



**Palestine  
Solidarity  
Campaign**

[www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org)

# TRADE UNION DELEGATION

JANUARY 2008

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## BACKGROUND

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign first national trade union delegation took place from 5th to 12<sup>th</sup> January 2008. The Delegation consisted of senior representatives nominated by PCS, UNITE (TGWU), UCU, UNISON and TSSA.

### The Delegation:

<b>Hugh Lanning</b>	PCS Deputy General Secretary
<b>Linda Newman</b>	UCU President
<b>Sue Blackwell</b>	UCU National Executive Committee Member
<b>Mary Davis</b>	UCU National Executive Committee Member
<b>Barry Lovejoy</b>	UCU National Official
<b>Alison Shephard</b>	UNISON Chair International Relations Committee and TUC General Council Member
<b>Nick Crook</b>	UNISON International Relations Department
<b>Pat Stuart</b>	UNITE and TUC General Council Member
<b>Adrian Weir</b>	UNITE Region 1
<b>Dave Barnes</b>	TSSA National Executive Committee Member.

The objectives of the delegation were to meet with and convey solidarity to the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and to conduct a fact-finding visit to the Palestinian Occupied Territories and to learn about the situation facing Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The nature of the delegation was based on a commitment to an end to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, for the destruction of the illegal Wall and a respect for the right of the Palestinian people to self determination. The meetings were with organisations and individuals who shared these objectives and had a proven record of working to bring them about.

The visit was confined to the West Bank because of an inability to visit Gaza but the delegation was made aware of the situation in Gaza during their trip. The trip lasted one week and during that time visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus in the West Bank and Nazareth and Wadi A'ra in Israel. (See **ANNEX 1**)

The visit coincided with that of the United States President George W Bush who went to the area at the same time as part of the negotiations which had been initiated at Annapolis.

During the course of the week the group met with a wide variety of organisations and representatives many of whom commented on the prospects for resolving the situation. The overwhelming impression that the group had was that the prospects for a Final Status negotiated agreement were not optimistic and that any significant move to address the injustices faced by the Palestinian people was unlikely at this moment.

The group was convinced that the role of international solidarity with the Palestinian people will be vital to ensuring that the Palestinian people achieve a just resolution of their situation.

In this report you will find the general conclusions and findings that were agreed by the delegation. In addition there were recommendations that have been put forward for individual trade unions and the wider trade union movement.

The recommendations have been checked with the PGFTU and a meeting to discuss them has been arranged with the TUC.

If you would like further information, please contact the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Box BM PSA, London WC1N 2XX – telephone 020 7700 6192.

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## CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

### THE OCCUPATION

The delegation recognised that the occupation by the Government of Israel of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip is the most urgent concern of the Palestinian people and that every aspect of personal, social and economic well being is defined and determined by the occupation. It became evident that ending the occupation is the first essential to the successful resolution of the most critical problems facing Palestinian workers and their families.

The occupation is the central problem which impacts on the Palestinian economy and therefore on the lives of workers and their families. The Wall, checkpoints, travel restrictions, daily harassment, incursions and all the paraphernalia which surrounds the occupation including the restrictions imposed on the movements of goods and workers and the ability to import and export, place enormous burdens on Palestinian economic life.

The Palestinian economy is unable to develop under the occupation, because to state one of the most obvious problems, there is no means by which Palestinian goods can leave or enter the West Bank and Gaza without having to be loaded and reloaded in processes known as “back to back” transfers from one vehicle to another at Terminals and crossings between the Occupied Territories and Israel.

The impact of the withholding of money by the Government of Israel from the Palestinian Authority following the elections in February 2006 continues to be felt and is evident from the functioning of the economy. Poverty and mass unemployment are having an impact on Palestinian life.

It was pointed out on a number of occasions that the impact of the occupation on the economy had its consequences for Palestinian society in general and for women in particular. Tremendous additional burdens are placed on women.

The Wall represents the most tangible symbol of the occupation. It continues to expand and is added to by the development of an earth barrier down the Jordan Valley and beyond. Despite the ruling of the International Court of Justice in July 2004 the Government of Israel continues to build the Wall. The delegation witnessed the impact of the Wall in surrounding and isolating towns like Bethlehem. (An impact present in other areas of the West Bank).

The delegation saw and experienced the checkpoints both at “cross-over” points between Israel and the Occupied Territories and within the West Bank – requiring everyone to stop and produce identity documentation, being subjected, if required, to searches including body searches and luggage checks. The delegation witnessed the manner in which travellers journeying short distances might be subject to long circuitous routes as a result of the requirement to go through specific checkpoints. It was noted how Palestinian transport alone was subject to arbitrary stops as a result of the establishment of “flying checkpoints”.

## **SETTLEMENTS**

Everywhere the impact of the Wall and the development of the “settler-only” roads was visible. The “settler-only” road system joining the settlements to Israel and bypassing the Palestinian towns and villages is a clear expression of the intention to permanently incorporate the settlement blocks into the state of Israel. The difference between the quality of the road systems – the “settler-only” roads and the “Palestinian roads” spoke volumes about the situation.

