



War crimes in Gaza



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ISSN 1477 - 5808

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palestine NEWS

A Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) publication. PSC does not necessarily agree with all opinions expressed in the magazine.
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Palestine Solidarity Campaign

- Campaigning against the oppression and dispossession suffered by the Palestinian people
- Supporting the rights of the Palestinian people and their struggle to achieve these rights including the Right of Return in line with UN resolution 194
- Promoting Palestinian civil society in the interests of democratic rights and social justice
- Opposing Israel's occupation and its aggression against neighbouring states
- Opposing anti-semitism and racism, including the apartheid and Zionist nature of the Israeli state

No limits, no shame

Israel can no longer disguise its true aims and methods, says **Hilary Wise**

As *Palestine News* goes to press, Israeli tanks gather on the borders of Gaza, after six days of intensive bombing and shelling from sea and air.

So far, over 400 men, women and children have been killed — including five young girls from a single family as they slept, and another six girls at the doorway to their home. The already battered infrastructure of the Gaza Strip is being reduced to rubble. The Islamic University, the local headquarters of the Legislative Assembly, Ministry offices, police stations, a mosque and many homes have been bombed.

Over the last seven years over 5000 Palestinians have been killed, more than half of them in Gaza, and dozens more have lost their lives through the brutal siege that has restricted food, fuel and medical supplies and barred patients from seeking treatment outside Gaza. Over the same period of time 18 Israelis have died. Is this what Israel means by ‘proportionality’? To take three hundred lives for one? By this insane logic the Palestinians would be justified in killing 1.5 million Israelis tomorrow.

Israel claims that Hamas rejected their offer to renew the ceasefire; the truth is, the ceasefire ceased to exist when Israel bombed Gaza on 5 November, killing 6 Palestinians. Israel claims it has no ‘partner for peace’. But when Hamas won the general elections in 2006 they offered Israel a ten-year truce, during which time negotiations could take place. Israel’s response was intensification of its stranglehold on Gaza and expansion of the illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The pose of a peace-loving nation exercising great self-restraint and interested only in self-defence can hardly be sustained, even to Israel’s staunchest supporters.

With the elections looming, Israeli leaders believe, as did Sharon, that a macho display of massive military power will win them votes — and cripple Palestinian resistance. The first supposition may be correct, but experience should have shown them that the will to resist has only been strengthened in the past by Israeli brute force.

Part of Israel’s motivation must be to boost the image of the army, after its humiliating defeat in Lebanon. In the Gaza bombing there will be few soldiers in body bags to upset the Israeli public. No wonder they hesitate to attempt a ground assault — although the Palestinians have little defence against Merkava tanks. Perhaps, too, the temptation to make the most of the last days of Bush’s Presidency — the most compliant Israel has ever known — was just too great.

Israel has grown so complacent, so used to blind support from Western governments, including our own, and to abject silence,

if not active collusion, from the Arab regimes that they feel there are no constraints on their actions. A lethal mix of paranoia and overwhelming military strength spurs them on, unhindered, from one atrocity to the next.

There are limits, however, even to our government’s complicity. In November and December there were signs of the first stirrings of uneasy conscience among our leaders (see page 21). There are limits, too, to the ability of oppressive Arab regimes to stifle the fury and indignation of their people, who see on Al-Jazeera and other Arabic-language channels scenes of carnage that are considered too ‘graphic’ for our screens. Massive rallies and demonstrations

have been taking place from the Gulf to Mauritania. The banners proclaim: ‘Shame on our leaders!’ and ask ‘How long can we be silent?’ and ‘Where are the Arab states?’ There have been violent protests outside Egyptian embassies around the Arab world, as Egypt is widely seen as being complicit in the ongoing siege of Gaza. Religious and community leaders have called for strikes against Israeli interests worldwide. This may well be interpreted as including strikes against those countries whose governments have given Israel their unstinting support. Certainly, these events will be a powerful recruiting ground for those who believe violence is the only language that will be understood.

Among the frustrated and impoverished peoples of the Arab world, the mass murder occurring in Gaza, as their leaders remain silent, could well be the spark that will light the fuse of unimagined convulsions, in a region overripe for radical change.

In this country, at least, we have a degree of democracy that makes it a moral obligation to take action in the face of this unprecedented aggression. We have already seen dozens of demonstrations, from London to Glasgow, and even the mainstream media have been aroused from their habitual torpor to focus on what is happening. This is the moment, while Israeli brutality is fully in the spotlight, to demolish the myths in which it cloaks its actions. This is the moment to organise local meetings, to invite Palestinians to speak of their experiences, to inform and challenge our MPs, to write to government ministers. At the very least, we can all express our condemnation of Israel’s actions by boycotting every product coming out of that country, and every event that seeks to promote its interests or its image. We must certainly challenge Israel’s position as a favoured neighbour of Europe and end its preferential treatment under the EU/Israel trade agreement. Only in this way will Israel perhaps come to understand that it has become a pariah state in the eyes of the world, and must comply with international law to be accepted as a civilised nation. If this happens, maybe the children of Gaza will not have died in vain.

“The mass murder occurring in Gaza could well be the spark that will light the fuse of unimagined convulsions, in a region overripe for radical change”

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Guernica, Israeli-style

Mary Jones reports on the human cost of Israel's bloodbath in Gaza

Five young sisters killed in their beds, two children riding on a donkey cart, 42 civilian police trainees at a passing out parade, eight men loading a truck with goods salvaged from a bombed workshop: these are just a few of the civilians callously slaughtered in first few days of the Israeli massacres in Gaza.

Israel began its massive and unprecedented bombing campaign of the densely populated and virtually defenceless Gaza Strip at 11.30 am on 27 December, the time of the changeover between the morning and afternoon school sessions, when the children were all on the streets. It is still going on as we go to press.

Wave after wave of US-supplied F16 warplanes bombed over 400 targets within the first few days, killing an estimated 390 Palestinians and injuring around 1800 more. At least 32 Palestinian children were killed in the first 48 hours and humanitarian organisations estimated children formed 45% of the injured, many of whom would die because the hospitals were overwhelmed.

Because of Israel's prolonged siege of Gaza, there were already severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines so the suffering of the wounded was almost indescribable. Fikr Shalltoot, programme



Child in Al-Shifa Hospital

co-ordinator for Medical Aid for Palestine, said of the scene in Al-Shifa hospital: "There were mothers, fathers looking for children, looking for relatives. Everyone was confused and seeking support. Mothers were crying, people were asking about relatives, the

medical team was confused. I saw many, many civilians, some dead, some injured, some were children, some were women, some were elderly people. "There's no gauze so they are using cotton, which sticks to the wounds. They can't sterilise clothes for the operating theatre. They're using wrong-sized syringes. They're working 24 hours. They're referring cases from one hospital to the next. One hospital was running out of anaesthesia. They're also drawing blood and there's no alcohol. This is a disaster."

Protests around the world

The onslaught provoked a wave of protests around the world, not only in Arab countries but also in cities across Europe (see page 18). On 27 December the UN's Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Professor Richard Falk, condemned the airstrikes as "severe and massive violations of international humanitarian law."

Professor Falk, who was barred from entering Israel in December, said that the Hamas rocket attacks were also unlawful but that "does



not give rise to any Israeli right... to violate international humanitarian law and commit war crimes... in its response. I note that Israel's escalating military assaults have not made Israeli civilians safer; to the contrary, the one Israeli killed today after the upsurge of Israeli violence is the first in over a year."

He added: "Israel has also ignored recent Hamas' diplomatic initiatives to re-establish the truce or ceasefire since its expiration."

No military advantage to Israel

B'Tselem — the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the OPTs — analysed statements from Israeli political and military leaders and concluded that the operation was aimed against every person and entity in Gaza with even the loosest connections with Hamas, even if they were not engaged in military action against Israel.

They cited the examples of the 42 trainees killed at the main police building who were on a course studying first-aid, handling of public disturbances, human rights, public-safety exercises, and so on, and the bombing of government offices including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour, Construction and Housing. They said these "cannot be considered military objects in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law — they do not make an effective contribution to the military activity against Israel and the attack provides Israel with no military advantage whatsoever."

They added that striking at such targets "contravenes the principle of distinction that lies at the foundation of international humanitarian law. An intentional attack on a civilian target is a war crime."

Moreover, the declared aim of the operation — to stop Hamas firing home-made rockets on towns in Southern Israel — was a failure, as militants fired over 247 rockets and mortars in the first few days, killing four Israelis and injuring 34 others.

Peace boat rammed

Another act of terrorism by Israel was the ramming in international waters of the Free Gaza boat *Dignity* which was on its way from Cyprus with three tons of desperately needed medical supplies, three surgeons, politicians and human rights activists on board.

Several Israeli gunboats surrounded the *Dignity* roughly 90 miles off the coast of Gaza at 6am on 30 December, fired live ammunition around it then rammed it three times, causing extensive damage. The

ship's British captain, Denis Healy, said the attack came "without any warning, or any provocation."

The ship limped into the port of Tyre, Southern Lebanon, where it was greeted

by thousands of supporters. The attack was a violation of both international maritime law and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which states, "the high seas should be reserved for peaceful purposes" — purposes such as delivering doctors and medical supplies to suffering civilians.

Until this incident, the Free Gaza movement was beginning to achieve its aim of establishing a regular ferry service between Cyprus and Gaza. In early November the *Dignity* took a boatload of European Parliamentarians, including Clare Short, Lord Ahmad and Baroness Jenny Tonge, from Cyprus to Gaza. They took this route after having been denied access to the Strip by the Egyptian authorities.

After a warm welcome the group handed over one ton of medical supplies and visited various organisations and hospitals. Jenny Tonge, for many years a GP, met a young patient in a critical condition in Gaza Hospital: "The trouble was, the hospital had nearly run out of drugs and they had nothing to relieve her agony. Antibiotics, muscle relaxants, even simple painkillers were not there because of the Israeli blockade."

On the return trip the boat took on board eight Palestinians who had been denied exit visas for medical treatment or to pursue their studies at universities.

On its fourth trip earlier in December, the boat took supplies and observers including two British academics, Jonathan Rosenhead and Mike Cushman, of the London School of Economics and the British Committee for Universities in Palestine (BRICUP), which supports Palestine's call for an academic boycott of Israel, and returning with 11 Palestinian students who had been denied exit by Israel to attend their universities abroad.

Singing for Sarah



Before the devastating bomb attacks began, the misery of life in Gaza was relieved for a day by a group of young Palestinians who organised the first music concert of its kind, called Gaza Concert '08. Performers — all aged under 25 — sang and danced for freedom

and peace in the event, sponsored by Action for Peace Italia and watched by thousands of people.

One of the organisers, 24-year-old Hatem Shurab, said he was singing for a sick friend called Sarah. "The words of my song say: 'A girl called Sarah, innocence in her eyes, because of no medications she is about to die. Don't let Sarah feel the pain, let her fly like a bird in the sky, take the siege away.'"



Safe arrival of the Dignity, in November

Death in the Night

Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza is home to some 300,000 Palestinians who fled or were driven in 1948 from their homes in towns now in Israel, such as Sderot and Ashkelon.

Just before midnight on 28 December an Israeli bomb landed on the camp's Imad Aqil mosque. The force of the blast was so massive it also destroyed the house nearby where Anwar and Samira Balousha were sleeping with their nine children.

A wall fell on the mattresses where the elder girls were sleeping together. Five of them: Tahrir, 17, Ikram 15, Samer, 13, Dina, eight and Jawahar, four, were killed where they lay. Imam, 16, was the only survivor.

"I just woke when the bricks fell on me. I saw all my sisters around me and I couldn't move. The neighbours and ambulance men couldn't see us. They were walking on the bricks above us. I started to scream and told my sisters we would die. We all screamed: 'Baba, Mama. Come to help us,'" she said.

Eventually, Imam was pulled free and tried to comfort her devastated mother, punished with the loss of her five daughters for the crime of living in a refugee camp in Palestine.

No hiding place

Even before Israel's all-out assault on Gaza the International Coalition Against Impunity, a Beirut-based legal NGO, had filed a lawsuit with the Office of the Prosecution of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This charges Israel and five of its leaders with egregious violations of international law and the Rome Statute, following Israel's continuing blockade of Gaza.

On 10 December, American international lawyer and human rights advocate, Dr. Franklin Lamb, who drafted the ICC submission, explained that the ICC has been asked to conduct the investigatory phase of its work inside Gaza, citing the Rome Statute which allows the Court to 'Circuit' and travel to an area where Rome Statute crimes are alleged to be occurring.

Lamb welcomed the support of Professor Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the OPTs, and commended him for calling for Israel's crimes in Gaza to be investigated and adjudicated by the International Criminal Court.

The UN Human Rights Council recently issued 99 recommendations to Israel regarding its continuing siege of Gaza and its treatment of the 1.5 million residents facing increasingly severe shortages of food, medicine, electricity, and basic necessities of life. The detailed UN reports which have been issued over the last couple of years will no doubt be used as part of the ICAI submission, which charges Israel with war crimes, crimes against humanity and elements of genocide.

Among the Israeli officials named in the submission to the International Criminal Court are:

Prime Minister Ehud OLMERT.

Defence Minister Ehud BARAK.

Deputy Defence Minister Matan VILNAI.

Minister of Internal Security Avraham DICHTER.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gabi ASHKENZI.

