



LIVE FROM Palestine

TESTIMONIES
FROM THE
NONVIOLENT
RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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Hope and Despair

Paul Larudee, May 2010

The desperation is easy to understand. Eight million Palestinians remain homeless. Whether they live in a crowded refugee camp or in Beverly Hills, Israel has denied them their homes for up to 62 years and is working hard to expel the rest.

The crushing Israeli restrictions on Palestinians is intended to destroy their ability to earn a living, get an education, maintain their culture, or even keep their families together. Under the new “infiltrator” law, it is now illegal for Palestinians in one part of Palestine to be in another part, and they are subject to “deportation” to the location shown on their Israeli-issued ID. Many who went abroad for education or work have been refused permission to return, and Jerusalemites are being expelled to the West Bank. More than 24,000 homes have been demolished. On top of that is the devastation of Gaza, with the threats and prospect of being repeated.

How, then, is it possible to feel hopeful?

The irony of major social change is that it typically occurs at a population’s darkest hour. The most repressive period of South African apartheid was after the passage of the 1987 “emergency laws.” However, the laws were the last card in the hand of the white supremacist government, and when they failed, apartheid was broken.

We are approaching such a point in Palestine. The scattered and nearly invisible solidarity groups that appeared (and then sometimes disappeared) with the first intifada in 1987-90 began to proliferate with the Sharon regime’s invasion of Palestinian cities in 2002. Now the groups are so numerous that they



Paul Larudee

are treading on each others’ feet, and forming larger projects to challenge Israeli policy. The voyages to Gaza by sea and land, culminating most recently in the massive Gaza Freedom March and the flotilla to Gaza with 600 passengers and 5000 tons of cargo, reflect the change, as does the global BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement and the international legal challenges to Israeli policies, practices and officials. Warrants are now outstanding for the arrest of Israeli officials in several countries.

Israel is on its heels. By some estimates, up to a million Jewish Israelis have emigrated to other shores, propelled by better opportunity and to escape an onerous military service obligation. Israel is keenly aware that the outlook for a Jewish majority state is grim. Its Jewish population is at its lowest proportion ever, and declining rapidly. The officially listed level of 75% is in doubt, as many take “extended visits” abroad, and Israel has tapped out most sources of Jewish immigration.

This explains the increasingly repressive

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The Berkeley Divestment Veto: a Minority Opinion Prevails

By The Editors, May 2010

The U.C. Berkeley student union made news recently with its vote to divest ASUC funds from two companies that supply the Israeli military with weapons used for occupation and war crimes. Although the ASUC senate voted overwhelmingly to divest, its president vetoed the measure. Unfortunately there were not enough votes to override his veto. However, we should not look upon this as a defeat. The debates and the resulting publicity are nearly as important as the outcome of the vote. Many more people heard the arguments for divestment and learned about the issue. With enough education and outreach, the measure will pass the next time it is introduced.

Divestment initiatives like the one at U.C. Berkeley are part of the BDS movement that is gaining momentum and visibility in many areas of the world. Although they will not succeed every time, activists for Peace

and Justice in Palestine can have a great impact by organizing and participating in BDS actions.

BDS: BOYCOTT, DIVEST AND SANCTION

Boycotts, divestment and sanctions have been highly successful at influencing the course of many human rights struggles. The end of Apartheid in South Africa, and the repeal of Jim Crow laws in the southern U.S. are two examples of how these tactics can succeed.

Types of boycotts include Academic, Cultural, Consumer and Sports. Divestment initiatives seek to encourage and pressure individuals, financial institutions and companies to shed their investments in a country. Sanctions are diplomatic, legal or governmental penalties or injunctions placed upon a country to apply pressure against occupation and human rights violations.

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Hope and Despair

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policies toward the Palestinian population, as a means to restrain or reverse its growth. As with South Africa's "emergency laws," however, this will only delay the inevitable, and increase the suffering in the meantime.

