



LIVE FROM Palestine

TESTIMONIES FROM THE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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The Land of Milk

By Paul Larudee, August 5, 2006

The name Lebanon literally means “land of milk”. It is one of the names given to a mythical earthly paradise in ancient times, usually located in one’s neighbor’s land, which typically justified the conquest of said neighbor, assumed to be barbarians.

Of course, such justification is no longer acceptable today under the Geneva conventions. Merely coveting one’s neighbor’s land is not enough, even if those neighbors are barbarians (today’s term is “terrorist”) unworthy of life itself. A “terrorist threat” is therefore required as a pretext for Israel to take land that it and its founders have coveted since at least 1918, when David Ben Gurion first described Lebanon’s Litani river as Israel’s future “natural” border to the north.

Yesterday the original meaning of Lebanon’s name came to mind as I sat for five hours in a

“some Americans oppose Israel’s actions enough to come here and do what we can to stop them”

shared taxi on the way to Beirut from Damascus airport. The tour had to use the longest possible route because it is the only remaining one; all the rest had been closed by Israel’s bombing of the bridges. This one had no major

bridges, so even if it is bombed, a rough detour is probably still possible.

Within a few kilometers of the border crossing, in the far north of the country, was a destroyed vegetable distribution center that Israel had attacked the same morning, claiming



Photo: Paul Larudee

that it was a munitions depot. At least twenty people died to prove them wrong. What could be the purpose of destroying the infrastructure in the largely Christian north? Perhaps it is Israel’s way of punishing them for showing solidarity this time with those resisting Israel’s invasion of the south, or perhaps it is just SOP to cause misery as widely as possible.

Today I will join a team of international volunteers recruited by Adam Shapiro, one of the co-founders of the ISM, and including his Palestinian wife Huwaida Arraf, Kathy Kelly (founder of Voices in the Wilderness) and other experienced nonviolent activists, who are in the midst of discussions with the local

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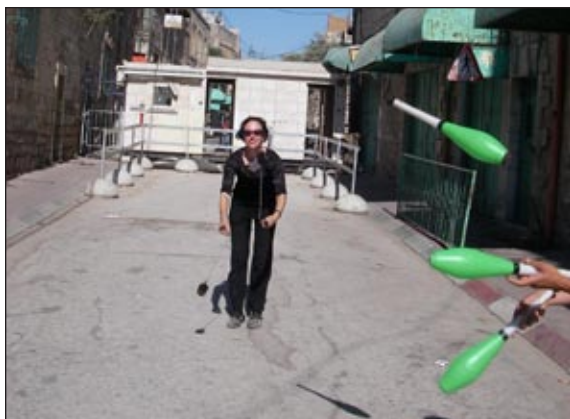
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The Tel Rumeida Circus for Detained Palestinians

Katie Miranda and Jonas Moffat, December, 2006



Fire dancing in the Tel Rumeida circus

Photo: Jonas Moffat

Checkpoint juggling

Photo: Katie Miranda

International Solidarity Movement volunteers, Katie Miranda and Jonas Moffat, recently finished a speaking tour of the San Francisco Bay Area. The purpose of these engagements, “Witnessing Palestine,” was to report back from Occupied Palestine and to raise funds in order to return and continue their work in the West Bank.

The work of ISM in Hebron is extensive and complex to say the least. The situation is unlike any other place in the West Bank because Palestinians live literally side by side with

Israeli settlers. As a result of their close proximity to each other, the Israeli military has set up a variety of restrictions that make life for Palestinians perilous and humiliating. This is in conjunction with violence from settlers whose purpose is to push the Palestinians out of Tel Rumeida and fulfill what they believe to be their religious destiny to control all of Hebron and eventually the whole West Bank.

The district of Tel Rumeida contains two Israeli settlements. Palestinians are not allowed to drive cars of any kind. This includes taxis, buses, fire trucks and ambulances. If a Palestinian is too sick to walk, they must be carried to another part of town where ambulances are “lawful”. People have died while being transported to an ambulance. Israeli ambulances will not serve Palestinian residents.

The police and security forces in the Tel Rumeida district are Israeli only and exclusively serve the Israeli settlers. Complaints made by Palestinians to the police are ignored. International volunteers are given the same

treatment. In the year that ISM has had a permanent presence in Tel Rumeida, no settler has ever been arrested for violence towards an international or Palestinian member of ISM despite innumerable assaults accompanied by video or photographic evidence.

Palestinians are subjected to IOF house invasions where soldiers enter homes at night, kick the family out or lock them in one room and destroy property or beat people. The IOF will also frequently and arbitrarily detain young Palestinian men at checkpoints for hours for no particular reason.