“Cruel, inhuman and degrading”

Gill Swain investigates Israel’s treatment of prisoners

In November Israel released 230 Palestinian prisoners as a “goodwill gesture”. Good news, in its way, especially for the families. But recent figures reveal that in the same month the IDF arrested at least 294 Palestinians in the West Bank and over 390 in the Gaza Strip¹. So that was a net increase in detainees of 454.

Some of them may have been released by now, but many will be interned without trial or even charge, physically tortured, psychologically abused and held incommunicado for months without contact with a lawyer or their families in harsh inhumane conditions. Small wonder that 95% of convictions in Israel’s military courts are obtained on the evidence of “confessions.”

Even more shocking is the fact that these methods are applied equally to children as young as 12. Though Israel likes to boast that it is “the only democracy in the Middle East,” it incarcerates hundreds of children in adult prisons for crimes such as throwing stones at the Apartheid Wall. Many are savagely beaten during arrest and coerced by threats into signing confessions written in Hebrew, a language few of them understand.

The Israeli state thus uses imprisonment, not as a system of justice, but as a means of oppressing the Palestinian population, in particular anyone who attempts to resist the occupation. Of the approximately 11,000 Palestinians in prison, over 40 are elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and many more are political activists who have pledged themselves to non-violence.

At the end of November there were 570 Palestinians in “administrative detention” — i.e. held without trial — of whom 13 are children, including two girls². All prisoners are kept in jails located inside Israel, in breach of the Geneva Convention. One, known as “Facility 1391”, has operated for decades at a secret location unknown to detainees, their lawyers and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The authorised use of torture

Next May the UN Committee Against Torture will review Israel’s compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment for the first time in eight years. To help it along a coalition of 14 Palestinian and Israeli NGOs called United Against Torture (UAT) filed a report in September based on



“Of the 11,000 Palestinians in prison, over 40 are elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and many more are political activists who have pledged themselves to non-violence”

hundreds of personal testimonies.

It stated, baldly: “Torture and ill-treatment are purposefully used to obtain information and confessions, as well as to intimidate, humiliate and terrorise the Palestinian population.”³

It said the use of torture was “widespread and systematic” during all the stages of arrest, interrogation, detention and trial and it especially wanted to highlight the “disturbing number of attacks on human rights defenders and their organisations in the OPT.”

Amongst the evidence that torturing Palestinian prisoners is official government policy came a report published in November in the Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Ahronot*, revealing a “top secret” intelligence document authorising its use.

The document stated that interrogators were allowed to use techniques of physical and psychological torture, including slapping, violent shaking, hunger, sleep deprivation and forcing prisoners to stand for long periods.

They could also exert psychological pressure by accusing the prisoner of collaboration in front of other prisoners, or revealing confidential information about him. They could arrest family members, including women, to place further pressure, or threaten to demolish the prisoner’s family home or deport him.

Added to this list should be the denial of medical treatment, education, adequate exercise and visits from family members. These practices are perpetrated with the collusion of Israeli doctors, according to Physicians for Human Rights – Israel which stated in a paper last summer: “Take the physicians out of the torture system and torture will cease to exist.”

The legalisation of torture dates back to a government commission headed by Supreme Court President Moshe Landau in 1987 which

Case Study

Lu'ay A, in an affidavit to Al-Haq (an NGO which protects and promotes human rights and the rule of law in the OPT), 16 June, 2007

“ Interrogators used a new torture method called the “squatting Shabeh.” They forced me to stand on my toes and put an iron hook up my nostril. The hook was tied to a metal chain that hung from the ceiling, thereby depriving me of the ability to stand comfortably on my feet. If I wanted to rest the result would be damaging my nose as the hook would be inserted deep inside it. I was

interrogated for about 100 consecutive hours.

I was in severe pain and I felt the bones fracture in the bottom of my back. I fainted. I woke up when water was poured on my face. I tried to sit upright but I was no longer able to control my body. I rocked forwards and backwards uncontrollably. I felt my feet go cold and I gradually stopped feeling in them. I could not feel myself urinating. The interrogator told me to stand up. “I cannot,” I replied, “I do not feel the lower part of my body.” “This means that you are now paralysed,” he stated, “this is what we want.”

came up with a report containing a list of permissible interrogation tactics. The central conclusion of the report was that “the exertion of a moderate degree of physical pressure cannot be avoided” and it protected Israeli intelligence officers from prosecution. The recommendations in the report were approved by the Israeli Knesset.

Abdul-Nasser Farawna, a former prisoner and head of the Statistics Department in the Palestinian Ministry of Prisoners Affairs, said that his research showed that 95% of Palestinians who have been imprisoned in Israel have been beaten; 89% deprived of sleep for long periods; 82% forced to stand in difficult positions; 55% subjected to extreme hot and cold temperatures, and 50% had pressure applied to their testicles. He added that 70 prisoners have died in Israeli custody as a result of torture.

He denounced the silence of the international community towards Israel’s “excessive use of force” against Palestinian prisoners and said it gave the occupying power “the green light to continue.”

The children in Israeli jails

In the early hours of one morning last summer two 16 year old girls, Salwa Salah and Sara Siureh, were dragged from their respective homes in Bethlehem, handcuffed and blindfolded and driven to prison in Israel.



Salwa's grandmother with a treasured photograph. Photo: Chrisian Minelli

During interrogation they were asked if they had “any relations with any political group.” Neither confessed to anything yet they were put into administrative detention, the first time this has happened to girls under 18. In October their detention was extended for three months on the basis that they remain “dangerous,” despite the fact that no evidence has been presented to support this assertion.

The girls claim that during transit a female police officer was extremely abusive and pushed them. Boys, who form the vast majority of the children arrested, are often treated much more violently and some have complained of sexual abuse, even rape.

According to a report published in November by Defence for Children International – Palestine Section⁴, which provides legal representation for children in the military courts, a child being arrested is often beaten or kicked before being blindfolded and handcuffed.

At the detention centre interrogation practices “include beating, kicking, verbal abuse and threats. The child is often threatened with long term detention if s/he does not confess or threats are made against the child’s family.” Most of the children confess within two hours, signing their names to documents written in Hebrew.

There are 293 Palestinian children in Israel detention and 13 in administrative detention. Each year approximately 700 young people under 18 are prosecuted and since 2000 some 6,500 have been detained.

In contravention of international law, there is no specialist branch of the Israeli military courts for dealing with children so they are prosecuted under the same jurisdiction as adults and kept in the same jails. At a public meeting organized by Lawyers for Human Rights in London in November, DCI’s legal unit co-ordinator, Khaled Quzmar, described the terrifyingly Kafkaesque scene in an Israeli military court. “In order to work there you have to forget first of all what you learnt in your legal studies,” he said.

The courts were small, crowded and noisy, children were dragged in in shackles and hearings lasted only a few minutes. They were not allowed to speak to or hug their parents. There were three judges, all soldiers, only one of whom was required to have any legal knowledge.

Because the children had always “confessed”, Khaled’s role was to bargain over length of sentence. “It is the only way I feel I can help. I have found that, if I challenge the conviction, it makes things worse,” he said.

In the 276 cases closed by DCI-PS in 2007, 44.9% of children sentenced were 15 or under, 65.6% were sentenced to over one year’s imprisonment and 25.7% were sentenced for throwing stones, which carries a sentence of up to ten years for those over 14. DCI knew of five children who had been sentenced to life.

Palestinian children are currently detained in five prisons, all but one of which is inside Israel. Because of the difficulties for families to obtain permits to visit Israel, this means in practice that 30% of imprisoned children never get a visit.

“In order to work there [in the Israeli courts], you have to forget first of all what you learnt in your legal studies”

Administrative detention — Israel's own Guantanamo

Since the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem began in 1967 and Israel imposed military law on the Occupied Territories, the number of military orders has proliferated and now stands at 1500. Military Order 1226 empowers Israeli military commanders to detain Palestinians, including children, without charge or trial for up to six months.

The Order directs that the detainee be brought before a judge within eight days. The hearing is not open to the public, and the judge makes his decision based on secret evidence which the accused has no right to see. The detainee has the right to appeal the judge's decision but, like the first hearing, the appeal is held behind closed doors, and the decision is based on confidential material.

Military commanders are only required to have "reasonable grounds to presume that the security of the area or public security require the detention." No definition of "security of the area" or "public security" is given, which is how children can be locked away for months for throwing stones at a concrete wall or taking an interest in politics. An order can be renewed every six months indefinitely and without notice and often are renewed on the very day a prisoner expects to be going home.

Administrative detention is allowed under international law but, because of the obvious danger of abuse, there are rigid restrictions on its application. Israel's use of administrative detention blatantly violates these restrictions. The Israeli-Palestinian human rights organisation, B'Tselem, says: "Israel has made a charade out of the entire system of procedural safeguards in both domestic and international law regarding the right to liberty and due process."

Conditions in jail

The vast majority of detainees are in jails in Israel, in flagrant breach of international humanitarian law which forbids the transfer of civilians from an occupied territory to the territory of the occupying state. Israel also ignores its obligation to enable relatives to visit so this is arranged by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Because most adult Palestinians are denied permits to enter Israel, large numbers of children, some only four or five years old, are forced to



Four-year-old boy travels alone to visit his father. Photo: B'Tselem.

travel alone to visit fathers, brothers or uncles, who they are only allowed to see through a glass partition. According to the United Against Torture Coalition, "security" detainees suffer far harsher conditions than criminals. They are not entitled, for instance, to a daily walk in the open air or to use the telephone, even to call their lawyer. They are kept in crowded cells — 21 beds and one toilet, for example — and several facilities are military camps in the desert where the detainees live in tents. They get no books, newspapers or TV.

The UAT Coalition says: "These discriminatory conditions severely violate the fundamental rights of thousands of detainees, including their right to dignity, to personal freedom and to fair and minimal living conditions in detention centres, and may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

About a year ago ITV News broadcast a report on Palestinian child prisoners. For the first time a foreign film crew showed children in shackles in a military court, before being imprisoned in adult jails. It won an award at the annual Amnesty International Media Awards 2008, and can still be viewed on <http://tinyurl.com/6fahsj>.

1 Figures from UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and from the Palestinian Ministry of Detainees in Gaza.

2 See B'Tselem: www.btselem.org

3 See Alternative Report at www.unitedagainsttorture.org

4 www.dci-pal.org

Case Study

Muhammad Khawajah, aged 12 — told to Iyad Hadad of B'Tselem, 18 Sept 2008, Ni'lin, Ramallah.

“The soldiers cuffed my hands tight with plastic handcuffs, which hurt a lot. A soldier grabbed me by the shirt from behind and started... pushing me forward. The shirt was up against my neck and I couldn't breathe properly. I tried to free myself, and he punched me in the back and pulled the shirt tighter, choking me even more. Another soldier also punched me and pulled my hair as we walked. They led me to an alleyway between the houses where there are cactuses. One of the soldiers pushed me into them. The thorns pricked me in the hands and legs.

Children from the village began to throw stones at the soldiers. I fell down. One soldier started dragging me along the ground, on my stomach, with my hands tied. The ground was full of stones, gravel, and dirt. He pulled me by my hands and I cried and shouted. It felt like my right knee and the palms of my hands were injured. My knee was bleeding.

(Two more boys, aged 14 and 18, were arrested). The soldiers beat us and knocked us to the ground... they

stepped on us, on our heads and stomach.

(The boys were led away). A soldier was behind each of us, holding each one by the shirt. One soldier was angry at me in particular. He beat and strangled me, as if he wanted to kill me. I shouted and cried, I was so scared.

(At a detention centre he was questioned by an officer) He... showed me three pictures of myself, holding a slingshot in a demonstration against the separation fence. I admitted that it was me... Then he hit me in the back with a plastic stool. I cried and shouted, and he hit me twice in the leg with a wooden stick.

...The interrogator told me to sign, with my fingerprint, a page with Hebrew writing. I don't know what it said. The soldier didn't read it to me. I assume it was a confession. I had to sign, because I was afraid he would beat me.

“The interrogator told me to sign, with my fingerprint, a page with Hebrew writing”



Holy Land diaries

21st century pilgrimage

Engaging BBC correspondent Aleem Maqbool kept an online diary in text and video as he walked and rode from Nazareth to Bethlehem, retracing the journey made by Joseph and Mary. The 150 km trip took him 10 days and four donkeys, via the West Bank town of Jenin, through Nablus, Ramallah and Jerusalem before arriving in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.



Aleem and friend skirt the illegal settlement of Shilo

Along the way we are treated to stunning views — but we are also given an introduction to the daily realities of life for Palestinians in the West Bank.

In a mixture of nostalgic pilgrimage and grotesque obstacle race, Aleem visits ancient churches and shrines, but also passes through the notorious Hawara checkpoint near Nablus, where only a few weeks earlier a baby had died at birth as Israeli soldiers barred her mother's way to hospital.

Meeting both Palestinians and Israelis, he learns about the reasons for the chronic water shortages in the region, and struggles with Israeli bureaucracy over his donkeys' credentials — a process all too familiar to the human beings trying to travel even short distances in the West Bank.

As Aleem comments: "Having a foreign passport, Israeli government press card and hotline to the army are privileges that make it difficult to totally understand how living without them would affect life here."