That is why it is more urgent than ever to challenge Israel's human rights violations with new and creative forms of nonviolent

The irony of major social change is that it typically occurs at a population's darkest hour.

resistance. Our sister organization, the Free Palestine Movement, is planning an aircraft to Gaza later this year. The Free Gaza Movement continues to send boats, along with the Turkish IHH, the European Campaign Against the Siege, the Greek and Swedish Boat to Gaza projects, in which the Free Palestine Move-

ment also participates. In addition, the Free Palestine Movement, the Palestinian Return Centre (UK) and the Al-Awda Palestine Right to Return Coalition (USA) are organizing Palestinian volunteers to fly to Tel Aviv to exercise their right to return to their homes. ISM, of course, continues to send volunteers to participate in the strong and still growing Palestinian nonviolent resistance movement, despite increasing obstacles from Israel.

The strength of these movements shows that the brutal acts of Israeli authorities are themselves a sign of weakness and despair, with the difference that the future prospects for a Jewish supremacist state are increasingly devoid of hope. When they, like the last white South African regime, realize that the only solution is to treat all humans as equals, they will rediscover the hope and peace that now eludes them. ■

Paul Larudee first went to Palestine in 1965 and has been active in the ISM since 2002. He is co-founder of the Free Gaza and Free Palestine movements.

Local ISM Chapter Partners with Independent Documentary Film

[Corner Store is] a remarkable achievement of documentary filmmaking; immortalizing the everyday to express a facet of human life. (SF Bay Guardian)

Corner Store tells the true story of Yousef Elhaj: beloved shop owner, Palestinian immigrant and long-distance father. It is a resoundingly universal tale of hard won choices for a better life, now set on the back drop of San Francisco and modern-day Palestine.

Seizing the opportunity to amplify the quiet voice of this incredible man and his story, Director Katherine Bruens and a small and dedicated team of filmmakers set out to create a documentary that throws its audience directly into this man's shoes. After ten years of astonishing sacrifice and patient loneliness, the feature-length film follows Yousef's long awaited journey to reunite with his wife and now grown children, and his confrontation with the new realities in his family and his fractured homeland.

The filmmakers realized that engaging and partnering with the communities that care deeply for people like Yousef would make the project truly unique and impactful. As a result, a companion outreach initiative was developed to link with the organizations most closely involved with the issues raised by the film. Early partners, including NorCal ISM, had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the initial cut of the film and offered support and legitimacy in efforts to involve other local groups. The Corner Campaign, now comprised of over ten organizations, was officially launched this past March with a red-carpet benefit screening that brought together over 700 film lovers, Arab Americans, and activists and drew attention to the grassroots networks who are working for peace, justice, cultural acceptance, and equity today.

The project provides a powerful example of how thoughtful documentary work, combined with passionate community advocacy, can draw attention to the untold stories and lead to a stronger, more solid movement. The filmmakers are preparing to launch a national

screening series to reach audiences outside the Bay Area as part of their outreach strategy. If you are interested in sponsoring a screening please contact communityscreening@thecornerdocumentary.org.

To find out more about the film, or to help the film on its way with a small tax-deductible donation visit: www.thecornerdocumentary.org. ■



Tristan Anderson and Gabby Silverman: 2010 ISM Rachel Corrie Award Recipients

March 2010 A chilly day in the shadows of the concrete canyons of San Francisco's financial district was the setting for the presentation of the second annual Northern California ISM Rachel Corrie Award on March 15, 2010.

March 16 marked the seventh anniversary of the death of ISM volunteer Rachel Corrie in 2003 at the hands of an Israeli soldier who ran her down with a bulldozer as she stood in front of a Palestinian home that the soldier had orders to destroy. Her parents, Cindy and Craig Corrie, are suing the Israeli government.

However, March 13, also marks the date that ISM volunteer Tristan Anderson, of Oakland, California, was gravely wounded in the head by another Israeli soldier firing a rocket propelled tear gas canister in 2009 as Tristan was filming Israeli soldiers attacking Palestinian residents of the West Bank village of Ni'lin. He has been in an Israeli hospital ever since.

Beside him on that day was his partner, ISM volunteer Gabrielle ("Gabby") Silverman. She has remained at his side ever since, advocating on his behalf and providing a liaison for ISM and Tristan's many other supporters. She and Tristan's parents, Bill and Nancy Anderson, stayed with Tristan during many months of often discouraging medical news, until at the end of 2009 Tristan started to make remarkable progress. His news continues to be hope-

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The Village of Al-Aqaba: Resistance Through Survival

Ryan Fay, August 2009



Ryan and children planting a peace sign garden at Al-Aqaba.