ISM and the Tel Rumeida Project have joined forces with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) in a legal campaign to open the roads to Palestinian vehicular traffic. ISM and TRP have been conducting video interviews of Palestinian residents of Tel Rumeida about the hardships they have faced as a result of being prohibited from driving cars. This testimony will be used in a forthcoming legal case by ACRI.

ISM and TRP volunteers accompany Palestinian children on their way to and from school as they pass in front of two settlements and are frequently attacked by both settler children and settler adults. Palestinian families in Tel Rumeida call ISM and TRP volunteers when their houses are invaded by IOF soldiers. Volunteers with video cameras use their international privilege to document both forms of violence. It has been well documented that IOF soldiers will not beat residents or destroy property if they know they are being filmed.

Katie and Jonas both learned the art of fire dancing and came to Palestine from San Francisco. Although we did not know each other before Palestine, we were pleasantly surprised to learn that the other had brought our fire dancing equipment (poi).

As we started performing, the soldiers stopped abusing the Palestinians and started watching us.

Sometimes we would become weary and exasperated from negotiating or arguing with soldiers regarding Palestinian men being detained at checkpoints. One day we saw a few of our neighbors being pushed around and verbally abused by Israeli soldiers, soldiers who were young enough to be their children. Rather than contributing to the bad energy, we decide to contribute to the absurdity of the situation.

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International Volunteers Needed in Palestine

Mohammad Khatib
December 3rd, 2006

For the last two years I have been a leader in the 'popular non-violent' struggle against the wall, the Israeli settlements and occupation near Bil'in, West Bank.

Bil'in is a Palestinian village that is struggling to exist. We are fighting to safeguard our land, our olive trees, our resources and liberty. The 'Apartheid wall' separates us from 60% of our land and our olive trees. For many of us the olive trees are our main source of income and have been in our families for centuries. While the Israeli government claims that the wall was built for their citizens' protection, we see that the wall is actually a violent way of stealing our land and giving it to the settlers.

Every day it destroys a bit more, and is gradually turning Bil'in into an open air prison for its inhabitants. Every Friday, we demonstrate peacefully in front of the "work-site of shame", and the Israeli army responds with violence, both physical and psychological.

I see it as our duty to widen the popular non-violent resistance in the whole of Palestine, and use our experience to empower and convince activists that this kind of resistance is the way to Freedom. Bil'in has become a symbol that can be applied in many other places.

I see all of you who believe in peace and justice around the world as my partners. I see you taking an active place in our struggle, taking the next step from solidarity to active participation. Please join in our demonstrations, and take part in our 2nd annual 'popular non-violent' conference. The conference will be held on April 18-20, 2007. This conference seeks to create a network that will improve coordination, share resources, launch joint campaigns to stop the Apartheid Wall, and work for justice. For more information please see our website: www.bilin-village.org or www.palsolidarity.org ■

Mohammad Khatib is an ISM activist in the Occupied West Bank



Both photos: S. Bloom

Speakers Available

ISM volunteers who have recently returned from Palestine are available to make presentations to high school and college campuses, churches, organizations and house parties.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Northern California ISM Support Group needs volunteers to help with local organizing activities. For more information, call 510-236-4250 or email info@norcalism.org

Some donations lessen the suffering. We try to stop the cause. Please support nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation.

A 4-year old girl attends a protest against the wall in Budrus. Her house has been a consistent target by Israeli soldiers. A few days before this demonstration, Israeli soldiers threw a tear-gas canister in her window, where she and her 8-month old sister were trapped.



Gaza Since Disengagement

by Henry Norr, December, 2006

Back in August, 2005, when Israel was pulling its 8,000 Jewish settlers out of the Gaza Strip, Palestinians and outside observers were divided about just what the move would mean for the 1.4 million Gazans who would remain.

Some, looking on the bright side, hoped for at least modest improvements, such as increased freedom of movement for Gazans and perhaps some revival in the area's long-suffering economy. Other observers, focusing on Israel's insistence on maintaining tight control of Gaza's borders, air space, and territorial waters, argued that the withdrawal of the settlers would bring no real change.

Hardly anyone, however, seems to have predicted that the 15 months following the withdrawal of the last Israeli settlers and soldiers would produce nothing but a massive increase in death, destruction, and deprivation.

