



# LIVE FROM *Palestine*

TESTIMONIES  
FROM THE  
NONVIOLENT  
RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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## Why Should You Be an Activist in Palestine?

Cide Benengeli, October 2010

The moral reason to go to Palestine cannot be disputed. Palestinians are currently in their seventh decade of military occupation and are subject to the most brutal immiseration and politicide. Only the most jaded conscience can fail to be moved at the sight of the horrors perpetrated. Furthermore, the Occupation is personal to Americans. The F-16s that rain death over the Gaza Strip come with “Made in USA” labels.

However, if compassion drives us, emotions alone cannot be the reason to go. One argument of IDF intellectual hitmen has been “but why do you unfairly target Israel when there are so many other tragic situations in the world?”. They have a perverse point. Unmanned drones wreak havoc in Pakistan, and ethnic cleansing plagues the Congo. If we are, however, to avoid comparing victims to see who is “more oppressed,” then we have to consider the strategic dimension.

One can imagine when it would be correct *not* to go to Palestine. If the Palestinian political movement were non-existent, then internationals could accidentally become neo-colonial tourists who unconsciously steal the political space from Palestinians. Furthermore, there are moments when staying at home is much more effective than travel abroad. American activism on foreign policy is testament to the virtues of political work from without. Finally, the simplest reason is that one’s work could be simply



demonstration in Bil’in

ineffective in changing the situation.

A status review is therefore in order. In the US, there have been noticeable, albeit glacial, changes in perceptions of Israel and the Occupation. Although today we find rigged debates favoring Israel, before there would be no debate *at all*. Can one imagine William Kristof ten years ago writing sympathetic portraits of Palestinian non-violent struggle? Even Tom Friedman recently wrote that Israel “really is behaving like a spoiled child.” These cracks in the propaganda machine show that going to Palestine can be critical. Firsthand observation not only strengthens one’s voice, but the act of traveling makes it clear that international pressures will not go away. The PR blows that Israel has suffered

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over the Gaza War and the Mavi Mavimara show that participatory actions have entered a critical phase.

A second consideration is the political landscape within the Occupied Territories themselves. Here, despite their bravery,

quite as advertised. Conversations I had in the West Bank and Jerusalem evinced disgust on the part of ordinary Palestinians for their leadership.

Although there is no collective policy for liberation, the gap is partly filled by towns and villages across the West Bank, where popular committees organize and coordinate nonviolent resistance. As expected, however, the brave work of these committees meets

*Internationals provide an important source of support for these currents of resistance within the Palestinian movement by getting out their message to the wider international sphere.*

Palestinians are politically extremely weak. Israel's efforts at politicide have successfully fragmented Palestinian society. If Palestinians are subject to increasing Israeli repression, their own officialdom inspires no confidence. As Karma Nablusi laments in a recent issue of London Review of Books, "...the key people in Ramallah ... no longer discuss strategies of liberation but rather the huge business deals that prey on the public imagination." If Fatah is a hollow shell of a resistance organization, Hamas is also not

with arrests and bullets. Palestinian "Gandhis" languish in jail if they are not already dead. In the West Bank village of Iraq Burin, soldiers called a popular committee one August weekend and threatened to kill anyone who set foot on the mountain where demonstrations are normally held. Two months earlier, the soldiers had made a similar call and murdered two young men when the Palestinians refused to call off the protest. Internationals provide an important source of support for these currents of

resistance by getting out their message to the wider international sphere.

They are no substitute for Palestinian initiatives, but internationalization of the struggle is a key strategy when isolation would be catastrophic.

Is international participation effective? My fellow activists and I often joked that all we did was run from village to village only to be tear gassed. It is easy to dismiss our efforts as a futile exercise. However, it is the cumulative work that brings the change.

Of all of ISM's work, the neighborhood watch in Sheikh Jarrah has been one of its most long-term and dedicated projects. Situated between the Old City and the East Jerusalem settlements of Pisgat Ze'Ev and French Hill, the neighborhood is a strategic location for Israel. Its colonization would create territorial continuity for the settlements but split up Palestinian land. The twenty



Hamde Abo Rahma

year process of legal and bureaucratic expropriation and displacement of Sheikh Jarrah's residents has created an extremely tense situation in which settlers and Palestinians live next to each other. Every day, settlers file false complaints against local residents and activists, tear out fencing, break windows, puncture tires, provoke scuffles, and, in a particularly nauseating example, once stole children's games from a yard. During my stay, one resident had his tires slashed which resulted in him being fired by the Israeli company for which he worked, on the obscene logic that the potential for him to be victimized again by a racist attack made him a liability for the company.