Photo: Ryan Fay



A camper with a T-shirt that says 'peace' in English, Arabic and Hebrew.

Photo: Ryan Fay

While volunteering with ISM in the West Bank in the summer of 2009, I visited the village of Al-Aqaba in the northern part of the Jordan Valley, next to the town of Tubas. The area has fertile land and a plentiful underground water aquifer. Israel would like to confiscate these resources, and has built three military bases around the village. Village residents and nearby Bedouins are now confined to less than 0.1 percent of their original lands. Israel implements these land confiscation and exploitation policies through zoning and planning laws forced upon the residents. The Israeli occupation government has issued 39 demolition orders in the village; no construction is ever approved. These policies are intended to destroy yet another Palestinian village, forcing its residents to join the approximately 6 million Palestinians who have been driven from their lands and homes.

The dispossession began in 1967, when the Israeli Army began to use the village and surrounding lands for training exercises. In 1970 three military bases were built around Al-Aqaba, and a fourth was sporadically utilized. Much of the village land was confiscated at that time, and the entire area was declared a closed military zone. These actions largely put an end to agricultural production, the rearing of livestock, and public services such as health care and education. Israeli Occupa-

tion Forces (IOF) also began to raid homes and conduct training exercises, using live ammunition. Mines were placed in the village fields and soldiers began to harass the villagers. To date, these practices have resulted in the death of eight and the maiming of more than fifty residents.

Haj Sami Saadi is the mayor of Al-Aqaba. In 1972, when he was 16, he was shot three times in the back by Israeli forces while working in his family's fields. He was left paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair ever since. 700 of the village's 1000 residents fled in search of a safer place to live. Later, during the Oslo peace process, Haj Sami dreamed that peace might finally come to his village.

These dreams ended in 1999 when the IOF destroyed a newly installed electrical and telephone infrastructure. Appeals to Israeli authorities brought re-installation of the connections. Next, they lost the ability to irrigate their fields when an IOF bulldozer, without warning or cause, filled in the village's small agricultural reservoir. The first seven home demolitions occurred in 1999, leaving the owners homeless. No compensation, redress, food, shelter or support of any kind was offered to these families as they struggled to rebuild their lives and feed their children. Dreams of peace gave way to a new period of tragedy and hardship.

In 2002, as a result of a village petition to the Israeli High Court of Justice, a decision was issued that removed one of the three military bases surrounding the village, and the IOF was ordered to stop using the village for training exercises. With this court ruling, the residents hoped to resume normal, dignified lives. They built a kindergarten and women's center to encourage displaced families to return. 130 children and mothers used the facilities.

In 2004, Israeli Army Civil Administration issued orders that would effectively raze the entire village. The demolition orders included the mosque, medical center, kindergarten,

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and most of the homes in the village. In June 2006 an American serving in the IOF opened fire in the village mosque. He fired 106 bullets before taking his own life. Fortunately, no residents were harmed.

In 2007, the Israeli High Court of Justice heard an appeal from the village to revoke the military order calling for demolition of the village. Instead, the Court validated the order, authorizing confiscation of 80% of the remaining village land and the demolition of any structure.

Al-Aqaba has no history of extremism or armed resistance. It is a simple, isolated village. The people have never given Israel any reason to attack them or destroy their lives. The father of one family with 12 sons asked a soldier, "Where am I suppose to take my family? And what do you think my son's attitude to Israel will be when they grow up? Is this going to bring peace?"

The day I visited the village, I was cheerfully greeted by mayor Haj Sami and a group of children who were attending a summer camp that the village was hosting. First, I helped the children plant a flower garden in the shape of a peace sign. Next, they gave me a tour of the school, hospital, and women's center. Their kindness, pride, and hospitality made it unfathomable that anyone would want to destroy such a place.

Several years ago an Israeli Army jeep crashed outside Al-Aqaba. The villagers rescued and saved the lives of the soldiers who have caused them so much pain. Three days later the army delivered a demolition order

for the village's health clinic. The village faces many hardships and unimaginable oppression, yet the people still remain peaceful, deplore violence, and demand justice. Israeli violence and aggression is met with calls for peace and acts of kindness. Yet, Israeli consistently meets their non-violent resistance with violence, disrespect for basic human rights and destruction.

