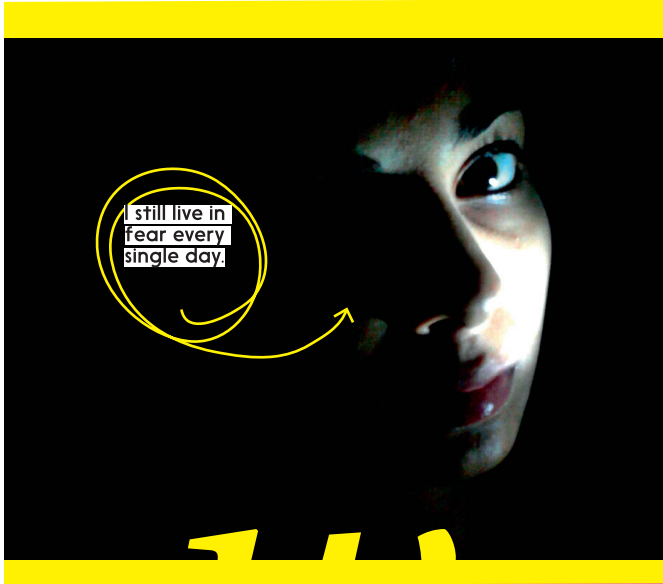
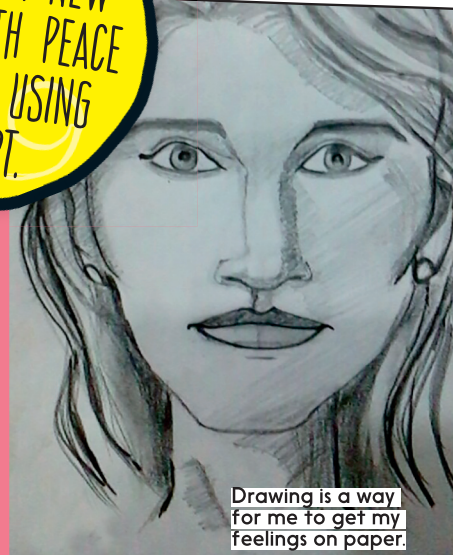
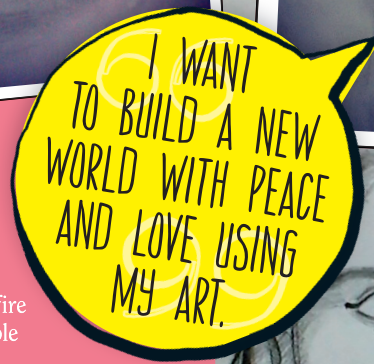


# "My home is a war zone."

LANA, 18, SHARES WHAT IT IS LIKE GROWING UP IN GAZA, WHERE EVERY DAY SHE LIVES IN FEAR OF GETTING KILLED.



I want to use my art to show how people are suffering.



Drawing is a way for me to get my feelings on paper.

**W**hen I think of my childhood, I don't have any happy memories. I couldn't play outside with my six sisters or hang out with my friends on the playground. I couldn't even go to school without being scared. It was like I lived in a prison because I was not able to go outside whenever I wanted. **Imagine living your entire life never feeling safe, waking up each day wondering if you were going to die that day. It's a sick life, but it's mine.**

I live in Gaza City, located on the Gaza Strip. Gaza has been a warzone since the 1960s because the Israeli Jews and Palestinians are fighting over the land. The Jews want the land as a safe haven where they won't be persecuted. But the Palestinians see the land as rightfully ours. Innocent people are killed every day.

**My family has fortunately been safe, but 11 of my friends have lost family members.** There have been long periods where I couldn't go to school because the schools were housing homeless

refugees. In August, a ceasefire was announced and I was able to go back to school.

My family has never even considered leaving Gaza. To us, that's the opposite of fighting, it's surrendering. Imagine if you were just sitting at home and someone told you to get up and leave. Would you?

I live in an apartment that is 200 square metres. Because we don't have a lot of space, I share a room with two of my sisters and my other four sisters all share a room. **During the day I always feel tired because I can't sleep, so to give myself some peace, I like to write and draw.** It's a way for me to get all my feelings on paper. I write and draw a lot about the war because I see speaking out as my way to fight. To me, fighting for my freedom doesn't mean using weapons. It means telling the world about what life is really like here for the people living it.

**I want to create a gallery full of my artwork and travel all around the world to show everyone how people in Gaza are suffering.** I want to tell everyone about my friends' lives and all the homeless people the war has caused. I want to build a new world with peace and love using my art and my voice.

**The war has been going on for so long that I don't know if I'll see the real end to it in my lifetime.** But I still think it's important for me to speak out. I'm not just sharing my story in hopes that I will be free. I'm sharing it on behalf of everyone in the world that has to live in fear every day.

If you're wondering what keeps me strong even though my life is so hard... it's the little moments that still make me smile. My experience has taught me a lot – how to love people and how to fight for my freedom. It's taught me the importance of pursuing an education and never losing sight of my dreams. **Most importantly, it's taught me to never give up.**

AS TOLD TO EMILY LAURENCE