



# LIVE FROM *Palestine*

TESTIMONIES FROM  
THE NONVIOLENT  
RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

VOLUME 1

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## The Slow Creep of Israel's Annexation

By John Petrovato

*The ongoing destruction of olive trees in Jayyous to make room for Israeli settlement expansion.*

Photo: [www.jayyousonline.org](http://www.jayyousonline.org)

First they were told that they were building a wall between the two populations for the protection of both.

Then they were told them that the wall on their land was necessary for the protection of Israel. Then they told the Palestinian farmers on whose land the wall rests that they would have unlimited access to their lands ... after which gates were erected along the wall—gates which would be opened only three times a day.

Then the Palestinian farmers were told that if they wanted to work their land—now on the Israeli side of the wall—they would have to get special Israeli work permits in order to pass through the gates which only opened three times per day. Now the residents of Jyayous have discovered that 850 dunams (1 dunum = 1/4 acre) of their farmland on the other side of the wall is being cleared for the construction of a new settlement of “Jewish only housing.” Accompanying the new settlement will be a large military base, just meters away from the village.

This is the story of Jyayous. Jyayous is a small village of approximately 3,500 people located six kilometers from the “green line” (the internationally recognized border between Israel and the Palestinian territories). The so-called Israeli “security” wall, as in most places on the West Bank, was not erected on the green line border but, rather, deep in Palestinian territory. Consequently, it consumes some 85% of Jyayous agricultural land. Only about fifteen percent of Jyayous’s land is now located on their “Palestinian” side of the wall. After the

Israeli soldiers informed the Palestinians that they would require work permits in order to pass through the gate in order to work their own lands—though now on “Israeli” territory—they told them that the only ones likely to receive permits were those either over fifty or under fifteen years of age. Finally, they told the



farmers—whose crops have been devastated by these decisions—that they would no longer be able to sell what is left of their produce in Israeli markets.

These events have had disastrous social and economic consequences for the farmers and community of Jyayous. This land has been taken illegally, and in direct opposition to the Military Court of Israel’s decision just last year that land would not be taken from farmers. In a matter of less than a year following that decision, various measures have been taken and barriers erected to make it extremely difficult—if not impossible—for these farmers to get to their lands. In the end, it seems as though the observation made to me by a soldier one year ago has turned out to be true: “the [security] wall will be the new green line.”

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# The Unseen Future: An ISM Volunteer Reports from Refugee Camps in Lebanon

By Brooke Atherton

**F**ifty-six years since the ethnic cleansing of Palestine that established Israel in 1948, there are almost 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Over half live in inhumane conditions in twelve official refugee camps assisted by UNWRA (the U.N. agency responsible for administration of Palestinian refugee camps and services) and seventeen unofficial refugee communities that receive no official outside assistance. Over 60%, or 240,000 of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live in poverty and over 10% are considered special hardship cases by UNWRA. This means that 40,000 Palestinian



An example of the precarious and sub-standard infrastructure.

Photo: Brooke Atherton

refugees in Lebanon live on less than \$30 a month.

In addition to providing much needed social services and promoting political empowerment with a focus on women and children, Association Najdeh plays an important role in educating the international community about the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Najdeh wants more of its staff to be able to speak with international delegations, so as part of my volunteer work I am facilitating English conversation workshops for six women on staff. They know English quite well but want more practice.

Wednesdays and Fridays I join Buthayna, Reja, Sana, Fatima, Majida, and Amina in Najdeh's offices. I usually prepare questions related to their work and the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. For five of the six women, these questions are also about their own experiences as second generation Palestinian refugees. They are energetic

and welcoming and we often laugh together. Despite this, I often leave saddened by our conversations. One day, we spent our entire time discussing, "What are the problems facing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon?" These were some of their responses:

- There is one doctor for 12,000 people in Shatila camp.
- The doctor treats seventy or more people a day.
- Moisture in the homes creates mold causing many health problems such as allergies and asthma.
- Every day the electricity goes out in Shatila camp for about six hours. Most of the time there is no electricity.
- Many people have died from electrocution because of dangerous electric wires.
- There are six water wells for all of Shatila camp. Everyone depends on these wells.
- People must buy the water because the wells are privately owned.
- Sewage is always coming out of broken pipes and running in the streets.
- The water system does not work. The clean water mixes with the sewage and causes lots of sickness.
- In Lebanon it is illegal for Palestinians to work in over 70 professions. Palestinians may only take the lowest paying jobs with the worst conditions, such as construction and agriculture.
- When Palestinians work outside the camps, they must work illegally and therefore have no rights and no health insurance. They sometimes do not get paid. If they are fired,

## ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES WORLDWIDE:

- 2,400,000 Live in and around refugee camps in Jordan
- 620,000 Live in and around refugee camps in the West Bank
- 800,000 Live in Gaza
- 200,000 Displaced inside Israel
- 461,000 Live in and around refugee camps in Lebanon
- 461,000 Live in and around refugee camps in Syria
- 575,000 Live around Arab countries in refugee camps and with the general population on temporary bases.
- 575,000 Live scattered around the world
- 6,092,000 Total Estimated Palestinian Refugees; [www.palestinerefugees.org](http://www.palestinerefugees.org)

there is no severance pay. Palestinians in Lebanon cannot form unions.