Many international volunteers go to Bil'in, Jerusalem and Gaza, where civil disobedience and demonstrations get attention and are important. However, there are many places like Al-Aqaba that simply refuse to flee or give up in the face of terror. This form of resistance is also a form of steadfastness against injustice, and no less heroic. ■

Ryan Fay is completing his law degree at Golden Gate University, after which he will attend the LLM program for Public International Law at Amsterdam School of Law. During his most recent trip to Palestine, he interned at the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, and volunteered with ISM.



Unique minaret with a double peak representing a peace sign.

Photo: Ryan Fay

Rachel Corrie Awards

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ful, and can be followed at www.justicefortristan.org.

The Northern California chapter of ISM therefore awarded its 2010 Rachel Corrie award to Tristan Anderson and Gabrielle Silverman, in honor of their steadfastness and solidarity in support of the human rights of the Palestinian people and in particular their right to resist Israeli occupation and ethnic cleansing.

So why did the Northern California chapter

of ISM ask its representative, Katie Miranda, to present the award among San Francisco's skyscrapers? Why had Palestinians and their supporters, including Tristan and Gabby's friends, gathered at that location? Because on the 22nd floor of one of those granite towers perches the celestial bunker of the Israeli consulate, in untouchable isolation from accountability, international law and human rights principles. As Katie said that day, "They need to know that we are here, that we are in Palestine, that we are with Palestinians until their rights are restored and respected, and that we are never going away." ■



The most effective measures are defined in a way that is appropriate to the situation, in order to ensure the best chance of success. The Berkeley divestment measure, for example, was specific to two companies that sell arms to Israel (and other nations that violate human rights) and did not single Israel out.

ORIGINS OF THE ISRAEL BDS MOVEMENT

The Israel BDS movement was launched in Palestine in 2005 with the initial endorsement of over 170 Palestinian organizations. A broad consensus among civil society had developed there about the need for a broad and sustained non-violent resistance campaign that would attempt to sanction and penalize Israel in financial terms for its ongoing occupation and human rights abuses. The signatories to this original call represent the three major components of the Palestinian people: the refugees in exile, Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the subjugated Palestinian citizens of the Israeli state. ISM Palestine endorsed the BDS call.

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are still at the forefront of this effort. For example, in April 2010 the Palestinian Authority issued a law banning trade in goods made in settlements, and began a campaign to urge European nations to boycott goods from settlements as well.

In the U.S., BDS activism picked up significantly after a meeting in September 2009, when approximately 300 groups that make up the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation voted in favor of an academic and cultural boycott of Israel. NorCal ISM members who attended that meeting intend to propose a resolution to expand this to an economic boycott, as well, at a future meeting.

ISRAEL'S RESPONSE TO THE BDS MOVEMENT

Israel, as well as its advocates in the U.S and other countries, are taking the BDS movement very seriously. However, Israel is struggling to find an effective way to counter BDS because its usual tactics of violence and repression aren't effective against a movement that is being enacted by students, cultural workers, unionists, churches, progressive governments

and sports fans all around the world.

Even though Israel can't bomb this campaign away, it is using increasingly repressive measures against Palestinians in the OPT who participate in the BDS movement. For example, Mohammad Othman, a prominent BDS and anti-Wall activist from Jayyous, was arrested and held for over 4 months without charges when he returned to the West Bank after traveling to Norway to meet with officials there about divestment. Here in the U.S., AIPAC reacted to the Berkeley divestment measure by announcing that they will "take over Cal student government." The Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported in March that forums have been held in the U.S. and in Israel about how to combat the BDS movement.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Support existing consumer boycotts and divestment initiatives. Are you patronizing or investing in companies that profit from the Occupation? Find out by checking the website www.whoprofits.org

Learn more about the goals and reasons for the BDS movement. The Global BDS Movement <http://bdsmovement.net/> website is an excellent resource that contains links to groups in various locations that you can connect with.