ACCESS AND MOVEMENT

The Israeli pullback did bring one indisputable benefit: the dismantling of internal checkpoints that had for years strangled life within the Gaza Strip. But hopes of easier access to the

West Bank and the wider world, codified in an agreement concluded between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in November, 2005, proved to be only a short-lived illusion. Under pressure from the Americans,

Israel promised a long list of concessions: it would allow regular bus and truck convoys between Gaza and the West Bank; permit the export of all Gazan agricultural produce, open the Rafah border crossing to Egypt (under European Union supervision for a year, then under Palestinian control), allow construction of a new seaport, and so on.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared that the deal would "give the Palestinian people freedom to move, to trade, to live ordinary lives."

Twelve months later, on Nov. 30, 2006, the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs issued a report on compliance with the agreement one year on. Its conclusion: Israel was out of compliance with all six major provisions of the deal:

The promised bus and truck convoys between the two Palestinian territories have

not been allowed, and "the movement of people between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank remains virtually impossible," according to the U.N. Israel has closed the Karni crossing, the main outlet from the Strip for commercial traffic, more than half the days this year. On average a paltry 12 trucks per day have been allowed through, compared to an agreed target of 400 per day by the end of 2006. Less than 4 percent of Gaza's 2005 agricultural harvest was exported.

The Rafah Crossing was opened regularly during the first few months of the agreement, but since Palestinian resistance fighters captured an Israeli soldier on June 25, 2006, Israel has allowed EU monitors to open the crossing only occasionally (one day in seven on average) and unpredictably, often forcing would-be travelers to wait days for a chance to enter or leave the Strip. Israel has not allowed construction of the new seaport to begin, nor kept its promise to continue discussions about reconstruction of the Gaza airport it destroyed.

ECONOMY AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Under these pressures, the Gazan economy—already suffering from more than a decade of what economists call "de-development"—has continued to contract.

Israeli and Western responses to the elections of Jan. 25, 2006, when the Palestinians gave a clear majority in their legislative council to the Hamas movement, have exacerbated the problem: Israel stopped handing over the tax payments it collects for the Palestinians, which normally constitute about half the PA's budget, while the U.S. and European Union acceded to Israeli demands that they cut off most aid to the Palestinians.

These factors have combined to turn Gaza into a humanitarian disaster area: Some 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day. Three-quarters of the population depends on U.N. food aid for survival. About 70 percent of Gaza's potential workforce is out of work or working without pay. For most of the population electricity is available only irregularly (typically six to eight hours per day). Because electricity is required to pump water, most residents have no running water most of the day.

MILITARY ACTIVITY

Israeli settlers were scarcely out of the Gaza Strip when the Israeli military unleashed a devastating new tactic intended to intimidate the Palestinian population: creating devastat-

*Since the disengagement,
525 Palestinians have been killed,
and 1527 injured in Gaza*

ing sonic booms by breaking the sound barrier with supersonic jets flying at low altitude, typically at night, sometimes as frequently as an hour apart. The resulting shockwaves break windows by the thousands, crack buildings, induce miscarriages, exhaust everyone, and especially traumatize children, according medical authorities.

Gazans also continued to face more immediately lethal assaults. Within days of withdrawing the last of the military forces it had stationed in Gaza, Israel began a new wave of attacks inside the Strip, ostensibly in retaliation for the continued launching of homemade projectiles by Palestinian resistance fighters. These assaults included artillery fire from land and sea, air strikes, and “targeted assassinations” of alleged militants – and whoever happened to be near them.

2006 brought rising tension and increasingly frequent clashes between supporters of the two leading Palestinian political movements, Fatah and Hamas, but no letup in Israeli attacks. The violence reached an emotional crescendo on June 9-10, when Israel killed fourteen Palestinians and injured thirty-six others, including thirteen children. The death toll included seven members of the Ghaliya family, who had been enjoying a day at the beach; only seven-year-old Huda survived.

At that point many thought the situation in Gaza couldn’t get much worse; unfortunately, that view soon proved shortsighted. In late June, in response to the capture of its soldier, Israel launched a massive offensive, code-named “Operation Summer Rain,” throughout the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of civilians were arrested, including 10 ministers and 31 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Among the buildings destroyed were the Palestinian Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and the National Economy; the office of the Palestinian Prime Minister; and, most disastrously, Gaza’s only power-generating plant, which had produced 43 percent of the electricity consumed in the Strip.

While world attention shifted to the war in Lebanon, Israel continued its offensive in Gaza through the summer and into the fall of 2006. The culmination came in early November, when Israeli forces, citing the firing of Qassam projectiles into nearby Israeli towns, attacked the town of Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip with 70 tanks, F-16s, helicopter gunships, and armored bulldozers. A young resident of the town gave a vivid description of conditions during the attack: “No one can leave. No one

can flee. ... We have no water, no electricity. We hide in the remote corners of our houses. Ambulances are not authorized to enter into this occupied and closed zone. The soldiers ... shoot anyone that moves.”