When I visited Shatila camp with Leila (Najdeh's director), I saw the harsh reality. Najdeh's center in Shatila is across the road from a dilapidated UNWRA school. UNWRA schools are the only public schools that Palestinians in Lebanon are allowed to attend. Over half of UNWRA schools run double-shift school days and the average class size is 43 students. Substandard schooling and intense poverty forces many children to look for paid work. Only 61% of Palestinian school-aged children in Lebanon are enrolled in school. Most do not continue on to high school. At the Najdeh center, we visited a literacy class for girls aged 9 to 12 who were eagerly writing their lessons on a hot afternoon. I couldn't help asking myself: Why should these girls be denied a decent education just because they are Palestinian and poor?

After visiting the Najdeh center, we walked through the streets of the camp—a mix of gravel, dirt, and broken pavement wide enough for cars only on the edges of the camp and elsewhere narrow walkways no more than three feet wide between tall buildings of haphazardly constructed homes. The Lebanese government restricts building in many camps. This has forced Palestinians to build upwards, often with substandard and unsafe materials. Additionally, the Lebanese government does not provide adequate infrastructure and services like water and electricity. The systems are overloaded, creating unhealthy and dangerous conditions. The density and lack of infrastructure creates dire conditions and most homes are unfit for healthy habitation.

In many places, people have not been permitted to rebuild bombed out buildings, scarred by years of Israeli attacks and Lebanon's own civil war. Children must play on heaps of rubble and rubbish, in dark alleyways and stairwells where sewage runs freely. Bored children became interested in us as outsiders walking through the camp and shouted, "*Sowerni* (Take my picture)," grabbing their younger siblings to join in the temporary entertainment. We left the children and ended our tour of Shatila in a mournful place—the mass grave of Palestinians massacred by Israeli-supported right-wing Lebanese militias in September, 1982. The horror of this three day rampage, overseen by Ariel Sharon, in which countless women were raped and over 2,000 Palestinians were slaughtered, permeates the camp.

There is a new project in Shatila camp. Young people are painting murals about Palestine on many of the walls—some are hopeful, others defiant, and some depict the existing unbearable conditions. One woman who volunteers with youth told me, "They are not even allowed to dream of Palestine." Although Palestine is only a three hour drive from Beirut, Palestinians are not allowed to enter the border zone and look upon their homeland through Israel's fortified border.

Despite the vivid colors of the new murals, I wonder if these two dimensional paintings of a homeland so rich in beauty and tradition can sustain a third and fourth generation of Palestinian refugees born so close yet so far from home. After leaving Shatila, I asked Leila what she thinks is the biggest challenge facing Palestinians in Lebanon. Her reply, "The unseen future."

Lately I have felt more desolate than hopeful in the face of Palestinians' lives here, the continued denial of Palestinian refugees' right to return to Palestine, and the ongoing ethnic cleansing through U.S.-backed Israeli military attacks, economic strangulation, and land theft in Palestine. I complained to my friend Raida, who also works with Najdeh, "It is so difficult for me to think of what people in the U.S. can do."

She replied, "It is simple." The same systems that uphold the occupation of Palestine uphold the mistreatment of Palestinians in Lebanon and uphold oppression around the world and in the U.S. Wherever and however we are able to work against racism, economic exploitation, colonialism, and imperialism, it is all the same struggle. We are working for justice and liberation. ■

*Brooke Atherton is a Bay Area Palestine Solidarity activist*



*Girls in a window of Naher Al Bared camp.*

Photo: Brooke Atherton

*Residents are frequently not allowed to rebuild buildings destroyed by years of Israeli attacks and Lebanon's civil war.*

Photo: Brooke Atherton



# Fall 2004 Olive Harvest: Reports from Bay Area Activists

## Kufer Thilth: A Microcosm of the West Bank

November 9, 2004  
By Sarah Olson

I see this village as a microcosm of what it is like for farmers to live in the West Bank. Kufer Thilth is a small farming village on very fertile and beautiful land. It had a rich agricultural industry. Right now it is facing many problems. First there is the wall. It has grabbed up to 6000 dunums of land (1 dunum equals 1/4 acre) and caused the destruction of many olive trees and other crops. Also, the main city in the area is Qalqilya which is completely surrounded by a towering concrete wall. This makes it impossible for the farmers to get their produce to market there. It also makes it impossible for the city dwellers to come to jobs in the village farms. There is only one checkpoint through which you can get into Qalqilya, and it is only open a few

hours a day. There are two roads that access this checkpoint, and these roads are right on top of each other. One is for settlers. One is for Palestinians.