WHY BDS IS BOUND TO SUCCEED

A paradox of Israel is that it fears world perception as an apartheid society even as it pursues increasingly misguided policies that make this perception inevitable. Soon it will be impossible for all but Israel's staunchest supporters to deny its inherent injustice. Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert stated this as well as anyone when in 2007 he declared: "If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the state of Israel is finished." More recently, making a similar point, Ehud Barak, Israel's defense minister, said "as long as between the Jordan and the sea there is only one political entity, named Israel, it will end up being either non-Jewish or non-democratic . . . If the Palestinians vote in elections, it is a binational state, and if they don't, it is an apartheid state." ■

Palestine Sad

Sydney Morris, April 2010

January and February were my first two months in Palestine. Although it was cold and rainy, I spent nearly all this time on the streets of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, staying with the Gawi and Al-Kurd families. Nowhere is the racist nature of Israeli policies more apparent than in Sheikh Jarrah. Israel recognizes a unilateral right of return for Jews (only Jews) to Sheikh Jarrah, based on vague Ottoman Empire documents. Palestinian families are being forced out of their homes and onto the streets so that Jewish colonists can move in. ISM maintains a 24/7 presence on the streets of Sheikh Jarrah. Cameras ready, we sit, play, give tours and interviews, de-arrest and document alongside the Palestinian residents.

I currently spend most of my weekends in the village of Al-Ma'sera near Bethlehem. Residents of Al-Ma'sera have been participating in nonviolent Popular Struggle demonstrations for the past three years, and as a result they are being raided, arrested, detained and tortured. If you've spent time in Palestine you will understand how some villages, people and struggles connect with you. I feel that about Al-Ma'sera. Perhaps it is because at night their village is full of more stars than I've ever seen. It is also nice that the Popular Committee will stay up late with us smoking hookah on the rooftop while simultaneously doing night watch for Israeli Occupation Forces entering the village.

It's difficult to find the emotions to describe how being here makes me feel. For this reason, I created an emotion: 'Palestine Sad'. It is a baseline emotion and I go up or down and eventually settle in the middle, at Palestine sad. This emotion is created by a mix of observations, language barriers, outrage at the occupation, delicious food that I don't find in the United States, cultural obligations, settler attacks, relief when tear gas and steel coated rubber bullets do not hit me, media misrepresenting the conflict, and consuming too many Coca Cola products for my conscience to handle. Essentially, if one looks

closely in any place or situation here, one will see the negative effects of Israel's ethnic cleansing, and this makes me Palestine Sad.

Even the community dinners in Sheikh Jarrah, which ISM started two months ago, are Palestine Sad. Delicious Palestinian dishes are made and shared with residents and international and Israeli activists. Community dinners have given the women of Sheikh Jarrah reason to teach me how to cook Palestinian foods, and I am very grateful. If a dinner is too successful, and by that I mean lots of people, music, children playing, or too much dessert, we know that settlers illegally occupying the Gawi home will call the police. Within minutes flashing lights arrive and games of soccer are called "illegal demonstrations" or dabke music is a "noise violation." The evening turns into Palestine Sad.

Emotions aside, I see the work that ISMers do across Palestine as supportive and meaningful. Our presence at demonstrations ensures villagers that their resistance will not go unreported. Our late night IOF raid watches show Palestinians that their struggle is shared. Our presence in courtrooms

If you've spent time in Palestine you will understand how some villages, people and struggles connect with you.

tells the Israeli judges that a racist ruling is an illegitimate ruling. Our presence across Palestine sends a clear message to the Israeli government that the world is not only watching the nonviolent Popular Struggle to end the occupation. It is participating. ■

Sydney Morris is an ISM volunteer from the Bay Area



Life Under Occupation.

Photo: Sydney Morris

Call for Volunteers

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) needs nonviolent resistance volunteers to stand with Palestinians against the theft and colonization of Palestinian land. You will witness and report human rights violations, participate in nonviolent demonstrations, resist home demolitions and land confiscations, accompany children and patients to school and hospital, remove roadblocks, or just share time with Palestinians, listen to them, and help ensure that their voices are heard. When you return to your community you will be better equipped to advocate for the freedom and self-determination of the Palestinian people. ■



More info: solidarity@norcalism.org,
510-236-4250, www.norcalism.org or
www.palsolidarity.org

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

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