tragic paradox of a people made victims by a those who were themselves historic victims.

Said, Edward W. *The Question of Palestine*. Revised ed., Vintage Books, 1992.
<https://www.zvab.com/9780099967804/Question-Palestine-Said-Edward-W-0099967804/plp> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Antisemitic attacks in Washington and Boulder:

<https://time.com/7287740/washington-dc-shooting-israel-embassy-jewish-museum-suspects-victims-investigation/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/02/us-leaders-condemn-attack-pro-israel-rally-colorado?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to

meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of:

Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeris Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Kreß LL.M. (Cambridge) (Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast by renowned historians. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes in the history chapter for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.

Please also check out our other episodes to explore multiple perspectives:

On the human reality: Udi Goren, Michel Friedman, Alena Jabarine, Mai & Sima (Young Ambassadors for Peace)

On the Nakba: Adel Mana, Derek Penslar, Muriel Asseburg, Gudrun Krämer

On October 7 and Gaza: Alex de Waal, Political and Legal debate chapter