Aleem's journey can be followed on <http://tinyurl.com/7gbqpb>.

Embargo on communion wine



The lovely Cremisan vineyard, belonging to a Salesian monastery situated in the village of Beit Jala between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, has been producing wine for over 120 years. Its most important product is communion wine, primarily exported to the UK. But not this Christmas.

In the weeks before Christmas Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint into

Israel refused to let the wine pass. The soldiers told Cremisan that the wine constituted "a security risk."

Della Shenton of Cremisan Wine said the ban meant the wine could not reach the Israeli port of Haifa, from where it is shipped to Europe. She said: "It is sad that this Christmas Christians are being denied the opportunity to be at one with the people of Bethlehem by drinking its wine."

Not only Christian churches worldwide but also pilgrim houses, hotels and restaurants in Jerusalem, Nazareth and other parts of Israel were deprived of their traditional wine this Christmas.

Birmingham-based Bishop Kenney, a member of the international Holy Land Group of Catholic Bishops commented: "This is a serious matter of the Palestinians being refused access to international markets for products, not just altar wine."

For more information about the wine see www.cremisan.org

Vicar: 'We can't sing this carol'

The Rev Stephen Coulter, vicar of the Dorset parish of Blandford Forum, banned the Christmas carol 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' from local carol services, saying it did not represent the modern-day reality of the town under military occupation.

He told his congregation that he had visited Bethlehem on a recent pilgrimage and was shocked by the devastation he witnessed. Mr Coulter also showed the congregation a nativity scene, carved by a local craftsman, that he had had to smuggle out of the West Bank. It shows the traditional nativity scene, but includes the Wall which now encircles the town and is strangling the economic and social life of Bethlehem.

The vicar might have appreciated the 'alternative carol service' held in St James, Piccadilly (see page 19), where more up-to-date words were put to traditional carols. One verse of 'O little town of Bethlehem' goes:

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie!
A wall is laid where tourists stayed,
And people can't go by.
And in thy dark streets shineth
No cheerful Christmas light;
The hate and fears of eight sad years
Are met in thee tonight.

The worst Christmas gift ever?

An enterprising Israeli tour guide from Galilee, Menachem Goldberg, developed one of the most remarkable gifts of the holiday season: Holy Land Donkey Dung sealed in hardened, see-through plastic. It is on sale for a mere \$70. "It can be very nice for Hanukkah or Christmas," said Goldberg. "It's very, very special."

Goldberg is the founder of Kfar Kedem, a tourist stop near Nazareth advertised as "life passing through a time tunnel to the Galilee of antiquity." It is a recreation of a 2,000-year-old village where visitors are encouraged to wear Biblical dress as they press olives, tread grapes with their bare feet, herd sheep and take donkey rides "in the footsteps of Jesus."

The views of the local (largely Christian) community are unknown. You can watch a promotional video (in Russian) on www.k-k.co.il.



Lessons in ethnic cleansing

Intimidation, violence and pseudo-legal procedures make life unbearable for inhabitants of Jerusalem and the West Bank, reports **Julia Richards**

The rate of Israeli settlement and confiscation of Palestinian lands has more than tripled since the Annapolis 'peace process' in November 2007. Across the West Bank and East Jerusalem Palestinians continue to lose their homes and livelihoods, due to expansion of the colonies and to the ongoing construction of the Wall. To date, about 60% of the West Bank has been confiscated or annexed.

A major focus of settler activity, fully backed by the Israeli government and the army, is the Old City of East Jerusalem.

Fawzieh AlKurd and the neighbours from hell

The case of the AlKurd family in East Jerusalem has attracted some media attention, due to the particularly tragic circumstances surrounding their persecution and eviction.

Before 1948 the family lived in West Jerusalem, and were driven out during the Nakba, and went to live in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh AlJarrah, in a house provided by UNRWA — the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees. Fawzieh AlKurd spent seven years resisting the attempts of Israeli settlers to oust her from her home in the East Jerusalem on the grounds that Jews had lived in the area before 1948. At one point the courts ruled in favour of



Fawzieh AlKurd

the Palestinian family, but the eviction order against the settlers was never enforced.

For many years Fawzieh had painstakingly improved the home for her family: her husband Mohammad, who was partially paralysed and who also suffered from diabetes and heart problems, and their five children. But seven years ago, when Fawzieh was at her husband's hospital bedside, she got a message from a neighbour telling her that

Israeli settlers, with the help of police, had broken into her home. Subsequently, three Israeli settler families occupied parts of the house, making life hell for the Palestinian family. To add insult to injury, the AlKurds were obliged to pay for the electricity used by the intruders and were even ordered to pay 120,000 shekels for their legal fees. Fawzieh was also offered \$10 million dollars by the settlers' lawyers if she would leave the house. "If you give me the whole world — No," she said. "I will never leave my home."

However, after many costly legal battles, the Israeli Supreme Court served her family with an eviction order, which was carried out on 9 November. The condition of the father, Mohammed, worsened and he had to be hospitalised.

The family then set up a tent on privately owned land near their former home, with the help of international peace supporters. On three occasions Israeli police and military personnel came to remove the tent, which was finally destroyed on 21 November. On 23 November Mohammed AlKurd died in hospital.

Twenty-seven other Palestinian families in the Sheikh AlJarrah neighbourhood, comprising about 500 people, are also faced with eviction orders. In appealing the court's decision the families were once again faced with the high cost of legal fees. "They want to bleed us continuously — morally and our pocket," a spokesman said. "They are putting us under pressure."

A legal precedent?

The indomitable 57-year old Fawzieh is now staking a claim to the AlKurd's old family home in Talbieh, in what is now West Jerusalem. (About two-thirds of West Jerusalem land was owned by Palestinians before 1948.)

Former Mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, has warned that evicting the families of Sheikh AlJarrah could open a Pandora's box of legal issues, since it is clearly discriminatory to recognize the claims of one ethnic group to pre-1948 property — but not of the other.

Nevertheless, Nir Barkat, the millionaire businessman who was elected mayor of Jerusalem on 11 November, pledged support to some of the most extreme figures in the city's settlement movement during his campaign. He has promised to build a new Jewish neighbourhood, called Eastern Gate, that will be home to at least 10,000 settlers, on land next to the Palestinian neighbourhood of Anata. At present there are about 250,000 Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem.

Settlements in Jerusalem contravene both international law and the Road Map, established in the Oslo Peace Accords. The United Nations recognizes East Jerusalem as occupied territory, and therefore subject to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and consequently rejects Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem.

Settlers on the rampage

Hebron, in the southern West Bank, has been the scene of some of the worst violence by fanatical settlers in and around the city. Some incidents have been caught on camera, some witnessed or indeed experienced by visiting MPs, officials of international organisations and Israeli activists. In the past the settlers have rarely been prosecuted or even hindered by the Israeli authorities. However, they have recently captured the attention of the world media, hence becoming a source of embarrassment to the Israeli government. Moreover, some settlers have been blamed for setting off a pipe bomb in front of a left-wing Israeli professor's home in September, and for offering rewards for the assassination of Israeli activists.

In October and November, prime targets were Palestinian homes near an outpost of the Kharsina settlement. International activists, including members of the Brighton-Tubas Friendship and Solidarity Group, the International Solidarity Movement and Rabbis for Human Rights joined local Palestinians in an effort to defend the houses and their inhabitants. But settlers attacked them and tried to set fire to the houses, resulting in the hospitalisation of a number of Palestinians and activists. They also desecrated Muslim cemeteries and daubed the walls of a local mosque with racist slogans.



Settler children learn how to use automatic weapons

the rampage, shooting and wounding 17 Palestinians, burning cars and attempting to torch houses and olive groves. Even Israeli Prime Minister Olmert was shocked, describing the attacks as a 'pogrom'. (See website of btselem.org for a video of one of the shooting incidents.)

Settler leader Baruch Marzel said of the eviction: "We have come to actual war. All of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] and the Land of Israel will not stand silent in the face of this horrible crime." He called on fellow Israelis to "stop the uprooting of residents from the House of Peace [sic] and fight for the right of Jews to settle anywhere in the Land of Israel."

The Israeli Gush Shalom peace movement has demanded that "the government give full and immediate compensation to the Palestinian inhabitants targeted in the settler rampage, all those whose houses were torched and their property damaged," adding, "For the hurt caused to these inhabitants, the State of Israel is fully to blame. The army, border guard and police had large forces on the spot, which stood aside watching for hours and did nothing to stop the settler pogrom."

After the settler attacks Palestinians were confined to their homes by the Israeli army and some were arrested, while settlers were allowed to roam the city freely.

Hebron is the scene of the massacre of 29 Palestinians in the Hebron mosque in 1994 by militant settler Baruch Goldstein — now regarded as a hero and a martyr by the settler movement.

In November, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak described the concentrations of violent settlers as "cancer growths", but little was done to address the problem. Only after protracted legal wrangling was a (temporary) eviction order passed, in relation to one specific house in Hebron, occupied since March 2007. The order was enforced on 6 December and after the eviction settlers went on

100 settlers removed — 450,000 remain

While much show was made of the forcible eviction of a handful of "extremists" in Hebron, no effort is being made to contain, let alone reduce, the major settlement blocs, such as Ariel or Maale Adumim. As they are separated from the indigenous Palestinian communities by the Apartheid Wall, and linked to Israeli cities by 'sterile' highways, the inhabitants rarely catch a glimpse of their Palestinian neighbours, and are often unaware that they are living illegally on Palestinian territory.

Nor are settlers the only problem. A recent UN Humanitarian Affairs report indicates that around Hebron alone more than 100 roadblocks and military checkpoints are destroying the ancient heart of the city and putting a stop to normal life, ostensibly to 'protect' the heavily armed settlers.

The inhabitants have launched a campaign to relieve the eight-year closures, demanding that "the Israeli government and Israeli occupation authorities lift the blockade, thus allowing Palestinian citizens to enjoy freedom of travel and normal mobility in their own city." See www.hebronrc.org for details.

Pogroms in Acre

In Israel itself there are signs of a growing readiness to 'cleanse' the cities of their Palestinian inhabitants, despite the fact they are officially Israeli citizens.

In the port of Acre in Northern Israel, about a third of the population is of Palestinian origin, survivors of the Nakba of 1948, now living uneasily with their Jewish neighbours. Inter-communal tension has been exacerbated by the relocation to the city of some of the fanatical settlers forcibly withdrawn from Gaza three years ago.

On 8 October, the beginning of Yom Kippur, 14 Arab families totalling 72 people lost their homes through attacks by Jewish extremists. Three houses were burnt to the ground during the attacks.

These particular incidents were characterised as 'riots' by the Israeli authorities, but Arab member of the Knesset, Ahmed Tibi, called it a racially-inspired 'pogrom'.

Every week, the Arabic press in Israel reports on two or three incidents of race-related violence, according to the Almassawa Centre, which monitors the situation within Israel and campaigns for equal rights for Arab citizens: see www.mossawacenter.org.



6-year old victim of settler violence

The symbol of resistance

The increased settler violence throughout the West Bank this year did not deter Palestinian farmers from making every effort to bring in a good olive harvest.

The social and symbolic significance of the olive tree in Palestine cannot be overestimated. Not only are olives the staple crop of the region, in rural areas the trees play a central role in family life. Traditionally a tree is planted when a baby is born and individual trees can be passed down from generation to generation, like heirlooms. The harvest especially is a time of neighbourly cooperation and celebration — or was once.

In recent decades the longevity, hardiness



The olive harvest goes ahead — with the help of international volunteers.
Photo: www.uawc-pal.org

and fruitfulness of the trees, even under the toughest conditions, have made them a symbol of the Palestinians' will to resist and survive under occupation.

This is possibly why the olive trees have become such a target, not merely for the 'extremist' settlers who regularly raid the olive groves to cut down or burn the trees, but also for the Israeli army, acting under government orders, to bulldoze entire groves to make way for illegal settlements or the Wall, or simply to steal the trees for resale in Haifa or Tel Aviv (a centuries-old tree can fetch several thousand dollars).

Dr. Taha Rifaie of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) said: "Fortunately this year, as in the past, Palestinian farmers were supported by dozens of international volunteers. They are warmly welcomed, as their presence is something of a deterrent to both settlers and soldiers. Not always, though. On some occasions the Israeli forces intervened for the side of the settlers, arrested some farmers and even foreign volunteers, on the pretext that these olive groves were "closed military zones".

The Palestinian NGO, the Joint Advocacy Initiative (see www.jai-pal.org), also reported that: "The Israeli soldiers accompanied settlers in harassing farmers on several occasions... Farmers were forced to start their harvesting before the actual season has started, or to leave their trees half-full of olives. They have in total lost more than fifty percent of their harvest." One problem is that the army assigns random dates for the harvesting — irrespective of whether the crop is ready or not.

The trees of course need year-round attention, for watering, planting and pruning. But the closures and permit system mean the olive groves cannot be accessed for much of the year. For example, there are three gates in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala giving access to surrounding agricultural land — but they are kept closed. The farmers have not been able to reach their fields in years.

A regular supporter of Palestinian farmers since 2002 is Arik Ascherman, executive director of Israel's Rabbis for Human Rights movement. He reported: "It's a real tide of settler violence this year and they [the IDF] are just overwhelmed." He added: "I've been beaten by security forces. I've been attacked by settlers. I've had my car stolen by Palestinians — it's equal opportunity out here in the West Bank. But I think it's a risk worth taking."