The other problem that Kufer Thilth is facing is the settlements. The village is nearly surrounded by settlements, and they are constantly expanding. The settlers harass the farmers in many ways including shooting at them, uprooting their olive trees, cutting them down, and putting chemicals in the soil so that nothing can be grown. When the farmers do access their land they are often chased off by armed settlers, who are backed up by the Israeli army.

In addition, most of the roads on which you drive to get to Kufer Thilth are closed off by one checkpoint or another. It's difficult to get anywhere. One villager I spoke with said the situation facing people living in Kufer Thilth is "like waiting for death." ■

*Sarah Olson is a local independent reporter*

*whose work has appeared on Free Speech Radio News, Making Contact, the Radical Tea Party and KALX's Amandla!*

## Olives Fell Before the Scythe—

October 30, 2004  
By Andy

—or rather the well-wielded stick—of Abid, our host, as he stood barefoot between the upper branches of the olive tree, slashing away at the stems. Olives fell also to our fingers, combing and squeezing the abundant fruits from their stems on the reachable branches, and dropping handful by handful to the plastic mats covering the ground. We moved around the tree and milked the branches empty. But we did not produce the showers of olives that rained from the shuddering branches chastised by Abid's rod. Thwack after thwack his stick exhorted the branches to give up their fruit, and so they did, bouncing on our heads and rolling over the mats amongst the gathering lake of olives, leaves and stems over which we gingerly stepped.

We ISM folk are helping with the olive harvest on Abid's farm near his village of Kufer al Labad, in the Tulkarm district of the West Bank. Abid's olive trees are near (maybe 0.5 km) the Israeli settlement of Avnei Kefets, and our presence here acts as a deterrent (hopefully) to potential settler harassment of Palestinians harvesting their crop. To us the settlement is a couple of buildings, a glimpse of road, and patches of barbed-wire fence on the ridge of the terraced hill of rocks and



Pouring olives from one bucket to another, using the breeze to winnow out the olive leaves — when done over and over, it's more tiring than picking.

*Photo: Jeff Pehrul*

Harvesting in close proximity to the encroaching Israeli settlement of Avnai Khefets, which is just east of Tulkarem.

*Photo: Father Peter Dougherty; Michigan Peace Team*



olive trees we are working on. We had a lucky time in that we had no confrontations over the three days of our harvest. The closest we came to violence was a pair of settlers staring down at us for a couple of hours. With binoculars we could see one of them perched on his chair with a rifle slung across his lap, like a moonshiner defending his still. We had a little start when one of them moved on the road toward us, but nothing came of it.

After the picking there are more steps: dragging the mats with olives and consolidating them into a pile, sifting out the twigs and branches, winnowing out the leaves, and pouring the olives into 45-kg sacks. The winnowing was managed mostly by Firaj, Abid's sister, who would gather a bucket of olives, hoist it to her head, and pour it down into a wider bucket on the ground, relying on the intermittent afternoon wind to blow away the chaff of leaves. ■

*Andy is an ISM volunteer from the Bay Area.*

## Smiling is an Act of Resistance

October 26, 2004  
By Jeff Pekrul

I arrived in Jerusalem about a week ago, to spend 2–3 weeks working on ISM's 2004 Olive Harvest campaign. After a 2-day training session, I and 13 other volunteers have come to the town of Tulkarm. The group of volunteers is quite varied—people from the US, France, UK and Switzerland, and ranging in age from 20 to 70.

I understand much better now the importance of olive trees to the Palestinian people after spending time in Kufr Al-Labad, and why destruction of any trees is such a devastating thing for them. The six of us managed to pick 8 trees on a typical day, and this yielded about 225 kilos of olives. For this, the farmer receives about 300 shekels, which is about \$80. Since the Intifada began, employment in Israel is largely unavailable to Palestinian men, so these trees are a primary source of income for them. The tragic fact is that hundreds of thousands of olive trees have been destroyed by the Israeli military in the West Bank and Gaza recent years. I wonder how much longer the beautiful groves near Kufr Al-Labad will exist.