The settlements, like the Wall, continue to be built taking more and more land from the Palestinian farmers, the towns and villages. Evidence of the expansion of the settlements was clearly visible around Bethlehem and East Jerusalem. The delegation witnessed the incongruity of the buildings in the landscape of the region, the quasi military character of the developments being located strategically on the top of hills and were made aware of the discrepancies between the resources and services available to the settlements in contrast to those provided for the Palestinian communities.

The delegation were aware of the additional problems encountered as a result of the creation of the “seam zone” isolating Palestinian lands, villages and people between the Green Line and the newly built Wall. The development of the road system and the building of the settlements indicates clearly that there is no intention on the part of the Government of Israel to return to the 1967 Green Line as the basis for the border between Israel and a Palestinian state.

Travelling through the Jordan Valley the delegation observed, as they had already witnessed, the massive and continuing expropriation of Palestinian lands by Israeli settlers backed by the military enforcement of the occupation by the Government of Israel. These illegally seized lands are the basis for the massive agricultural industry which is expanding there.

The delegation was made aware of the impact of the occupation on the lives of young people, the difficulties this presented for children, school students, university students and young workers. Despite these difficulties the Palestinian youth that were met expressed all the aspirations, vivacity and creativity of youth living in more auspicious circumstances. It is an undoubted testimony to the commitment of the Palestinian people to develop a positive future for their youth that this was so.

## **REFUGEES AND PALESTINIAN WORKERS IN ISRAEL**

Visiting a refugee camp revealed the particular adversity confronting refugees whose families had been displaced in 1948 or 1967. The hardships confronting the refugees, the quality of life, the opportunities available to them were clearly restricted and place them in an inferior position even when compared to their fellow non-refugee Palestinians. It is clear that a resolution to the plight of the refugees must be an integral component of any Final Status agreement.

During the course of the visit to Nazareth the delegation became aware of the position of Palestinian citizens of Israel – referred to by the Government of Israel as “Arab citizens of Israel” or “Israeli Arabs”. Whilst living within the state of Israel the

Palestinian Israeli citizens face some of the problems faced by Palestinians living in the occupied territories but in addition face specific problems of discrimination in a wide variety of aspects of their lives which differ. The delegation witnessed the uprooted roads of an “unrecognised” village, the threats to pull down a house built on a Palestinian family’s own land. The delegation learnt of the problems confronting Palestinian and migrant workers.

The occupation throws up a number of specific issues relating to the circumstances confronting all Palestinian workers. In addition there was ample evidence that Palestinians working in settler linked industrial zones were discriminated against and the employers refused to recognise Palestinian trade unions and negotiate with them. The new industrial zones in the “seam zones” also threatens to introduce a new category of super vulnerable workers who may be employed by agencies, perhaps Palestinian run, thus allowing the owners of the industries within the zones to avoid any legal responsibilities.

The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions faces an incredibly difficult set of tasks. It is prevented from organising effectively because of the occupation – the split imposed by the Government of Israel between the West Bank and Gaza; the problem of movement within the West Bank; the difficulties created for any trade union with mass unemployment; the need to have resources to function; the failure of the Histadrut to pay the money owed to the PGFTU since 1995 amounting to €2.5 million.

The delegation met and held discussions with a number of organisations of Israelis and Palestinians who work on the basis of shared values opposing the occupation, campaigning against the Wall and for justice for the Palestinians. None of these organisations wished to be involved in any process that wanted to see their task as the “normalisation” of the situation – but rather wanted to challenge the status quo.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### GENERAL

1. That the findings of the delegation be circulated as widely as possible within the trade union movement, within the constituent unions represented on the delegation and that it be brought to the attention of the appropriate national and international bodies of the trade union movement.
2. That the appropriate recommendations be brought to the attention of the British Government, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the appropriate departments of the Government.
3. That the appropriate recommendations be brought to the attention of the representatives of the Government of Israel.
4. That the appropriate recommendations be brought to the attention of Members of Parliament in Britain.
5. That the contents of the report be communicated to the appropriate Palestinian Authorities and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.

### TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

1. The Trade Union Congress has expressed its support for
  - the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination;
  - the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland;
  - the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories; and
  - the removal of the illegally constructed 'apartheid wall'.
2. Having witnessed the continuing denial of the rights of the Palestinians the maximum publicity must continue to be given to these objectives through the trade union movement in Britain and through the international bodies to which individual unions and the TUC are affiliated.
3. Resources should be directed to the production of material to convey these policies to the members of the trade union movement, to seek to ensure that they are incorporated into appropriate publicity and educational material for unions.
4. Unions should be encouraged to affiliate to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and requested to encourage branches and regions to do likewise publicising the activities of the Campaign to individual members.
5. In conjunction with the TUC, trade unions should be encouraged to develop solidarity work and links with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions mindful of the agreed initiatives already being developed between the TUC and the PGFTU.