In just one village, Jabal Odala, north east of Qalqiliya, on 20 October, more than one hundred Israeli settlers damaged vehicles and attacked and beat up Palestinian farmers and foreign volunteers collecting olives. The local mayor Muhammad Shteivi said that his own family members were beaten by



Israeli soldiers arrest a Palestinian farmer during clashes with Israeli settlers near Kafr Qaddum. Photo: Maan images / Rami Swidan

settlers who then blocked off the olive grove and prevented families and volunteers from entering the area. The village has been the target of frequent attacks by the settlers from the Qedumim settlement, which was established on lands forcibly confiscated from the properties of Kafr Qaddum.

Justifying such attacks, Rabbi Mordecai Eliyahu, guru of the ultra-religious Zionists and formerly the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, said that it is permitted to pick olives in Palestinian olive groves and to take the crop. He quoted the Old Testament verse that says: 'And

“The army assigns random dates for the harvesting — irrespective of whether the crop is ready or not”

he gave them the lands of the nations; and they seized the labour of the people' (Psalm 105:44), interpreting it as meaning: "The land is ours, and [if] you built a house in my place, [if] you planted a tree in my place, the fruit is mine. Therefore, all of these things belong to Am Yisrael [the Jewish people]."

For more information on agriculture in Palestine see www.uawc-pal.org.

For details of the Olive Tree Campaign, which plants thousands of trees every year, see www.jai-pal.org.

In Brief

BARAK CLIMBS ON PALESTINIAN CORPSES

Before the all-out attacks on Gaza, the coalition parties of the Israeli government had been very low in the opinion polls. After a few days of the bombing and shelling of Gaza they were riding high, especially the party of Defence Minister Ehud Barak (who famously fled from the negotiations with Arafat in 2001, when it looked as though a settlement was within reach).

The Israeli writer Ran Hacoen wrote about this change of fortune in an article, 'Pacifying Gaza': "Polls now predict five additional Knesset seats for his [Barak's] Labour Party in the coming February general election. That's 40 Palestinian corpses per seat. No wonder he promises it's just the beginning; at this pace, it will take Labour just about two thousand additional corpses to go from rags to riches, from a dead political party to an absolute majority in parliament, like in the good old days".



Vote for Barak

NICK CLEGG: THE EU ACTS LIKE A POLITICAL PYGMY

When the foreign ministers of the European Union held an emergency meeting on 30 December, Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg called on them to suspend the new co-operation agreement between the EU and Israel.

The proposed agreement would give Israel access to EU funding programmes, which in some areas are only enjoyed by full members of the EU (see page 22).

Commenting, Nick Clegg said: "The continuing bombardment of Gaza is intolerable and self-defeating. It goes far beyond Israel's right to defend itself. There is not a terrorist organisation in the world that has been bombed into submission. Innocent people are being killed and injured by a military operation that will only serve to further inflame extremism, and weaken the moderate Palestinian and Arab opinion which Israel's long term security depends on.

"With the US Administration hobbled by the transition between Presidents, it is time for the EU to act. The EU has enormous potential leverage in the Middle East as the major donor of aid to the Palestinian community and the main market for Israeli exports.

"Yet for too long the EU has been an economic giant which acts as a political pygmy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. EU Foreign Ministers have the chance this evening for once to take action and not just issue words.

"EU Foreign Ministers must immediately suspend the proposed new agreement with Israel. The deal cannot proceed until there is a transformation of the conditions on the ground in Gaza."

At the meeting the Ministers called for a ceasefire, if only for two days, to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, but this was rejected by Israel.

NO CHRISTMAS FOR GAZANS

Traditionally, many of the 4,000 largely Orthodox Christians who live in Gaza travel to Bethlehem to celebrate midnight mass, in January. Israel handed out only 280 permits to travel this year, but even these became inoperable due to the non-stop bombing of Gaza.

On 24 December, Gaza Latin Church pastor Manuel Musalam called on all Christians to gather at the Holy Family School, run by his church, to attend a silent mass, instead of praying at the church. "Annuling the Christmas mass prayers at midnight in Gaza came also to protest the Israeli decision not to give permission to Gaza Christians to go to Bethlehem," he said.

EX-ISRAELI SOLDIER IN THE WHITE HOUSE



Barack Obama has appointed Rahm Emanuel, a congressman and former soldier in the Israeli army, as White House Chief of Staff.

Emanuel's Israeli father was once a member of Irgun, the Jewish terrorist movement that fought British troops before the 1948 creation of the state of Israel. Emanuel himself volunteered to serve in the Israeli army and spent two months at a base in

northern Israel during the 1991 Gulf War. He served in the Clinton administration and has strong ties to Obama's inner circle through his close friendship with the new president's top political strategist, David Axelrod.

As Chief of Staff, Emanuel will decide who has access to the Oval Office. He is, in effect, the president's top adviser, helping to plan the president's agenda and playing a major role in selection of the president's appointees.

His father, who moved to the United States in the 1960s, said: "It is obvious he will exert influence on the president to be pro-Israeli," and the Israel daily, *Maariv*, headlined an article about him: "Our man in the White House."

LIVNI ON 'TRANSFER'

On 11 December the Israeli daily Haaretz, reported Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, portrayed in the Western media as a 'dove', as saying that "the creation of a Palestinian state would serve as a solution to the Israeli Arabs' national problem".

She said: "When the Palestinian state is created, I will be able to

go to Palestinian citizens — who we call Israeli Arabs — and say to them: ‘You are residents with equal rights, but your national solution is in another place.’” She added: “The principle is the creation of two states for two peoples. This is my path to a democratic state.”

In November, Palestinian members of the Knesset were furious when Livni said: “It must be clear to everyone that the State of Israel is a national homeland for the Jewish people,” adding that the national demands of Israeli Arabs should end the moment a Palestinian state is established.

Her comments are in tune with the views of many Israeli politicians, who see no contradiction between the notions of democracy and ethnic cleansing.

HISTORIC DAY FOR PALESTINE

On 27 October

Palestinians celebrated their first ever international football match on home soil. After Palestine and Jordan drew 1–1, a vast crowd of fans streamed out of the brand-new stadium in Ramallah, chanting nationalistic songs and sending fireworks into the night sky.



Palestine v Jordan. Photo: Maan Images

In the past the team has had to play all their ‘home’ matches abroad, mainly in Jordan and the Gulf, because they did not have a stadium that met international standards.

Now the Al-Husseini stadium in Ramallah has an international-standard artificial pitch with new stands and upgraded infrastructure, including training facilities, to help develop the game in Palestine and to host visiting teams.

FIFA, who accepted Palestine as a member ten years ago, has provided \$800,000, while France has donated about €500,000, Saudi Arabia \$1m, the Olympic Council of Asia \$250,000, and Abu Dhabi, €1m.

FIFA President Joseph Blatter inaugurated the stadium, saying: “The aim of football is not only to put the ball in the net, but to touch the world and build a better future. As FIFA President, I’m very proud, impressed and honoured to be here to attend the first international game played by the Palestinian team in Palestine. This is a historic moment and a victory for football.”

Unfortunately Palestinian national squad members from the Gaza Strip did not receive permission from Israel to come to the West Bank, leaving the team without several of their leading players.

During his visit Mr Blatter also kicked off the Palestinian women’s football league at a futsal tournament in Ramallah. For the uninitiated, futsal is an indoor version of association football, which has become hugely popular with women players on the West Bank.

TUNNELS CLAIM MORE LIVES

According to the AlMezan Center for Human Rights, based in Gaza, the death toll of Gazans killed in the tunnels used to bring vital goods into the Gaza Strip from Egypt continued to rise in the months leading up to Christmas.

In 2008 alone 39 people died, due to explosions or the collapse of the makeshift tunnels in the sandy soil of south Gaza. In August this year five men were asphyxiated when a tunnel collapsed, and 18 others needed hospital treatment.



Digging a new tunnel. Photo: MaanImages/Hatem Omar

On 10 October AlMezan reported that two young men were killed after a cooking gas canister they were dragging into Gaza exploded in a tunnel near the Yibna district. Gazans have relied absolutely on such canisters for both cooking and light, since Israel’s siege brought supplies of fuel to a virtual standstill. Egypt continues to take its orders from Israel and the US, keeping its own border with the Gaza Strip firmly sealed, and Egyptian troops regularly blow up the tunnel entrances they find on their side of the border.

Despite the risks, the levels of unemployment and poverty lead many young people to risk their lives for the sake of making a living.

The mayor of Rafah, where most of the tunnel entrances are located, said there are now about 400 and that thousands work in them, making this by far the largest source of income in Gaza.

The tunnels are 30–40 metres underground and up to 1200 metres long. Some are big enough to import livestock or motor bikes; others have been rigged with plastic piping, to bring much-needed petrol and diesel into the Strip. Many Gazans have been reduced to trying to run vehicles off cooking oil — but even that is hard to obtain.

In September last year, the Hamas authorities introduced regulations to try and licence and control trade through the tunnels, and ensure some kind of safety standards.

In late December the tunnel entrances were heavily bombed by the Israeli airforce, as it was claimed they were being used to smuggle in arms. The death toll is not known. One veteran tunneller responded: “The Gaza Strip is already full of arms; we use the tunnels to bring in the basic necessities. Without them we couldn’t survive.”

THE KNIGHT WITH BLOOD ON HIS HANDS



On 21 November Shimon Peres, the President of Israel, was awarded an honorary knighthood by the Queen, the highest honour that Britain can bestow on a foreigner.

Peres has done as much as any other Israeli leader to promote the building of illegal settlements throughout the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention,

hence putting paid to any hopes of a genuine peace process. He is also currently overseeing the siege and indiscriminate bombing of one and a half million people in Gaza — again a policy of collective punishment in flagrant violation of international law.

But he is perhaps best remembered for his activities

in Lebanon when, as Prime Minister in 1996, he launched "Operation Grapes of Wrath", causing massive destruction and forcing 400,000 Lebanese civilians to flee their homes. About 800 of them took refuge at a UN base in the village of Qana, South Lebanon. On April 18 the Israeli army shelled the UN shelter in Qana, killing 102 civilians, mainly women, children and the elderly. Many more were injured. Human Rights Watch, the UN and Amnesty International subsequently established that Israel's attack on the UN base was deliberate.

Rather than honouring such a man, the UK should consider whether he should be allowed to enter this country unchallenged. After all, several Israeli generals, including former Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz, have had to avoid travelling to the United Kingdom for fear of being arrested on arrival, because they carried out the orders of politicians such as Shimon Peres.

The knighthood received curiously little coverage by the British media, although it was widely reported in the Israeli press. Other knighthoods of heads of state that later proved to be an embarrassment were those bestowed on President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Ceaucescu of Romania.



UN post where over a hundred people died

● PROTESTS OVER THEFT OF LAND AND WATER

New weekly mass demonstrations in the north of the West Bank began in November, against the rerouting of the separation barrier in Jayyous, which will permanently steal most of the village's land, and against the return of settlers to Homesh.

Jayyous in Qalqilya district is one of the best known examples of Israel routing the wall in order to annex the Palestinians' most fertile land. In 2002 the village's 3000 residents learned the wall would be built almost four miles east of the Green Line, as close as 90 feet from their homes, taking 75% of their most fertile land plus seven wells and 12,000 olive trees.

Community leader Sharif Omar said soon afterwards: "People burst into tears. Some fainted. Jayyous' residents depend almost entirely on agricultural income. So this means a loss of our livelihoods, dreams, hopes, future and heritage."

Gates were constructed in the fence but Israel has imposed ever tighter restrictions on issuing passes with the result that a once prosperous community has been reduced to poverty. Now, the Israeli army has apparently decided that the maintenance of the gates is too onerous and has decided to rebuild the fence without gates on a route that will return some land to the village but permanently steal



Marching from Jayyous to the wall. Picture: stopthewall.org

5,582 dunums of land and several water sources and hand them over to the Zufim settlement.

One Friday over 500 demonstrators marched to the fence and destroyed one of the gates. The IDF fired tear gas and rubber bullets, injuring several people, and imposed a curfew and house to house searches but villagers are determined to continue weekly protests.

For updates see: <http://stopthewall.org/latestnews/1785.shtml>

● PRESIDENT OF UN USES THE A-WORD — AND THE B-WORD

On 24 November, the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian

People, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, Nicaraguan President of the UN General Assembly, likened Israel's policies toward the Palestinians to South Africa's treatment of black people under apartheid. He said: "It is important that we in the United Nations use this term [...]."



It is the United Nations, after all, that passed the International Convention against the Crime of Apartheid, making clear to all the world that such practices... must be outlawed wherever they occur... More than twenty years ago we in the United Nations took the lead from civil society when we agreed that sanctions were required to provide nonviolent means of pressuring South Africa to end its violations. Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations."

In September, in his opening speech as President, Brockman also urged the UN to work toward implementing UN Resolution 181, which in 1947 called for the division of Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab states.

"The greatest case failure of the United Nations is the lack of a Palestinian state," he said. "Article 22 of the covenant of the League of Nations pledged as a 'sacred trust' to establish a Palestinian state on a Palestinian territory that was part of the Ottoman Empire." He continued: "At this very moment, people continue to die as a result of our incapacity to implement a resolution adopted more than 61 years ago. As the consequence, today the Palestinian situation is at the lowest, most critical point in its tragic history."