However, this is nothing compared to the violence less than a mile away in Silwan. The "City of David", as it has been relabeled by settlers, sometimes resembles more a war

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zone than a neighborhood. In late September, it was the site of demonstrations and brutal police repression including the murder of one man and two children. The robust presence of internationals in Sheikh Jarrah versus very little presence in Silwan helps to, in part, explain the difference. International presence helps temper violence since Israel, which could not care less about Palestinians, is very PR conscious.

It is the same story in the West Bank itself. Army repression and intimidation occurs everywhere, but murder of Palestinians is more common in the remote villages than in the villages which have internationals. Of course, there is something pathetic in such an evaluation of success, but it is safe to say that, in a land saturated by violence, the difference between tear gas and live ammunition is significant enough to not be scoffed at.



Hamde Abo Rahma

The reason, therefore, that international activists are effective is that the situation is both worse and better than it could be. It is worse insofar as the Palestinian political movement is weaker than ever, but it is better in that Israeli vulnerability and incompetence are also on the rise. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt said that force is not a sign of power but its very absence. In this in-between space, where things might seem more desperate than

***International activism at this stage is precisely the best way one can express solidarity for the new world that is not yet born.***

ever, we are entering the decisive stage in the Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination. International activism at this stage is precisely the best way one can express solidarity for the new world that is not yet born. ■

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*Cide is a graduate student in international relations at the University of Chicago. He spent a month and a half in Palestine last summer as an ISM volunteer.*

# A Kind of Schizophrenia

Paul Larudee, November 2010



Al-Awda

left: Nazi Germany,  
right: Palestine

**If Israel stops being a Jewish state, in much the way that South Africa is no longer a white state, nearly all the major issues between Palestinians and Israelis will vanish.**

It's easy to be on the side of peace and justice when a cause is popular, when the people we defend are admired, and when the sacrifice is not too great. But how many of us are willing to extend our principles to a cause that is unpopular, for people who are despised, at the risk of our livelihood, our family relations and our personal safety?

Of course, honest people disagree about what constitutes justice. There was a time in the history of the U.S. when slavery was commonly accepted. Later, it became our most controversial issue – the only one over which we fought a civil war. And yet today it is not controversial at all; indeed, it's a mystery how anyone could have condoned it, much less argued in its favor.

Here's another uncomfortable fact. The United States – the beacon of freedom and human rights – is a product of one of the greatest and most successful ethnic cleansing campaigns the world has ever known.

But how did it come to be this way? Were the people and the societies and the governments who committed these crimes so different from our own? Let us please not be so arrogant as to think so. We have only to look at how easily our society can be terrified and manipulated by the threat of communism or Islam, or how we can be led

to believe that marginal powers like North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran might seek to attack most powerful nation on earth.

Today we use the word "terrorist" to describe the persons who use violence against America and the West. During the ethnic cleansing of North America, we called them "savages." The function of such words is to make it unnecessary to question our motives when we attack them. In the moments after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, how many in our society asked the question why, and how many felt we didn't need to?

Our society is not unique in making racist assumptions that other societies are our congenital enemies, regardless of any legitimate grievances they might have about our policies. It is much easier to believe that they hate us for our freedom, and our government and media often encourage us to do so. Why are we so ready to accept that religion or ideology can transform entire populations into fanatic automatons, ready to sacrifice themselves to hurt us? Has our society never asked its youth to make such sacrifices to defend "the American way of life"?

We have to be very careful about demonizing others and about making judgments that fail to acknowledge the humanity of the persons we are judging, and the similarity of their motivations to our own. The Israeli founding father, David Ben Gurion, did not make that mistake:

*Why should the Arabs make peace? If I were an Arab leader I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it's true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing: we have come here and stolen their country.*

Now there's honesty. No compassion, but at least honesty.

Are we equally honest? In the place of our ancestors, would we have acknowledged indigenous sovereignty over North America,

*We must challenge the state of Israel and its policies that are directed toward the expulsion, marginalization and disappearance of the Palestinian people.*

asked permission to settle, and accepted to live in Indian majority nations?