With few other sources of income, and such low prices for the olives, the destruction of even a single olive tree is huge blow to these

people. In addition, they have a great psychological attachment to them, since many of them are very, very old, and have been tended



by their families for many generations. Our host farmer showed us a photo of himself as a small boy standing next to a large olive tree that belonged to his family. This tree he said, is on the top of the ridge, now inside the settlement, next to where we saw the soldiers pacing with their rifles.

Considering all their hardships, the people here are amazingly friendly and positive. As you walk down the street here, people always and almost without exception smile and greet you in a friendly way. Without such strong spirits I don't think they could have endured the occupation as long as they have in the face of such adversity. I was struck by a comment by Sahed who translated our interview with the women from the Women's Union: "Smiling through it all is an act of resistance; we will not give in to despair, no matter what." ■

*Jeff Pekrul is an ISM volunteer from the Bay Area.*



Three brothers next to a roadblock made of earth and stone, built by the Israeli military to obstruct farmers' ability to access their fields.

Photo: Andy

One of many farmers waiting at the locked gate, unable to access their fields. The notice on the sign indicates that the gate will be opened from 7 to 8 AM, 11 AM to 12 PM and 2 to 3 PM. Much of the time the Israeli military shows up to open the gate late, at some other time, or not at all.

Photo: Lindsay Motley

# The Slow Creep of Annexation

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I first came to Jayyous two years ago, when the path for the security wall was then being cleared. At the time, I, the Palestinians, and other observers had to watch as huge Caterpillar bulldozers tore away hundreds of olive trees. Villagers stood in the path of the bulldozers and



An olive tree in Jayyous being stolen rather than destroyed. Trees are removed and later sold in Israel.

Photo: Christoph Gocke; Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel; [www.eappi.org](http://www.eappi.org)

armored military vehicles in an attempt to resist this injustice by peaceful means. Jayyous, like most other Palestinian communities, has maintained a commitment to non-violent resistance.

On the one hand, it is amazing and inspiring to see such spirited and sustained non-violent marches, actions, and protests after all these years. On the other, it is an unbearable tragedy to know that their non-violence has not been successful, nor even recognized and valorized. Many people in the US and elsewhere still view the Palestinians as the primary sources of violence in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A few days ago, when I came to Jayyous it was for a social visit. In the midst of asking such simple questions as, "How are things?" I was informed that a new Israeli settlement is being built on Palestinian farmlands immediately to the latter's side of the wall on lands which are currently being cultivated. Jayyous residents only discovered this when they stumbled across signs and maps on their land stating—in Hebrew—that over 850 Dunams (225 acres) "to start" would be taken for the construction of

Jewish only housing. The settlement is to be placed in front of the two gates which the Jayyous residents currently use to access their farmlands on the Israeli side of the wall. They will effectively be barred from ever

passing through the gates again. No new gates have been planned at this time.

Furthermore, because the new settlement is to be built right next to the fence and within meters of existing Palestinian homes, the villagers believe that it is likely that their homes will be destroyed. The justification for this destruction will be that the Palestinian homes pose a security risk to the settlers. Accompanying the new settlement will be a large military base as well, just meters from the village. While listening to this news, I sat in shock and groped for words for my old friends. What can one say about the fact that their entire livelihood and means of sustenance had been completely torn from them by another people with claims to the need for "security"?

The situation in Jayyous is similar to that of many communities located immediately next to the "security wall." Israel continues to argue that the purpose of the wall is to "separate" the two populations for the protection of Israeli citizens. How can such a wall be defended when the facts surrounding its construction have little to do with protection? How can a wall be merely for protection when its practical purpose is to annex the best Palestinian land and give it to Jewish settlers, who themselves are illegally colonizing Palestinian territory?

These practices clearly violate the Geneva Convention. For instance, land leveling and property destruction carried out for the construction of the wall violates Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel's settlement practices are in clear violation of other international law as well. In 1980, the UN passed Security Council Resolution 465, which determined that, "All measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof, have no legal validity and that Israel's policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in those territories constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention." Also, according to a ruling by the International Court of Justice earlier this year, the wall violates international law and causes untold suffering to Palestinians and their communities. As such, the ruling demanded that the wall be torn down. ■

*John Petrovato is the co-owner of an academic bookshop in Amherst, MA. He has made multiple trips to Palestine to volunteer with ISM.*

A family's livelihood destroyed.

Photo: [www.jayyousonline.org](http://www.jayyousonline.org)



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# Live on the Ground at Home

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## The Caterpillar Campaign is Working!