Former US President Jimmy Carter came under fire last year

for using the term 'apartheid' in reference to Israel's policies. He was even prevented from speaking at the Democratic National Convention because of his position on the issue.

● 'MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE' CONDEMNED



Model of the projected museum

In an article in The Architects Journal (see www.architectsjournal.co.uk), Richard Vaughan reported on the decision to build a 'Museum of Tolerance' on the site of ancient Muslim cemetery on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

The museum is being backed by the US Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which already operates another Museum of Tolerance in New York.

The UK-based Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine have launched a petition to stop the project, describing it as a "blow to peaceful co-existence" in the city. APJP chair Abe Hayeem said: "The cemetery goes back hundreds of years. A lot of the decisions dealing with this were taken in secret, without the knowledge of local Muslim people. There was no opportunity for objection by the Palestinians."

In the petition the museum is condemned as "a statement of Israel's hegemony over the Palestinians, rather than any expression of 'tolerance'".

Signatories include many prominent architects from the UK and around the world.

The petition can be viewed and signed online at www.apjp.org, which also gives detailed information and comment on the planning aspects of the settlements and land grabs in the OPTs.

● US BISHOP: THE CRIME OF SILENCE



The Episcopal Bishop of Washington DC, the Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane, delivered a powerful sermon on October 5 at St. Columba Church, the largest Episcopal church in DC.

He spoke forcefully of his visit to Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, cataloguing the land grabs and settlement building he witnessed — "a clear violation of international law" — and the already desperate situation facing people in the Gaza Strip.

In his sermon he asks three times: "Is this the behaviour of a democracy that lives by and cherishes the rule of law?" Noting Israel's denial of access to the holy places of Jerusalem — to both Muslims and Christians — he asks: "Is this the behaviour of a democracy upholding the right to worship?"

He insists that Israel should be held accountable for its breaches of the law and berates US politicians for their silence. "The crime of silence is the greatest crime of all", he says.

The sermon can be downloaded from: <http://tinyurl.com/a7s36a>.

A good New Year present for our own, largely silent bishops?

Eye on the web



• Take an expertly filmed 'virtual tour' of the Occupied Territories, following a 9-day tour organised by the **Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions**. The trip visits Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and Hebron and touches on all the key issues, including academic boycott and child prisoners. You see the reactions of the members of the group as well as the reality of the occupation, which is very clearly explained by local specialists and activists, including the indefatigable Jeff Halper, doing inspiring work. It may well inspire you to sign up for an ICAHD tour!

On www.archive.org/details/IsraeliCommittee2007



Leila Sansour shows visitors around the Bethlehem area

• The human rights organisation **Adalah** has produced an excellent short film about the village of Lajoun and property in Hamdan, near Nazareth, where in both cases the land was taken from the Palestinian owners (now citizens of Israel). In one case the village was simply left in ruins and in the other the land was sold to Jewish Israelis. We meet the Palestinian owners of the property, who give some of their family history, and a young lawyer who explains the legal contradictions involved in what she calls 'expropriation for the sake of expropriation'.

Watch on <http://tinyurl.com/8ea63n>

• If you have ever wondered how teachers and pupils cope in Gaza, this short Guardian report will give you some idea. Here a teacher explains some of the stresses the kids are under, and we see her helping in a psychotherapy session where they are encouraged to act out some of the traumatic situations they find themselves in.

"You can see how it affects them. They are living here, watching the news, seeing how it affects their families," she says. "They are children but they are not acting as children. Here they play at funerals, in the rest of the world children play with toys. This is their reality."

See www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/may/16/gaza

• CNN coverage of the *Dignity* being rammed by an Israeli gunship (note they headline it a "collision"!) on <http://preview.tinyurl.com/a5ueky>. Cynthia McKinney, leader of the US Green Party, who was on board speaks of their experiences.



The Dignity in Tyre, Lebanon

• At a high profile press conference singer Annie Lennox, writer Alexei Sayle, Ken Livingstone, Bianca Jagger and George Galloway call on Israel to stop the bombing. Their impassioned speeches are interspersed with TV footage of the devastation being visited on the people of Gaza: <http://tinyurl.com/8ltr6l>

Unions get the message

Following the Trade Union delegation to the OPTs in June, led by PSC General Secretary Betty Hunter, the official magazine of the Fire Brigades Union *Firefighter* highlighted the situation, both for ordinary Palestinians living under occupation and for firefighters working under intolerable conditions. (The magazine goes out to every one of the 45,000 members of the union.)

This followed an earlier delegation in January 2008, led by Bernard Regan, which also inspired participants to write and speak widely of their experiences on their return, at meetings around the UK.

The unions that have been involved in delegations so far include UNITE (TGWU Section), UNISON, UCU, TSSA, FBU and PCS. At an informal level members of the GMB and NUT have also been involved in delegations. Solidarity work, including twinning activities, is being developed through a number of unions such as FBU and NUT (Camden).

Affiliations

PSC has been making a big push to win additional affiliations from the unions. So far we have around 180 affiliates — and branches are crucial to helping push up this number, which we hope to double over the next couple of years. So in the spring PSC will be renewing efforts to develop this work — asking unions to send out letters to their respective regions and local branches to encourage affiliation.

The focus is particularly on local affiliation by unions that are not yet nationally affiliated. Any union member can put motions forward to their local, regional or national unions on affiliation; PSC can put them in touch and can help write motions. There are literally thousands of union branches out there we need to try to make contact with.

Divestment and settlement goods

Over the last year the PSC's Trade Union Advisory Committee has been developing work on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions. In recent weeks UNISON has begun an internal strategy discussion on the issue of Divestment; if this can be developed then it will provide a basis to go out more widely. An initiative has been taken through UNITE (TGWU) to raise the question of settlement goods through the Ethical Trading Initiative, as a means of putting pressure on the Government to ban them. At last, there seems to be progress on this — see page 21.

This initiative will also be looking at the situation of Palestinian workers in settler industrial zones and developing links with bodies like Sawt el Amel, Kav LaOved and Ma'an (Workers Advice Center) in Israel working with Palestinian workers and migrant workers from Thailand and other countries.

In the coming year work will be continued and developed on the issue of settlement goods — an issue that the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) has supported in discussions with both PSC delegations in January and June 2008.

Union backing

One of the many pluses we can chalk up this year has been a generous UNISON grant to PSC for their publications. This will enable PSC to develop material that can be used to win more support for the Palestinian people. Over the year a number of unions have made

donations towards actions of the PSC, such as the demonstration in May and the Lobby in November.

If you would like to invite one of the trade union delegation members to speak

locally — or suggest to

a local union that they invite a speaker — contact Bernard Regan at bernard.regan@palestinecampaign.org

Exploitation of West Bank workers

In August, the Business and Human Rights Resource Center, an international watchdog organisation, asked three Israeli companies to respond to a report by an Israeli non-governmental organisation that protested the treatment of Palestinian workers at West Bank settlement “industrial parks”.

Kav LaOved, which is concerned with the rights of migrant and Palestinian workers employed both in Israel and in the settlements, reported on the rising number of claims by Palestinian workers employed in West Bank settlements following an October 2007 Israeli high court ruling that the country's labour laws applied in the settlements.

According to Kav LaOved's report, Palestinian workers who come from all over the West Bank have to work under poor health and safety conditions.

To evade liability, work permits are issued under the name of a different employer, and workers employed through a Palestinian contractor are paid less.

See www.kavlaoved.org.il for reports relating to problems facing Palestinian and immigrant workers.

Bernard Regan



Firefighter splashes out on Palestine



Women workers demonstrating in Nazareth. Credit: The Laborer's Voice

Protests over Gaza massacres

When the peace of Christmas was shattered by Israel's brutal massacres in Gaza, thousands of angry activists took to the streets in mass protests around the country.

In London, protest rallies jointly organised by PSC with a number of Palestinian, Muslim and Jewish organisations were held close to the Israeli embassy, varying from several hundred to several thousand every day. There were also demos outside the Egyptian embassy, and massive weekly marches and rallies in Trafalgar Square, with demonstrators throwing their old shoes at 10, Downing Street as they passed, to express their contempt for the government's position.

Other huge protests were held in **Birmingham, Halifax, Cardiff, York, Sheffield, Bradford, Portsmouth, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Bristol, Nottingham, Southampton** and **Hull**. Hundreds of members also wrote to their MPs and MEPs urging them to act to end Israel's military assault on Gaza.

These demonstrations were in addition to vigils and other events drawing attention to the deepening humanitarian disaster in Gaza which were organised by **Liverpool** Friends of Palestine, **Sheffield**



80,000 in central London on 3 January. Photo: Shelagh Weir

and **York**. In **Birmingham** members heard a firsthand account of the terrible conditions in the Gaza Strip from Clare Short MP who recently travelled on one of the Free Gaza boats.

In **Liverpool** the annual Breakfast for Palestine raised £1300 for the Union of Health Work Committees in Gaza and Medical Aid for Palestine.

Village in search of a partner

The village of AlMazra'a alQibliyah, near Birzeit in the West Bank (population about 5000) is looking for a committed group of people in the UK, who are willing to campaign on their behalf.

The inhabitants are experiencing increasing violence from the surrounding settlement Talmon B which has taken recently taken 14,000 dunams of land (3,500 acres) from them. The villagers challenged a recent land confiscation in court and won, only to have the land reclaimed by the IDF and handed back to the settlers. They have demonstrated against the theft of their land and in October 2007 a group from Brighton joined them on a demonstration, where they uprooted some of the grapevines illegally planted on their land. The demonstration was attended by both adults and children and was met with live ammunition from the settlers, who later entered the village and started to smash people's windows and destroy their olive trees. Fifteen Palestinians, including the town's Mayor and several underage children, were then arrested and detained for several months without charge.

In February this year 19 year-old student Muhammad Shreith was shot dead during a peaceful demonstration against the siege of Gaza. Israeli media reported that an Israeli settler named Moshe Benbenishti

had opened fire on the demonstrators. So far the settler has gone unpunished and the Brighton Tubas group is currently working on ways in which to bring him to justice and aid any court proceedings. During a visit in October the Brighton group witnessed further settler violence while helping the village with the olive harvest.



The village school

What they need

The people of Al Mazra'a need a group willing to provide practical solidarity and to carry out political campaigning on their behalf. To find out more contact brightontubas@googlemail.com, tel: 07984 438655.

Alternative Christmas Carols

Prior to the eruption of the crisis in Gaza, activists found inventive ways of adapting Christmas traditions to highlight the plight of Palestinians living in the present day Holy Land.

A concert in the historic St James's Church, Piccadilly, London, organised with Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods, was based on the traditional Christmas festival of nine lessons and carols. The nine readings each began with a UN resolution or other official document followed by a piece of writing about Palestinian suffering, most of them by Palestinians.

The first reading was from the League of Nations Mandate of 1922 and the ninth was from the UN Rapporteur, Richard Falk, on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Dr Swee Ang related how the massacres of Sabra and Chatila changed her from a bigoted supporter of Israel to a dedicated worker for the Palestinians. The ninth piece of writing was by a 16-year-old injured Gazan describing their joy at the arrival of the Free Gaza boats in Gaza harbour, in August 2008.

At the end everyone sang: "Oh let's not ignore it. Tell the world", to the tune of 'O come, all ye faithful' and nearly £600 was collected for Medical Aid for Palestinians, Open Bethlehem and the Free Gaza Movement. The concert caused huge controversy, and even attracted coverage by CNN. A flavour of the concert — and the uproar it inspired — can be seen on tinyurl.com/5cbxrg.

Various groups also sang "alternative" carols in London's Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, at railway stations and other places and a similar event was held outside Sheffield Town Hall.

Festivals of Culture

Several groups held highly successful cultural events during autumn. Camden PSC's well-attended 3rd Palestine Solidarity Festival was compered by Alexei Sayle.

The mostly Palestinian performers included oud player Nizar al-Issa and talented young photographer Muthanna Al-Qadi who

Liverpool Friends of Palestine made a major contribution this autumn by organising a lobby of MEPs in Brussels. See their report on page 21.



Liverpool in the European Parliament: MEP Chris Davies 3rd from right

described the background of many of the photos he was exhibiting. Films shown included one loaned by Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association about a festival in Palestine and another, "Yibna, Paradise Lost," depicting the memories and longings of 1948 refugees for their lost village.

The solidarity part of the festival was clear from the help of many organisations and individuals. These included Islington Friends of Yibna, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, CADFA, Zaytoun Ltd which donated stock, Camden Trades Council and the Socialist Film Co-op.

Manchester held a four day Festival of Palestinian Film and Culture which included music by Reem Kelani while Sheffield staged a falafel and film evening featuring a film about the triumphant breaking of the siege of Gaza.

Mohammed Alatar, director of the moving film *Jerusalem: East Side Story*, was in the UK to promote the movie and answered questions after screenings in Liverpool and Hackney. The film *Children of Chatila*, directed by Mai Masri, was also shown by Hackney PSC at the aptly named Catastrophe Film Club. It was followed by a Q & A led by Jenny Najar, PSC Director.

In Sheffield they showed the thought-provoking film *Welcome to Hebron*, a documentary filmed over three years in that divided city.