And look at the feeble excuses made for the ethnic cleansing of the North American indigenous population: that they failed to adjust; that we made generous offers that they refused; that they missed every opportunity that came their way. Sound familiar? I fear that we are just as easily deceived today as in the past, and the issue of Palestine is the perfect example, though by no means the only one.

There are more than 11 million Palestinians in the world today. More than 8 million of them are unable to live in their homes in Palestine, and the remaining 3 million face inexorable pressure to leave.

As with slavery and the genocide of the American Indian, however, many of us accept ridiculous excuses for this state of affairs. Didn't the United Nations offer them nearly half their country in 1947? Didn't Israel offer them more than 90% of the 22% of their country that Israel hadn't yet officially annexed?

And the best one is: doesn't Israel have a right to exist as a Jewish state? (Of course, if that's true, then don't we have the obligation to assure the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, and indeed, don't they have the obligation to ethnically cleanse themselves?)

How many Americans once believed that Palestine was a land without people for a people without a land, and that Israel made the desert bloom? How many believed that in late May, 2010, several hundred Israeli commandos, armed to the teeth (but nonviolent), were attacked during a peaceful mission in the middle of the Mediterranean by unarmed (but violent) humanitarian aid volunteers.

How honest is our commitment to social justice? Perhaps there is a way to find out.

The word genocide was coined in 1943 by a Polish Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, who became an advisor during the Nuremberg trials at the end of WWII. Lemkin first used his new word in 1943 to describe how a people whose religion and culture were different from the rest of the society in which they lived lost a quarter of their worldwide population through mass slaughter, and how

a lot of the rest were widely dispersed. Many of them resettled in the Middle East, where they remain to this day.

You may be forgiven for thinking that I'm referring to the Jews, but in fact, Lemkin first applied the term to the Armenians. And the Armenian case is instructive, because Armenian refugees resettled in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Europe, the US and other places.

Although there are a lot of parallels between the cases of the Armenians and the Jews, there is one major difference. The Armenians never dispossessed an entire population in order to create a state, and today they live pretty much in harmony with the rest of the population wherever they are. (And by the way, so do Jews, except in the region where they chose to expel the existing non-Jewish population.)

So do we judge Armenians and Jews (or at least Israeli Jews) the same or differently? Here's another yardstick.

In 1948, there were substantial European populations in two non-European locations – South Africa and Palestine. In both of these locations they were the minority, but didn't want to be, and they decided not to be ruled by the majority.

The South African solution was apartheid—in effect, to make the non-



*left: Nazi Germany, right: Palestine*

Europeans non-citizens, except in the so-called "homelands" (i.e. Bantustans) set aside for them. In other words, South African whites disenfranchised the majority indigenous population, but did not expel them.

Continued on the next page

## A Kind of Schizophrenia, continued from page 5

Meanwhile, also in 1948, Israel seized 78% of Palestine and expelled approximately 730,000 of its non-Jewish inhabitants, who constituted 85% of the Palestinian population within the areas seized. On the other hand, they granted the right to vote to the remaining



left: Nazi Germany,  
right: Palestine

15% who managed to stay. In other words, Israel expelled the majority population, but enfranchised the remainder – essentially the converse of the South African solution.

So do we judge South Africa and Israel according to the same or different standards? Do we oppose the idea of an exclusionary white state in South Africa, but support

the idea of an exclusionary Jewish state in Palestine? How do we feel about exclusionary Muslim and Christian societies in the Balkans? Do we support segregation in Palestine (otherwise known as the two-state

solution) but not in the U.S.? How do we feel about the so-called threat to the white Anglo majority in California (or Arizona or Texas) as compared to what in Israel is called the “demographic bomb”?

You get the idea. If we are anti-racist, are we consistently so? And do we accept this principle wherever it takes us? In 1967, I.F. Stone was not afraid to be consistent:

*Israel is creating a kind of schizophrenia in world Jewry. In the outside world the welfare of Jewry depends on the maintenance of secular, non-racial pluralistic societies. In Israel, Jewry finds itself defending a society in which mixed marriages cannot be legalized, in which non-Jews have a lesser status than Jews, and in which the ideal is racial and exclusionist. Jews must fight elsewhere for their very security and existence against principles and practices they find themselves defending in Israel.*

This is the crux of the matter. Because if Israel has its South African transformation and stops being a Jewish state, in much the way that South Africa is no longer a white state, nearly all the major issues between Palestinians and Israelis will vanish. It will not be a utopia, and it will undoubtedly have many of the same problems that South Africa faces today. But it will have taken a major step towards social justice, and both Palestinians and Israelis (or whatever they choose to call themselves) will know peace – in exactly the way that South Africa now knows peace. Peace is at least the one thing that South Africa has undeniably achieved.

