Thank you for this invitation. I am honored to be with you for this Jubilee celebration.

Our Vienna WiB group began in 2001 when Paula Abrams Hourani and a small group of women stood in St. Stephen's square with signs protesting the occupation. Paula who was Jewish and married to a Palestinian felt very keenly the injustices suffered by the Palestinians and over the years inspired many women and men to join the group. Her death last year was a great loss for us.

Palestine remains the chief focus in our vigils which we have been holding regularly for almost 18 years. As we stand in the busy pedestrian area holding banners and placards we want to make the situation in Palestine visable to those passing by. Each vigil is centered around a theme: the Nakba, the great March of Return, Children Prisoners, etc. We distribute flyers providing further background and those interested can sign up at our information table to receive our mailings.

Aside from the vigils our group also organizes book presentations and film screenings often with the author or film maker present. In this way we hope to reach a wider public and broaden interest in the culture and history of Palestine.

Of course, to effect any change in Austrian policy towards Israel, it is necessary to reach the politicians. We do this by writing letters reminding them of their obligation to hold Israel to account for its continuous violations of HR and International law. Recently we have endorsed petitions for Austria to recognize the State of Palestine and another to increase its funding to UNRWA after the US pullout.

Formerly our letters would receive a polite response. But since the new government was formed last year with the Freedom party as junior partner, not only are our letters ignored, but we are witnessing an acceptance of racist, anti-immigrant language which stokes fear and islamophobia. Most frightening is the proposal of a bill that would allow the detention of immigrants who are suspected of being dangerous to society.

As a group we face a number of difficulties. Our members are older. Paula's death left a gap we cannot fill. The situation in Palestine is worsening and at the same time Austria is strengthening its ties with Netanyahu's Israel. Criticism of Israel is labeled anti-semitic. It is easy to become discouraged as we see no visable effects of our efforts.

One way we are trying to improve our effectiveness is by joining with other Palestinian solidarity groups, both in Europe and in Austria.

We are a member of ECCP with its main office in Brussels. This wider platform for Palestine gives our small Vienna group access to various initiatives throughout Europe, provides us with material, contacts and issues to raise with politicians.

In Austria we are in the initial stages of forming an umbrella solidarity movement for the groups presently active for Palestine. Our hope is that by sharing resources and cooperating more efficiently we can be more effective in our efforts.

We especially value our international network with Women in Black and we are encouraged and enriched by your activities and commitment. I hope to invite you to the Jubilee of WiBV in 2026.