Friendship links

Close links with Palestinians continued to be fostered by the East London PSC/Tower Hamlets Jenin Friendship Association, which hosted visitors from Jenin in November as part of the Twinning Network UK tour.

Birmingham branch hosted two visitors from Ramallah who were helping develop links between the two cities while three people from Liverpool travelled to Bil'in to spend a week seeing at first hand the Palestinians' struggle for survival under Israeli occupation.

Scottish PSC, among others, remain very active in the Boycott Israeli Goods (BIG) campaign and in relation to the campaign to get Lloyds TSB to reverse their decision on targeting Interpal (see page 26).

York PSC held stalls at various conferences, including Church Synods, Trades Union and Party Conferences and members also gave talks to local Peace and Justice groups, Church groups and others,



Alexei Sayle (centre) comperes Camden's festival



Protesting Lloyd's TSB in Glasgow

members were so shocked and angry when the EU announced it was intending to withdraw funding from ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions), that they submitted a petition to the European Parliament calling for the funding to be reinstated.

Welcome, Bolton!



Dr Brian Iddon, MP

The latest branch to appear on PSC's Northern Network will be holding a major meeting on 16 January, at which a key speaker will be Bolton MP Dr Brian Iddon, Secretary of the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group. Dr Iddon visited the OPTs in March, but like many observers was unable to get into Gaza. Also speaking will be Dr Asad Khan, who lives locally but works in a hospital in Manchester. Dr Khan has also visited Palestine and has become a vocal campaigner, following his experiences there.

Local organiser Helen Dickson said: "We're lucky to have such well-informed and committed speakers. As a branch, we are still feeling our way, but we've already shown that fantastic film, *The Iron Wall*, and done some boycott leafleting, in the city centre. We aim to have at least one boycott action and one public meeting per month."

all of whom were truly shocked by the scale of Israel's human rights abuses.

At a Liberal Democrat regional conference where party leader Nick Clegg was speaking, members asked him a question about the Israeli occupation (one which elicited applause from the audience). He gave a very positive response mentioning that the EU was a key vehicle for putting pressure on the Israelis.

Also at York,

Drama – a powerful campaigning tool

This autumn, **Iceandfire**, an innovative theatre company that uses drama to explore human rights issues, marked the 60th anniversary of the Nakba with a powerful drama, *Welcome to Ramallah*. The authors, Adah Kay and Sonja Linden, explore the role of opposing narratives in the Israel/Palestine conflict through an encounter between members of two families, one Jewish and one Palestinian. The four characters are trapped together one evening in a Ramallah flat by an Israeli curfew. The gradual sharing of family histories uncovers deeply disturbing truths for the Jewish sisters, as elderly Salim describes the day his village was seized by Zionists, the dispossession and displacement that followed and the enduring consequences for his whole family.

The political nature of the subject, the uncomfortable truths exposed and the message that the play conveys — the necessity for truth on both sides for reconciliation — did not detract from the play's effectiveness as a piece of compelling theatre. An excellent cast sensitively directed brought all four characters to life in an engrossing narrative. More audiences should have the opportunity to experience this first rate piece of political drama.

York audiences were also lucky enough to have the opportunity to see *Palestine Monologues*, Sonja Linden's latest piece of verbatim theatre produced in conjunction with Actors for Human Rights, the outreach arm of Iceandfire. In *Palestine Monologues*, Sonja skilfully exposes the true nature of daily life under Occupation through the use of firsthand testimonies from both sides of the conflict. *Palestine Monologues* is currently touring and can be booked by activist groups.

To find out more, go to www.iceandfire.co.uk/afhr/index.html



**A scene from the play.
Photo: John Haynes**

Irene Bruegel

PSC members and supporters everywhere were deeply saddened to hear of the death in October of Irene Bruegel.

As a founder of Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Irene worked with PSC continuously since 2002. We may not always have had the same views, but we always shared the same priority of seeking justice for the Palestinians through the implementation of international law.

Irene's energy and commitment ensured that the issue of justice for Palestinians was raised constantly in the Jewish community in Britain and support for JFJFP grew remarkably. Irene will be sorely missed by all in the solidarity movement for Palestine; the most fitting memorial for her will be that the work continues, until we have achieved our goal.



Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter, who died on Christmas Eve, was best known as one of Britain's greatest playwrights whose subtle analyses of human relationships and the human condition were often funny, frequently disturbing. They won him many accolades, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005.

But to espousers of human rights causes he was also a hero, for speaking out so fearlessly on the major moral and political issues of the day. Although born into a Jewish family of Polish origin he was staunchly opposed to Zionism in all its forms and supported the right of the Palestinian people to be free of Israeli occupation and aggression. PSC was tremendously honoured when he agreed to become a Patron of the organisation, just a year ago.



Keeping up the pressure

Success in Westminster — and Brussels

The annual lobby of parliament this year coincided with Shimon Peres' visit to London and his address to both Houses of Parliament; so a lively protest outside Parliament, jointly organised by PSC and Jews for Justice for Palestinians, was held to draw attention to the Israeli government's policies in the OPTs and to the continuing abduction and imprisonment of Palestinian legislators.

At the lobby, hundreds of supporters urged over 100 MPs to use the forthcoming parliamentary year to work to change our government's policy on Palestine.

Since MPs returned to Parliament on 3 December there have been clear signs that the pressure on Parliament is producing results.

On 15 December Gordon Brown stated, before meeting Ehud Olmert, that Israeli settlements were a 'blockage' to peace. This followed Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell's answer to parliament that "we consider all settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to be illegal under international law and a serious obstacle to peace".

The issue of settlement goods is one that is now being taken up by the British parliament (see page 22). A debate on settlement goods on 17 December heard MPs sharply criticise Israel's settlements policy; Bill Rammell said that "we are working on what effective action we can take actively to discourage settlement expansion, part of which is making sure that the mechanisms we already have in place work. One such mechanism is the EU-Israel association agreement, which does not entitle settlements to the preferential tariffs that we give to Israeli goods. We have heard worrying reports that settlement goods are

benefiting, so we are investigating". (Prior to this debate the Minister had a briefing meeting, at his request, with representatives of PSC and other organisations, which those attending found 'positive'.)

On 18 December Early Day Motion 370 on the sale of illegal settlement goods was tabled.

By 17 December, 74 MPs had signed EDM 112 on Gaza, only tabled on 4 December. At PSC's evening meeting following the lobby of parliament, MPs from across all parties spoke of the need to end the siege and for justice. Lord Ahmed had just returned from leading a European parliamentary delegation to Gaza (see page 4), and Lauren Booth talked about her experience of travelling on the first boat to break the siege. Ramy Abdu, a student from Gaza, told of his despair when talking to his wife, who was not able to leave Gaza, and hearing that she had no fuel to cook food for herself and their young child.

Brown and Rammell: "The settlements are illegal and a serious obstacle to peace"

Please urge your MP to sign all EDMs relating to Gaza and to settlement goods.

PSC is producing a postcard for the New Year (see back cover), sending MPs a clear message that the siege on Gaza must end, and the sale of settlement goods must stop.

These are obtainable from the PSC office — please ensure that they are sent as widely as possible to MPs around the UK.

Liverpool lobby Brussels

In October the Liverpool Friends of Palestine took a delegation to Brussels to lobby MEPs. One of the organisers, Anne Candlin, said: "It took nine months to research and prepare for the lobby, the focus of which was to ask for the suspension of the EUAA (European Union-Israel Association Agreement). We wrote a detailed statement setting out the case for suspension, and for contesting the upgrading of the agreement. It was based on the failure of Israel to comply with human rights and on EU inaction in face of these failures. We included six reports on specific areas: Gaza; treatment of the Arab minority in Israel; refugees; land expropriation and settlements; water resources; and food imports from Israel and labelling of imported goods.

"We had a lot of support and encouragement from York PSC, who undertook a very successful lobby in November 2007. Fortunately, one of our MEPs is Chris Davies, who regularly speaks out in the EP in support of Palestine and has frequently travelled to Palestine with EU delegations. We also had an extremely informative meeting with Nathalie Stanus, who co-ordinates the Palestine Desk in the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (a group of 80 human rights groups based in 20 Mediterranean countries). Nathalie told us that

the European Parliament has no executive power: decision-making is determined by the Council of Ministers, made up of Foreign Ministers from all the member states, so lobbying of ministers at national level is crucial."

Anne continued: "It was interesting, too, to meet the Councillor from the USA mission to the EU — who has never been to Palestine and seen the reality for herself — and she was shocked when we showed her the poster of the three maps showing Palestine disappearing. Although she objected to our use of the phrase "Israeli racism", the members who had prepared the paper on Israel's Arab minority were able to competently justify the charge of racism and she was again visibly shocked and silenced.

"Everyone we met, from Leila Shahid, Palestinian Delegate to the EU, to the political advisor to the Commissioner for External Affairs, emphasised the importance and influence of campaigning and lobbying. We need to extend support in the EU for Palestine and also lend our support to those MEPs who are struggling to contest Europe's complicity with Israel's crimes."

The full report, which can be used as a resource pack, is available on the PSC website or direct from Anne: anne.candlin1@btinternet.com.

"The US Councillor was visibly shocked and silenced"

Is your supermarket guilty of war crimes?

In the last few months shoppers at supermarkets in many towns have been greeted by demonstrators with placards asking 'Would you buy stolen goods?' or people dressed in stripy robbers' suits with bags labelled 'stolen Palestinian goods'. The point being driven home is that by selling goods from the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank such shops are complicit in the theft of Palestinian land and property and in the contravention of international law which underlies this trade.

This is part of the evidence of the remarkable growth in the last few months of the range and intensity of BDS campaigning work and the background research which supports it. It has involved the majority of PSC branches and many PSC members, but also other groups, from the churches, Muslim organisations and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods to charities such as Oxfam and War on Want. Extremely important also has been the increasing awareness among the trade unions (see page 17) and the contribution of professional groups such as Bricup (British Committee for the Universities of Palestine), Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine, the medics involved in Boycott the Israeli Medical Association and Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights.

Spelling out the law

The role of legal support is invaluable. In early 2009 legal advice is expected on the complicity in war crimes of supermarkets which sell settlement goods — thus helping to sustain the illegal settlements themselves, and thereby contravening the Geneva Convention and its 1977 Protocol (on the illegality of transferring civilian population into occupied territory). It is arguable that the supermarkets must exercise 'due diligence' in these matters, and not rely on the government or other authorities to prompt them to consider their responsibilities.

It may also be possible to use the consumer protection legislation (Unfair Trading Regulations 2008) to highlight shops' culpability in labelling the origin of settlement goods either as 'Israel' (which is both inaccurate and exempts the goods from export duty that should be paid), or as 'West Bank', which seriously misleads shoppers into thinking they are buying Palestinian goods.

Legal support is also extremely useful in considering the position of other bodies which have dealings with firms which are complicit in the occupation. Examples are **Veolia**, which is part of a consortium building the tram system that will link the illegal Israeli settlements bordering Jerusalem with West Jerusalem, appropriating Palestinian land and property in the process, and **Eden Springs** — an Israeli company whose water and water-cooler products are used in many public institutions, including hospitals and residential homes, in this country. Several PSC branches are now petitioning their local Councils to exclude Veolia from tendering for contracts in waste collection and management because of the company's involvement in the Jerusalem tramway.

How effective is the campaign?

Without doubt we can see the impact on stores, the government, the media and public consciousness. Confronted with demonstrations and much letter-writing, the supermarkets have responded in various ways. At one end of the spectrum is **M&S**, which is reported to have declared that it does not stock settlement goods. This is impossible



to check, since produce from Israel and from the settlements are certainly amalgamated for export. But at least the claim is significant. Members of the Cooperative Society have voted to oppose the **Coop** stores stocking settlement goods, but their wishes may be overridden by the Board — though members and Coop-sponsored MPs will protest vociferously if this happens.

Sainsbury's has actually been willing to discuss its labelling of goods. PSC has suggested that the only accurate label would be 'produce of an illegal Israeli settlement' and that these goods should not be stocked at all. The dialogue continues.

Waitrose and **Tesco** continue to assert that their 'Israel' and 'West Bank' labels are accurate and provide desirable consumer choice. So this is where intensive new campaigning must be mounted, also stressing these stores' professed commitment to ethical trading standards. New initiatives — such as interventions at AGMs — are also being mounted at these and the smaller stores, including **Morrisons** and **Aldi**.

A wider response

Beyond the supermarkets, it is most encouraging to see that the British government is finally beginning to do more than reiterate its recognition that the Israeli settlements are illegal under international law, and to state its concern — to the Israeli government and in the EU — over the issues raised by the export of settlement produce (see page 21). When the Foreign Secretary raised this explicitly with his Israeli counterpart during his visit in November, the furious response was an indication of how sensitive and vulnerable Israel feels on this issue.

During this period there has also been fuller media coverage than is usual, with articles and correspondence about settlement exports in the *Times*, *Financial Times*, *Telegraph*, *Independent* and *Guardian*, as well as *Ha'aretz* in Israel — which impacts in turn on public consciousness.

For all these reasons, 'Ban Israeli Settlement Goods' will continue to be the spearhead theme for PSC's BDS work in the coming months. It is a powerful tool in itself but also creates an entry point for campaigning on the basic demand for a ban on *all* Israeli goods, with links to the other areas of BDS work, from cultural, sporting and academic embargos to divestment from companies which are complicit with the occupation (the selling by Unilever of its stake in the Israeli settlement-based Beigel firm is a landmark here — see next page).