On April 23, 2004, NorCal ISM, along with other ISM chapters, SUSTAIN, Jewish Voice for Peace, and many other groups, participated in the International Day of Action Against Caterpillar. The campaign puts pressure on Caterpillar Corporation to stop selling armored bulldozers and other military equipment to Israel.

The Israeli military uses Caterpillar bulldozers bought with U.S. tax dollars to destroy thousands of homes and hundreds of thousands of olive trees in Palestine. On March 15, 2003 an Israeli soldier in a Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer crushed ISM volunteer Rachel Corrie to death during a peaceful protest against the demolition of homes in Gaza. Rachel's parents went to Caterpillar headquarters in Peoria, Illinois as part of the Day of Action.

Shareholder activists in Caterpillar's annual meeting introduced a resolution to investigate whether the company violated its own code of ethics by selling to Israel. In an important victory, CalPERS, the California Public Employee Retirement System, voted to carry the resolution to next year, providing more than the minimum 3% of voting shares necessary to keep the resolution alive.

The U.S. Presbyterian Church also voted on July 2, 2004 to divest from companies profiting from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and noted that the recent Caterpillar campaign heavily influenced their plans to divest \$2.7 billion of Caterpillar stock out of a total of \$7 billion in potential divestments.

For more information, go to [www.catdestroyshomes.org](http://www.catdestroyshomes.org). ■

### 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](mailto:info@norcalism.org)

## In Solidarity to Protest AIPAC

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) held events in San Francisco and Oakland on Dec 13 to promote its agenda to government leaders and Bay Area organizations. AIPAC is a powerful lobby for congressional funding of Israeli military and settlement activities, and promotes Israel's foreign policies in the US government.

More than 160 demonstrators in a spirited picket line gave AIPAC dinner guests a special unwelcome at the Oakland Marriot as AIPAC celebrated U.S. taxpayer funding of Israeli militarism. Participants included NorCal ISM, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Jewish Voice for Peace, Tikkun, Middle East Children's Alliance and many others. State Assembly Member Loni Hancock attended the dinner, but some who chose not to attend this year were State Senator Don Perata, Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates, and Assembly Member Wilma Chan.

The U.S. provides Israel with \$5 billion in direct aid every year, which enables the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, including home demolitions, attacks on civilians, destruction of farmland and confiscation of Palestinian land and resources. AIPAC's lobbying has helped finance Israeli army actions that have closed, occupied, destroyed or damaged over 1000 Palestinian schools in the last four years. ■

## About NorCal ISM

The ISM Support Group in Northern California (NorCal ISM) is one of several dozen groups around the world whose primary work is support the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine. Since its formation in early 2002, more than 300 volunteers from Northern California have participated in the movement. NorCal ISM conducts training for volunteers going to Palestine, raises funds for the movement, and provides educational speakers, materials and events. Volunteers and donations for our efforts in the San Francisco Bay Area are always welcome and needed. Our fiscal sponsor is the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA)

# Your Presence is Urgently Needed in Palestine

While the U.S. and Israel talk of prospects for peace under new Palestinian leadership, the facts on the ground tell a different story. The confiscation of land, destruction of homes and expansion of settlements continues faster than ever, on both sides of Israel's Apartheid Wall. ISM volunteers are needed to support Palestinian nonviolent efforts to save their land and end the Occupation. Your presence helps to deter the violation of human rights, slows the removal of Palestinians from their land, and shows them that you care about their plight.

ISM is a Palestinian led movement of Palestinian and international activists working to raise awareness of the struggle for Palestinian freedom and an end to Israeli occupation. We utilize non-violent, direct action methods of resistance to confront and challenge illegal occupation forces and policies. The first ISM campaign took place in August, 2001. Since that time, thousands of volunteers from Europe, North and South America, Asia, the Pacific Islands and Africa have come to participate in ISM campaigns in Palestine. Come join us in the Occupied Territories and support the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom, truth and justice. ■



Nonviolent demonstrators from the village of Kufr Thilth (near Qalqilya) invited volunteers from ISM and other groups, as well as Israeli volunteers to demonstrate against the construction of an illegal settlement on their lands. The village obtained a ruling in their favor in Israeli court, only to see it ignored by the military and the settlers. As a result of the demonstration, the military agreed to meet with the mayor at the District Coordinating Office.

Photo: Paul Larudee

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

## NORCAL ISM Support Group

405 Vista Heights Rd.  
El Cerrito, CA 94530

[www.norcalism.org](http://www.norcalism.org)  
[info@norcalism.org](mailto:info@norcalism.org)  
510 - 236 - 4250

