



Short Interview with Maysoon Zayid

(Winner Her Abilities Award 2019 /category of Arts, culture and sports)

What is your response to winning Her Abilities?

I was shocked and pleased to have been chosen for this award by a handful of women whose work and character I admire and respect. There are so many groundbreaking and fearless disabled women doing important work globally. It is an honor to be highlighted in such a competitive field.

What is your vision for an inclusive society?

An inclusive society means equality for all regardless of gender, orientation, race, ability, economic standing, or place of birth. Inclusion doesn't mean just inviting diverse people to the table. It means making sure that their voices are heard and amplified. It means guaranteeing that the table is accessible, as well as the location it sits in. Inclusion doesn't mean doing the minimum, it means doing everything in your power to level the playing field.

What's your message to women with disabilities?

There's so much advice I have for women with disabilities, I should probably write a book about it. Here are my top three messages. You're going to have to work harder than any man and you're going to have to work harder than your non-disabled peers. You can work to change that reality, but it is the reality. Being disabled doesn't mean you don't have privilege. You might have walking privilege, speaking privilege, privilege that women of color do not have, check your privilege constantly. Don't let anyone but you define you. Choose the person you want to be and be that person. There is no shame in being disabled, but it's okay to hate it sometimes. If someone doesn't want to be with you because you are disabled, it's because they are worthless, not because you are.

What barriers have you faced in life and how did you overcome them?

Too many for a short statement and I haven't overcome the biggest barrier—Hollywood shuns disability. I have yet to break through, but hope someday that dream will come true.