All offers of support and help are very welcome!

Zoe Mars

“Helping to sustain the illegal settlements contravenes the Geneva Convention”

FCO advises against buying property in the OPTs

For the last few years real estate fairs in London and Manchester have advertised properties for sale in illegal Israeli settlements such as Maale Adumim and Har Homa, both in the West Bank.

Now, for the first time, British citizens have been explicitly advised by the government not to buy property in settlements in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

The advice, to be posted on the Foreign Office (FCO) website, warns explicitly that potential purchasers of property in a settlement should consider that a future peace agreement “could have consequences for that property”, FCO officials confirmed.

The move followed a meeting between Gordon Brown and the Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad.



Har Homa: a bad investment

Brown told Fayyad in a letter dated 9 December, quoted by the *Guardian*: “We have long expressed our opposition to settlement activity. But that activity has continued and has accelerated since the Annapolis process was launched. I share your frustration at this. The UK is now looking at what effective action we can take to discourage settlement expansion.

“Given our clear position on settlements it follows that we would not want any British national to purchase property inside an illegal settlement.”

The Palestinian ambassador to the UK, Manuel Hassassian, said: “This is a dramatic change of policy by Great Britain... In the past they have talked about settlements being an obstacle to peace and so on. But this is a milestone. They are now being proactive and very serious.” A spokesman for the Israeli embassy called the statement “highly disappointing”.

In their warning about buying settlement properties, the FCO stated: “Potential purchasers should be aware that a future peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians or between Israel and Syria could have consequences for the property they purchased.”

UK lawyers on the case

Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights, a UK-based organisation, is becoming increasingly active in a whole range of legal issues relating to the abuse of Palestinian human rights, especially within the Occupied Territories. LPHR supports the Palestinian people in their legal struggle to exercise their right of self-determination, pursuing its goals through litigation, advocacy, education and awareness-raising, dissemination of information and lobbying. Wherever possible it takes its lead from, and co-ordinates its work with, lawyers and human-rights organisations in the region.

Issues they are focusing on in the UK include the question of settlement goods (see previous page) and the arrest of Israelis guilty of war crimes, when they come to this country.

LPHR welcome new members, volunteers and donations to support their work. See www.lphr.org

US Episcopalians vote for divestment

On 21 November the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire voted “to divest from companies that profit from Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian Territories”.

They stated that: “This resolution intends to increase our awareness of multinational companies that participate in the continued oppression of the Palestinian territories, and divest from these companies,” mentioning specifically “the maintenance of unlawful Israeli settlements or Israeli-only roads in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territory and construction of the Separation Barrier as it extends beyond the 1967 ‘Green Line’ into Palestinian territories.”

Among the companies participating in the Occupation they listed Caterpillar, Citigroup, ITT Industries, Motorola and United Technologies, and voted to “take progressive steps to begin divestment from these corporations”.

Unilever divests from settlement factory

On 1 December Unilever, the multinational company specialising in food and soap products, announced that it will divest from an Israeli factory in Ariel, one of the largest illegal settlements on the West Bank. Unilever had a 51% stake in the Beigel & Beigel factory — a company whose products Harrods recently announced it would no longer be stocking.

The Dutch human rights group United Civilians for Peace congratulated Unilever, which defied the international boycott against South Africa during the apartheid era, saying: “This important and constructive step shows that Unilever takes seriously both the provisions of international law as well as its Corporate Social Responsibility. Israeli settlements form a major obstacle to a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and the industrial zones play an important economic role in maintaining these settlements.”



The pretzel that could stick in your throat...

Israel’s ‘dancing ambassadors’ face protests

At Sadler’s Wells and the Riverside, Camden PSC, in association with J-BIG (Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods), handed out leaflets and displayed banners and placards in protest at performances by the Batsheva Dance Company during this year’s Dance Umbrella Festival.

Batsheva calls itself “Israel’s leading cultural ambassador” and is financially supported at home by the Israeli government which also sponsors its tours.

In 2006, when the group performed in New York, Palestinian choreographer Omar Barghouti, who is also a leading figure in the Palestinian Campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, argued that Batsheva Dance should be targeted as representative of Israel’s official “culture”. He wrote: “We believe that boycott is the most morally and politically sound, non-violent form of resistance that has a chance to bring about Israel’s compliance with international law and that can give us hope that one day we can *all* coexist in justice, peace and unmitigated equality.”

• campus watch

Tom: the legacy

The people of Gaza still remember with enormous affection and respect the sacrifice of the young photo-journalist Tom Hurndall who was shot by an Israeli sniper while trying to bring young children to safety, in April 2003. This autumn Channel 4 screened a 1hr 45m docu-drama of all that happened at the time and in the following months, when the family pursued their campaign for justice.

Tom's mother, Jocelyn, told PN: "It is an accurate exposure of the approach the Israeli government and the IDF took in their dealings with us and, of course, it is a memory of Tom — it is not a sentimental biopic, which is the last thing Tom would have wanted. It's more an account of the quest for truth and justice. It actually takes a sympathetic approach to the IDF sniper, pointing the finger at the IDF policy-makers, whom we have always believed should take responsibility for Tom's killing. The writer, Simon Block, was outstanding: he interviewed key people, including the sniper, his family, and Daniel Reisner, the IDF lawyer responsible for the legal sophistry which allowed the 'principles of warfare' to be applied to the second Intifada."

In the spring the family are publishing a book of Tom's own work: 'The only house still standing — the Middle East Journals of Tom Hurndall'.

Tom's sister Sophie is now working for the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians, and Jocelyn has become Development Director of the Friends of Birzeit University. Anyone wanting a copy of the film should contact Jocelyn via director@fobzu.org.

Scholarship appeal

A project close to Jocelyn's heart is the appeal to raise funds for scholarships at Birzeit University. At a time when it is increasingly difficult for students in the Occupied Territories to travel even short distances to study, and when so many people live on or below the poverty line, support is desperately needed.

Birzeit, just north of Jerusalem in the West Bank, encourages the education of students from economically deprived families by establishing scholarships, concentrating on students from rural backgrounds. FOBZU is contributing to this programme by raising awareness and funds in the UK to administer the scholarships. There is a separate Hardship Fund which helps with books, travel expenses and technology. Many sponsors like to name the scholarships in honour of someone, or to sponsor a student in a particular Faculty.

If you would like to contribute, contact Jocelyn at director@fobzu.org or at 1 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE.



Graduation Day at Birzeit. Photo: Friends of Birzeit University

Leeds beats gagging motion

In November Leeds University Union agreed, by a vote of 12 to 11, to send to referendum a motion which would have labelled anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism, effectively silencing pro-Palestinian groups on campus. It would have prevented the University's Palestine Solidarity Group (PSG) from receiving funding from the union and from holding many of its events, and stopped the University from inviting speakers who are critical of Israel, such as Norman Finkelstein, who went on a very successful tour of UK campuses in the autumn.

In December students voted in the referendum by 1824 votes to 1225 against equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. A representative of the Leeds PSG commented that, "Under current Union policy we are well within our rights to express our opposition to Zionism and defend the rights of Palestinians who suffer discrimination and human rights abuses on the basis of their race, within Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories."

The PSG was supported by local organisations, including the University's Amnesty International Group and the Socialist Workers' Party, and by many of the union's councillors and exec members, as well as individual students who came out to defend their right to criticise Israel freely.

A representative of the PSG told Palestine News of their relief after the motion was defeated: "This is the second time in as many years that the pro-Israeli lobby has tried to silence Palestine activists on campus; hopefully this fresh defeat will put an end to the issue for the foreseeable future."

Oxford protest at Peres visit

A vociferous protest was held outside the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford against Israeli President Shimon Peres who had been invited by the Master of Balliol College to inaugurate the first of a series of lectures on the subject of peace, named after Peres. Armed police flanked Peres as he arrived, but the heavy security could not stop students interrupting his speech with a series of attacks on Israel's policies.

From outside students could be heard chanting 'Free Palestine'.

Inside the Sheldonian one student shouted: "I represent the thousands of farmers who've had their land stolen illegally to build Israeli settlements."

Another student heckled Peres and called him a war criminal and was escorted out of the building by security guards.

When a student accused Israel of purposely starving the residents of Gaza, Peres suggested that he "open your eyes and ears and keep your mouth shut for a different perspective."

A short clip from the meeting can be seen on <http://tinyurl.com/5nvztl>.

Bethlehem and Chester get together... .. and Goldsmiths with Al-Quds Open University

Since 2003 Dr Hala Yamani, a specialist in the role of drama in education at Bethlehem University, has been working with colleagues in Chester University, in the Faculty of Education and Department of Performing Arts.

Hala explained: "Professor Allan Owens and I developed a drama project together which is based on Gassan Kanafani's story 'Returning to Haifa'. In this project we are focusing on critical notions such as: Human Rights, Homeland, Identity, Peace, Security etc. We implemented this project with various groups in the UK, such as children in primary and secondary schools, university students, teachers and drama practitioners.

"I met Professor Owens at the International Drama in Education Research Institute at the University of Northampton, where we were both presenting papers. Initial conversations revealed an opportunity for co-operation. The Faculty of Education at Chester had been involved in work with the Palestinian Ministry of Education from 1995-2000 on a DFID/British Council project. However, the outbreak of the second intifada interrupted the work."

Not only university teachers are involved, but also the Vice Chancellor of the University, the Mayor of Chester, Teacher Training Programme Leader and football specialist Steve Tones and Chester businessman Rod Cox, who helped to organise and fund the link.



A drama workshop based on 'Returning to Haifa', with NW secondary school students. Hala Yamani is in the middle of the front row.

The joint drama project 'Returning to Haifa', involving young people from local primary and secondary schools, took place over ten days in June 2007.

In addition, a two-day North

West Symposium attracted drama teachers from throughout the region plus five international delegates — a total of 173 participants in all.

Hala said: "Feedback from the tour of the workshop/performance was very positive and the decision was taken to develop a research project based on it."

Since then she and Professor Owens have presented 'Returning to Haifa' and other joint work at a variety of international conferences and symposia in the UK and last October Professor Owens visited Bethlehem to work with students of BU and teachers of the schools in the Bethlehem area.

Hala can be contacted at halay@bethlehem.edu and Allan at a.owens@chester.ac.uk

Two years ago the Students' Union of Goldsmiths College (University of London) voted to twin with Al-Quds Open University (see below) in the West Bank. The aim was to start a campaign to twin officially with Al-Quds and offer two scholarships a year to their students.

Jennifer Jones, Campaigns and Communications Officer for Goldsmiths, said: "It was not simply a political statement condemning the Occupation. We who are at university in a country where we do not have to endure daily checkpoints, harassment from soldiers or fear of military attack whilst walking to lectures, are in a privileged position to help those who do suffer under occupation."

Last year students at Goldsmiths raised over £1,000 and with a donation of £200 from Goldsmiths UCU branch, the Students Union flew over one staff member and one student from the College, and the Dean of Student Affairs and the Students' Union President from Al-Quds.

Jennifer said: "We held a Welcome Party in the SU and had contributions from Jews For Justice, Cycle Palestine, Lewisham Palestine Solidarity Campaign and other groups. Events for our guests included a campus tour and meetings where they showed our students photographs from Palestine and told us what it's like to study there. Outside Goldsmiths we accompanied them to Palestinian theatre group productions and anti-war poetry nights in Central London and the week culminated in the Nakba Day mass demonstration on 10 May.

"We have received a very positive response from Goldsmiths Warden Geoffrey Crossick, who said: 'Goldsmiths shares with other universities in this country a strong sympathy for academic staff and students in Palestinian universities who are struggling to maintain normal academic activity in very difficult circumstances... It is entirely appropriate for the GSU to commit itself in this way and we look forward to co-ordinating our various activities in relation to Palestinian universities.'"

The trip to Al-Quds will take place over the Easter holidays and is open to staff and students. Said Jennifer: "We hope it will cement our relationship with the QOU and help us raise the money for the scholarships."

"We share with other universities in this country a strong sympathy for staff and students in Palestinian universities"

A university for all

Traditional universities have seen a dramatic decrease in students who come from rural areas of the West Bank or Gaza, as travel becomes a daily ordeal and the plummeting Palestinian economy makes it near impossible for students to afford accommodation near their universities.

One form of resistance to Israel's efforts to stifle higher education in Palestine has been the creation of **AlQuds Open University**. Offering degree programmes that can be completed as a distance degree, it provides Palestinian students with access to higher education, even as the Occupation bars them from

physically reaching the university.

From 1985 to 1991 committees of specialists prepared academic programmes, study plans and the production of educational materials such as textbooks and audio-visual aids.

Classes started in 1991 and by 2005 the Open University was operating on 13 campuses with 50,000 students — about a third of the total student body in the Occupied Territories. The first cohort of students graduated in 1997.

The opening of online portals to "attendance-based" universities and the creation of links with universities abroad mean students and teachers can stay in contact even during closures and curfews.

British health professionals in the OPTs

Heather Stroud reports on a fact-finding tour

In November, 16 British doctors and psychologists spent ten days in the Occupied Territories. We had planned to spend four days in Gaza but were denied access by the Israeli authorities on the grounds that Israel is 'at war with Gaza'.