Over eight days Israeli forces killed 82 Palestinians and injured more than 260 in and around Beit Hanoun. At least 39 of the dead were civilians, including 18 children and ten women. One IDF soldier was killed and another wounded. The worst tragedy came on Nov. 8, when a barrage of Israeli tank shells rained down on a group of homes in the town, killing 20, including eight children and seven women, and wounding at least 40; 13 of the dead, including two women and six children, belonged to one family, the Athamnas.

The November offensive pushed the toll from Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip since the completion of disengagement in September 2005 to approximately 525 Palestinians killed and 1,527 injured. More than 15,000 artillery shells were fired and 550 air strikes carried out. During the same period Palestinians fired approximately 1,700 projectiles into Israel, killing one and injuring about 45.

One bright spot in the Beit Hanoun saga was a courageous and creative act of non-violent resistance by about 200 local women, who surrounded a mosque in which about 60 men from the town had taken refuge and helped them escape – even after the Israelis opened fire on the women, killing two of them. A few weeks later hundreds of Palestinians in the nearby Jabaliya refugee camp also used non violence to prevent a planned Israeli air attack on one of the homes in the camp: they massed around and on the roof of the targeted home, until the Israelis called off the attack.

At this writing a ceasefire has been in effect in Gaza for just over a week. For the sake of the people of Gaza, we can only hope that it lasts. But what the horrifying history of the Strip since disengagement shows, once again, is that there are no shortcuts to peace – a lasting peace can be established only on the basis of a negotiated settlement that finally provides justice for the Palestinian people. ■

Henry Norr has spent six months in Palestine in recent years, starting with a visit to the Gaza Strip under ISM auspices in May, 2002.



Top: IDF destruction of olive orchards

Both Photos:
Palestine Red Crescent Society

We overcame our fear

The unarmed women of the Gaza Strip have taken the lead in resisting Israel's latest bloody assault

By Jameela al-Shanti in Beit Hanoun, November 9, 2006

Yesterday at dawn, the Israeli air force bombed and destroyed my home. I was the target, but instead the attack killed my sister-in-law, Nahla, a widow with eight children in her care. In the same raid Israel's artillery shelled a residential district in the town of Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip, leaving 19 dead and 40 injured, many killed in their beds. One family, the Athamnas, lost 16 members in the massacre: the oldest who died, Fatima, was 70; the youngest, Dima, was one; seven were children. The death toll in Beit Hanoun has passed 90 in one week.

This is Israel's tenth incursion into Beit Hanoun since it announced its withdrawal from Gaza. It has turned the town into a closed military zone, collectively punishing

its 28,000 residents. For days, the town has been encircled by Israeli tanks and troops and shelled. All water and electricity supplies were cut off and, as the death toll continued to mount, no ambulances were allowed in. Israeli soldiers raided houses, shut up the families and positioned their snipers on roofs, shooting at everything that moved. We still do not know what has become of our sons, husbands and brothers since all males over 15 years old were taken away last Thursday. They were ordered to strip to their underwear, handcuffed and led away.

It is not easy as a mother, sister or wife to watch those you love disappear before your

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Lebanese committee of activists on nonviolent strategies that we will employ in the coming weeks and months to confront Israel's occupation and to express the solidarity of many Americans and other peoples with the Lebanese and their rights, and to show that some of us oppose Israel's actions enough to come here and do what we can to stop them.

Whether we use the ancient term "barbarism" or its modern equivalent "terrorism" we recognize that it is just the latest form of racism to justify taking the "land of milk" from its people, who are portrayed as savages for defending their land and way of life. We hope that we may be able to change perceptions and demonstrate in person that our fate is bound directly to that of the Lebanese, and that our best protection is the protection of the rights of everyone.

Postscript: A week later, LebanonSolidarity, with the participation of ISM-Lebanon, launched its first nonviolent resistance action with 200 volunteers and 52 vehicles. For more of Paul's and other reports on relief activities after the ceasefire, go to www.hurriyya.blogspot.com or www.lebanonsolidarity.org. ■

Paul Larudee first went to Palestine in 1965 and began volunteering with the ISM in March, 2002.

Circus for Detained Palestinians

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Jonas took out his juggling pins and Katie took out her poi and we announced that there was going to be a circus performance at the checkpoint. As we started performing, the soldiers stopped abusing the Palestinians and started watching us. During our show, the men were released. This was the start of the Tel Rumeida Circus for Detained Palestinians.