You might wonder how, as a practical matter, Israel could accommodate all the Palestinians who might want to return to their homes. As Dr. Salman Abu Sitta has shown, however, more than 90% of the 500+ Palestinian towns and villages destroyed when the state of Israel was created are still empty. Rebuilding them is not a major practical problem, given the will and resources to do so.

Of course, it is clear that Israelis will never willingly accept such a solution. However, Afrikaners never willingly accepted the dissolution of apartheid, either. The last poll taken before apartheid was dissolved showed that it still had more than 90% support

### 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.

among the white community. South Africa abandoned apartheid not because the whites demanded it, but because their leadership understood the futility of trying to make it work in the face of increasing worldwide condemnation and isolation. Why should we wait for Israel to be convinced of the morality of abandoning a Jewish state?

Is there a just and peaceful solution short of dissolving the Jewish state? Of course, it depends upon one's principles. However, let us please not deceive ourselves that we are consistently applying the same principles of social justice that deny the legitimacy of ethnic and racial exclusionism elsewhere.

Even on a practical level, there are problems with the idea of a Jewish state. Such a state will always have to find ways to preserve an overwhelmingly Jewish population. If that population declines as Israeli Jews increasingly emigrate to other countries, it will be forced to find ways to decrease the non-Jewish population. And no matter how we look at it, that will not be a pretty picture.

Justice cannot be built on a foundation of injustice. And there is no justice in a state where some people are welcome and others are not, and which is built upon the expulsion of people from their homes. This fundamental fact has to change in order to achieve justice in Palestine.

This is why we must challenge the state of Israel and its policies that are directed toward the expulsion, marginalization and disappearance of the Palestinian people. We must be unwilling to give Israel a pass on the principles that we apply everywhere else. ■



*Photos of the Nakba Expulsion*

*Paul Larudee is one of the founders of the Free Gaza and Free Palestine Movements, and an organizer in the International Solidarity Movement.*

## Donations Needed

If you donated after receiving the ISM Spring 2009 newsletter, we thank you very much. We covered our printing and mailing costs and more, and remain committed to sending you two newsletters per year for the indefinite future. However, our costs go far beyond the newsletter, so we hope that if you may be able to help again – especially if you were unable to do so last time.

How important is our work? There are lots of worthy appeals to help the victims of Israel's violations of human rights. However, for every victim that is helped another is created. Human rights work is never as well funded as victim relief, and yet our work is to prevent the creation of victims who then need your relief dollars.

We subsidize ISM volunteers in Palestine and provide funding to the ISM-Palestine team for office space, housing for volunteers, communications equipment, legal support and other requirements. We also participate in national and local activities to educate the American public and support other Palestine solidarity groups.

Please use the donation envelope on page 4/5 to give as generously as you can. *Thank you.*

## Call for Volunteers

The presence of activists reduces the risk of violence by extremist settlers and the Israeli army, and supports Palestinians' right to protest the occupation, the apartheid wall, and illegal settlements. International solidarity activists engage in non-violent intervention and documentation, which is support that enables villages and individual activists to maintain their continued resistance.

For this year's olive harvest we had a third of the volunteers that we had last year: no more than 20 at one time. This made it impossible to support the families in Nablus with their harvest to the extent we had promised.

Now that the harvest is over, our numbers have decreased significantly to an average of 10 total, with only 5 long term residents. It is so difficult with these numbers to maintain a basic presence in key areas like al-Khalil, Silwan, Sheikh Jarrah, and Jiftlik in the Jordan Valley, that it is an incredible strain to expend anyone for special projects, such as to live with families in need of a continuous international presence.

With increasing numbers of night-raids in Bil'in, Beit Ommar, and Silwan, and the regular violent destruction of Palestinian property by settlers, setting fires to fields



or flooding villages with raw sewage, the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine is greatly in need of new volunteers present on the ground to support the Palestinian popular resistance. Please join us! ■

London Beirut,  
ISM Media Coordinator, al-Khalil  
for more information: <http://palsolidarity.org/join/>

***For more information or to register: [www.palsolidarity.org](http://www.palsolidarity.org)***

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