6. Trade unions should develop solidarity work and links with the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions sections appropriate to their field of work or trade unions appropriate to their field of work where, owing to Palestinian legislation, they are not formally part of the PGFTU. (This would include for example unions such as the General Union of Public Employees and the General Union of Palestinian Teachers).
7. Publicity should be given to the plight of Palestinian workers and their families, the consequences of occupation, for them in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
8. Publicity should be given to the impact of the creation of Industrial Zones attached to the illegal settlements and to the creation of Industrial Zones based in the so-called "Seam Zone" between the Green Line and the illegal Wall. Pressure should be brought to bear wherever possible to ensure that the workers have the right to join a trade union, that trade unions are recognised and to ensure that such developments at a minimum comply with the ILO conventions.
9. The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions welcomed the support and solidarity shown by trade unions in Britain and asked that activity such as boycott actions should be focussed on the occupation and the sustaining of the occupation. They suggested that the arms trade might be a focus for attention, together with those companies who were involved in building the Wall, the checkpoints and the "settler-only" roads and that this action could be coupled with a boycott of goods produced by Israel in the West Bank.
10. Publicity should be given to the plight of Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories seeking to work inside Israel. Pressure should be brought to bear to ensure that the workers have the right to join a trade union and that such developments at a minimum comply with the ILO conventions. Pressure should be brought to bear on the Government of Israel to lift the restrictions placed on the ability of Palestinian workers to work within Israel.
11. Publicity should be given to the employment plight of Palestinian workers who are citizens of Israel and the work of organisations like Kav LaOved and Sawt el Amel who are seeking to address these issues.
12. Trade Unions should be encouraged to organise in conjunction with the PSC and the PGFTU fact-finding solidarity delegations to the occupied Palestinian Territories.
13. Trade Unions should, when appropriate, consider conveying solidarity to those inside Israel, like "Breaking the Silence", "Combatants for Peace" and Gush Shalom who are organising opposition to the policies of the Government of Israel, the occupation, the Wall, the checkpoints and the blockade of Gaza.

**INDIVIDUAL TRADE UNIONS**

1. Trade unions should seek to produce appropriate material for all their members explaining the case for solidarity with the Palestinian people.
2. Trade unions should be encouraged to work with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign Trade Union Advisory Committee to develop and use already available Educational material and to consider further appropriate material. Unions should keep the PSC TUAC notified of material they have produced which they would be prepared to share with others.
3. Consideration should be given to sending fact finding missions, organised in consultation with the PGFTU and the PSC, to report back to the respective unions.
4. Representatives of the PGFTU and appropriate partner unions should be invited to address national conferences, National Executive Committees and other appropriate bodies within their unions. In particular women's sections of trade unions and the TUC should encourage bi-lateral relations with the PGFTU women's section.
5. The unions should publicise these policies to their appropriate international trade sections.
6. The unions should publicise these policies to Members of Parliament with whom they work.

ANNEX 1

## ITINERARY

<b>5 January</b>	<b>Old City, East Jerusalem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs</li> </ul>
<b>6 January</b>	<b>Old City, East Jerusalem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parents' Circle/Bereaved Families' Forum</li> <li>▪ Combatants for Peace</li> <li>▪ Alternative Information Centre</li> <li>▪ KavLa'Oved</li> </ul>
	<b>Bethlehem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tour of Bethlehem led by PLO Negotiation Support Unit</li> <li>▪ Meeting representatives of YMCA and Lutheran Church</li> </ul>
	<b>Old City, East Jerusalem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Breaking the Silence Group</li> </ul>
<b>7 January</b>	<b>Ramallah</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stop the Wall Campaign</li> <li>▪ Centre for Development Studies, Birzeit University</li> <li>▪ Ministry of National Economy, Palestinian Authority</li> <li>▪ Ministry of Labour, Palestinian Authority</li> </ul>
<b>8 January</b>	<b>Ramallah</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General Union of Palestinian Workers</li> <li>▪ Presidential Office, Palestinian Authority</li> <li>▪ Palestine National Initiative</li> </ul>
<b>9 January</b>	<b>Nablus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions</li> <li>▪ Meetings with appropriate PGFTU sections</li> <li>▪ Tour of Old City led by Shaher Sa'ed, PGFTU General Secretary, impact of most recent Israeli military incursion</li> <li>▪ Visit to Refugee camp</li> <li>▪ Nablus Mayor and Council members</li> </ul>
<b>10 January</b>	<b>Nablus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meeting with appropriate PGFTU Sections</li> <li>▪ Tour of An-Najah National University campus led by Saed Jamal Abu-Hijleh, Director of Centre for Global Consciousness</li> </ul>
<b>11 January</b>	<b>Nazareth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sawt el-Amel/The Labourer's Voice</li> <li>▪ National Democratic Assembly</li> </ul>
	<b>Galilee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ittijah - campaigning against eviction and land confiscation</li> </ul>
<b>12 January</b>	<b>Old City, East Jerusalem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jerusalem Centre for Women</li> </ul>