We at TRCDP have since expanded our focus to include the following activities: 1.) drawing the attention of the IOF away from Palestinians detained at checkpoint and onto us, 2.) entertaining detained Palestinians, 3.) giving weekly night time fire performances to the residents of Tel Rumeida, and 4.) teaching circus arts to the kids. If you would like to donate to TRCDP in order to help further non-violent resistance through art and circus, contact joeskillet@riseup.net or visit our website: trcdp.livejournal.com. ■

Jonas resides in San Francisco and has volunteered with the ISM in 2003 and 2006. He will move to Palestine in 2007. Katie Miranda has been living and working in Palestine over the past year with the ISM and the Tel Rumeida Circus for Detained Palestinians.

We overcame our fear

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eyes. Perhaps that was what helped me, and 1,500 other women to overcome our fear and defy the Israeli curfew last Friday – and set about freeing some of our young men who were besieged in a mosque while defending us and our city against the Israeli military machine.

We faced the most powerful army in our region unarmed. The soldiers were loaded up with the latest weaponry, and we had nothing, except each other and our yearning for freedom.

As we broke through the first barrier, we grew more confident, more determined to break the suffocating siege. The soldiers of Israel's so-called defense force did not hesitate to open fire on unarmed women. The sight of my close friends Ibtissam Yusuf abu Nada and Rajaa Ouda taking their last breaths, bathed in blood, will live with me for ever.

Later an Israeli plane shelled a bus taking children to a kindergarten. Two children were killed, along with their teacher. In the last week 30 children have died. As I go round the



Photo: canalblog.com

The lesson the world should learn from Beit Hanoun last week is that Palestinians will never relinquish our land, towns and villages. We will not surrender our legitimate rights for a piece of bread or handful of rice. The women of Palestine will resist this monstrous occupation imposed on us at gunpoint, siege and starvation. Our rights and those of future generations are not open for negotiation.

Whoever wants peace in Palestine and the region must direct their words and sanctions

Why should Palestinians have to accept ethnic cleansing without protesting and resisting?

crowded hospital, it is deeply poignant to see the large number of small bodies with their scars and amputated limbs. We clutch our children tightly when we go to sleep, vainly hoping that we can shield them from Israel's tanks and warplanes.

Why should we Palestinians have to accept the theft of our land, the ethnic cleansing of our people, incarcerated in forsaken refugee camps, and the denial of our most basic human rights, without protesting and resisting?

to the occupier, not the occupied, the aggressor not the victim. The truth is that the solution lies with Israel, its army and allies—not with Palestine's women and children. ■

Jameela al-Shanti is an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council for Hamas. She led a women's protest against the siege of Beit Hanoun last Friday. A slightly longer version of this article originally appeared in The Guardian (U.K.) on Nov. 9, 2006 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,,1942942,00.html>

Kalandia and the Meaning of 'Security'

by S. Bloom, March, 2006

Traveling between Ramallah and Jerusalem used to be a relatively easy trip; things have changed both quickly and drastically since 2003. What used to be a temporary "flying" checkpoint near Kalandia Refugee Camp has evolved into a terminal blended seamlessly with the apartheid wall. Paid for out of the US aid to the Palestinian Authority, it is truly a triumph of sadism.

I arrived at the checkpoint to find a large group trying to get past the first gate. From inside the control room, a female Israeli soldier was shouting commands in Hebrew, and controlling how long the revolving metal-bar doors would remain open. People challenged her authority by trying to squeeze through more than one at a time. Eventually, I managed to squeeze through this door, but this was only the first stage, the actual checking of the permits & bags was yet to be done. As I was finally about to push my way through the next revolving door, it slammed shut and I got the red light! The soldier behind the glass was yelling things in Hebrew that I couldn't understand. But then, miraculously, he let me through.

The whole ordeal took 1.5 hours. According to the Israeli government, Kalandia is the newest and most efficient checkpoint that and it provides 'security.' As far as I am concerned it is still a place that by its very existence, miles within the Occupied West Bank, serves only to humiliate, control, and do violence to the lives of Palestinians. It is a constant reminder to Palestinians that they are the ghettoized slaves and serfs of the land, and that the Israeli boys with guns, whether up close and personal or behind blast-proof glass, have all the power in the world; it is, in other words, the true meaning of 'security,' which will never result in anyone's security. ■

S. Bloom is an ISM volunteer from the Bay Area.



*new entrance to Kalandia.
"A place that by its very
existence serves only to
humiliate and do violence
to Palestinians"*

Photo: S. Bloom

For more information or to register: www.palsolidarity.org

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