In East Jerusalem we saw two levels of health care — one for Palestinians and one for Israelis. The main factor in the inequity is the figure of \$86.3 per person per annum spent on health care by the Palestinian Health Ministry and \$1578 by the Israeli Ministry.

Many people we met were dealing with the psychological consequences of occupation. Also, the restriction of movement at the (over 600) checkpoints and the need for both patients and staff to have travel permits to Muqassed Hospital, the main hospital in East Jerusalem, causes death in many instances and distress in others. (At least 68 women gave birth at checkpoints between 2000 and May 2007, leading to 25 miscarriages and the death of five women.*) At Muqassed Hospital we saw newborn triplets who had been delayed hospital access for over five hours awaiting permits. They were eventually transferred — without their parents.

We also heard how hospital workers in East Jerusalem have recently been denied access through all but three checkpoints into the city, increasing travel times by several hours.

While visiting Physicians for Human Rights we saw evidence of the drastic reduction in exit permits being granted to Palestinians in Gaza seeking vital medical treatment, and of the Israeli security service's practice of denying entry even to those with permits, if they refuse to collaborate (see *Palestine News*, Summer issue).

At the Rafidia Hospital in Nablus we heard how Israeli military forces sometimes entered the hospital and arrested or assassinated patients who were receiving treatment. Victims include those who are

members of the democratically elected government of Hamas, and those who have resisted Israeli military incursions by shooting back or throwing stones.

We also visited the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and An-Najah (Nablus) medical schools and heard of the immense difficulties they face as a result of the paralysing restrictions on staff and student travel between institutions in the occupied territories.

Poverty also compromises health care. Cases of malnutrition and anaemia in Gaza, and diabetes in the West Bank, due largely to a restricted diet, are reported by health professionals to be on the increase. During the time we stayed in Bethlehem family homes ran out of mains water and individuals were reliant on their limited supply of rain water. In Gaza there is no fresh mains water and available water is contaminated — which has serious implications for health.

In Hebron (see page 10) we visited a Palestinian family who live near a checkpoint in an illegal settlement area. While in their home we watched a video of a recent attack where settlers had thrown rocks at children, aged around 7 to 10 years, returning home from school. The child in the family who had suffered a broken arm from the attack,

watched with us. We could only wonder what psychological effect these attacks have on children so young.

The litany of abuses we witnessed, including failure to respect International Law and the International Declaration of Human Rights, and the consequent deterioration in the psychological and physical health of Palestinians appear to be part of a systematic programme designed to destroy and ethnically cleanse Palestinian society.

Heather Stroud is a mental health counsellor

*See Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the UN General Assembly, 23 February 2007

“We could only wonder what psychological effect these attacks have on children so young”

Aid to Palestine targeted by Lloyds TSB

Interpal, a leading charity which has for years provided vital food, medical aid and educational support to the beleaguered Palestinians of the Occupied Territories, has seen its work seriously undermined by the actions of a British bank.

On 12 November Interpal received notification from their bank, the Islamic Bank of Britain (IBB), that Lloyds TSB, their clearing bank, had served notice on IBB to cease all dealings with Interpal.

IBB told Interpal that failure to comply would mean “IBB will be further at risk of all its customer payments being suspended...” The notice was to come into effect on 8 December 2008 but was subsequently extended to 30 January 2009. Interpal has requested from Lloyds TSB an explanation for the proposed actions but to date no reason has been given.

Unless the decision is reversed, or some adequate explanation given, the implications are grave. It is the job of the Charity Commission, not a bank, to decide if a charity is carrying out work beyond its remit. That a bank should not be publicly answerable for its actions is particularly disgraceful when the

bank in question has recently received a massive amount of public funding to keep it solvent.

By way of response, MP Jeremy Corbyn put down an Early Day Motion (EDM 98) in Parliament on 3 December, praising the excellent work done by the charity and calling the bank's actions 'socially irresponsible'.

Part of the explanation for the bank's actions may be that Lloyds TSB Chairman, Sir Victor Blank, is a governor of Tel Aviv University, Chair of UJS/Hillel and a member of the Advisory Board of the United Jewish Israel Appeal. UJS/Hillel assists members of the pro-Israel Union of Jewish Students in their efforts to silence Palestinian voices on British campuses (see page 24).

■ Write and protest to the bank and send messages of support and contributions to Interpal: www.interpal.org.



Interpal emergency food aid to Gaza

Nablus, city of culture

For six years Nablus, in the Northern West Bank, has suffered a blockade by the Israeli army, camped on the hills surrounding the ancient city. Nightly military incursions result in the abduction or death of citizens and the destruction of homes.

However, the people of Nablus are fighting back — not with arms, but by showing their determination to lead a rich cultural and educational life, despite the occupation. An-Najah University is the largest in the West Bank with over 16,000 students who brave the military checkpoints on a daily basis to attend classes. The Old City, home to many historic buildings, some dating back to the Roman era and beyond, is seeing a revival of cultural activities of all kinds.



The Magic Flute comes to Nablus. Photo: The Choir of London

Sami Haddad, Director of the 'Nablus, the Culture' initiative, visited a number of European cities this winter, to spread awareness of their project and gain international support.

He said: "Nablus has always been an international city, with trading and cultural links as far as Cairo, Istanbul and the Gulf. Our heritage is under threat, as well as the social fabric of our

community. Israel wants to get rid of the community leaders and educated people, and keep the rest of us as cheap labour.

"Our project, 'Nablus, the Culture', is an effort to revive the cultural life of the city and to reach out to the wider world, initially through the medium of music. It was through music we met John Harte and the Choir of London, who toured the West Bank in 2007 with a wonderful programme of collaborative performances and workshops, and who we look forward to hosting again in 2009. The Choir will be coming in June, with Sam West's production of *La Bohème*, as part of an extensive Spring–Summer cultural programme."

Music — a cultural Esperanto

In 2007 the Choir of London participated in a big Palestine-Mozart Festival, partially hosted by Nablus, which included a production of *The Magic Flute*, directed by Sam West.

The Choir, composed of professional singers committed to charitable work, has an established reputation for projects of outstanding musical quality.

John Harte, Director of the Choir, told PN: "All the professional work we do in the UK we channel into our work in Palestine — it funds our tours there and our bursary scheme for young Palestinian musicians.

"We've now done three major tours in Palestine, with the 2007 Mozart Festival being the most ambitious so far. This year as well as *La Bohème* we'll be doing the Brahms *Requiem* with a mixed Palestinian/international choir and a mixed orchestra; in the past we've gathered a chorus of about 90 singers all together." He added: "It's astonishing what Sami's managed to achieve in a short space of time. He has built up an audience for concerts in Nablus, and created the nucleus of a student body, who are very lively, enthusiastic and talented — they just crave further teaching. They really need full-time staff."

Sami said: "We're looking for financial support, but even more for volunteers, especially in the field of music, to share their skills and knowledge with our students. We can provide accommodation — and bags of enthusiasm!"



Palestinian students on the Choir of London Trust Bursary Scheme, London 2008

See www.choiroflondon.org for details of the bursaries and the Choir's programme in the UK and in Palestine.

Don't miss their Cadogan Hall performances in London: Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*, on Saturday, 24 January with Colin Davies conducting, then later Mozart's *Requiem*, and Tippett's *Child of our Time*

Visit www.nablusculture.ps for an introduction to the city, past and present, and further details of their cultural initiative. Contact John Harte at john@choiroflondon.org

Belgium shows the way

This autumn saw one of the biggest ever European festivals of Palestinian culture, dedicated to the memory of Mahmoud Darwish. From September till early December the cinemas, theatres, exhibition spaces and concert halls of Brussels and other Belgian cities hosted the best of contemporary Palestinian art, music, literature and film. Workshops and interviews gave the public a chance to talk to the artists themselves about their motivation and aspirations, and learn about the context in which their work was produced.

Many of the singers and musicians, from Kamilya Jubran and her brother Khaled, to Reem Kelani, the Jubran trio and the rap group Dam, are well known in the UK. We are familiar, too, with the work of Palestinian artists and filmmakers, thanks to the annual Film Festival in London and the work of PSC and other organisations in helping to showcase Palestinian art (see page 28). But we have yet

to discover some of the poets, novelists and playwrights who participated in the festival.

Organiser Delphine Neuprez told PN: "This season of Palestinian culture really hit the headlines in Belgium. There were lots of follow-up events in the media — TV programmes, interviews and special supplements in magazines and newspapers. Even more important, perhaps, it inspired a dozen Belgian journalists to go to the West Bank and report back on what life is like in the Occupied Territories."

For a flavour of the range of events on offer visit www.masarat.be.



Dal'Ouna: a fusion of Eastern and Western musical traditions

Occupied Space 2008

For two weeks this autumn an exhibition/sale of about a hundred art works from Palestine and the wider world was held in the elegant new home of the A. M. Qattan Foundation, in West London. It was a great chance to showcase the works of Palestinian artists, many of whom have great difficulty in even sending their work abroad.



Preview evening at the Mosaic Rooms

Artwork was donated by top British and international artists, in support of the campaigning work done by PSC. One of the largest pieces was *Divided field for Palestine*, 2008, specially created by Antony Gormley (famous for his massive figure near Gateshead, *Angel of the North*). Other internationally known artists who generously donated their work included the controversial Chapman brothers, Maggi Hambling, John Keane, Jane Frere,

Laila Shawa, Chinese artist Ye Hongxing and Tunisian artist and calligrapher Nja Mahdaoui.

The preview evening was a great opportunity for networking, as well as appreciating the beauty of the Mosaic Rooms and the wealth of artwork on show. Writer and comedian Alexei Sayle was the first

to buy — Rula Halawani's photograph of a family meal in Jericho.

Betty Hunter, General Secretary of PSC, said: "This was yet another opportunity to show the vibrant cultural life of the Palestinians even under brutal military occupation. And the support of so many acclaimed non-Palestinian artists shows that the cause of Palestinian rights is being taken up across mainstream Britain."

All works — including the few that remain to be sold — can be viewed on the website: www.occupiedspace.org.uk. Work being produced in Gaza can be seen at www.eltiqa.com and www.artwfg.ps.

More details of the work of the A. M. Qattan Foundation can be found at: www.qattanfoundation.org.



Ye Hongxing's Splendid Shadows in Floating Life

'Palestine Aloud' — an unforgettable evening

On 22 October, voices from and for Palestine were indeed heard loud and clear in the Cadogan Hall, London.

There was a sense of excitement as the 700-strong audience gathered in the beautiful foyer of the Hall. They were not to be disappointed: Reem Kelani's thrilling singing opened the evening, creating, as always, a wonderful sense of unity. Guitarists PSC Patron John Williams and John Etheridge dazzled the audience as solists, then joined forces in ElHadj N'Diaye's Ragajuma.

The evening also showcased the sensitive talent of Palestinian pianist Tala Tutunji and we were privileged to hear Marwan Abbado, singer, composer and master 'oud player, who had travelled from Austria with his stunning percussionist Peter Rosmanith.

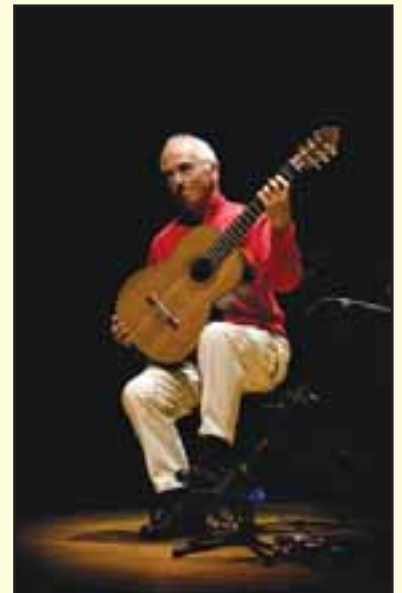
British actors Juliet Stevenson, Corin Redgrave, Kika Markham, Miriam Margolyes and Jeremy Irons were joined by writers Hanan El Sheikh and Victoria Brittain in reading Palestinian poems and prose from writers including Mahmoud Darwish and Raja Shehadeh.

Miriam Margolyes, who was working abroad at the time, was nevertheless keen to participate, so appeared via video-link, reading from Suad Amiri's darkly comic book "Sharon and my Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries". Shortly before the concert, speaking on BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs, Ms Margolyes said that while being Jewish was very important to her, "I

passionately object to the way that Israel is dealing with Palestine." She added: "I have been castigated by many Jews who feel that I am betraying my people, and I can't help it, I have to say what I believe. I am a proud Jew but I am also an ashamed Jew."

The Choir of London, a dedicated group of professional singers who took Sam West's production of the *Magic Flute* round Palestine in 2007 (see page 27), sang Giles Swayne's Magnificat, and the evening was rounded off with all the cast joining the Choir in a composition specially written for the evening by Jessica Dannheisser, inspired by a text of Mahmoud Darwish.

The Director, Poppy Burton-Morgan, who stepped into the role at relatively short notice, succeeded in producing an evening in which each performance seamlessly followed the last, keeping the audience caught up in the beauty and emotion of the event.



John Williams.
Photo: Muthanna Alqadi

Jewish voices on the question of Palestine

A Time to Speak Out: Independent Jewish Voices on Israel, Zionism and Jewish identity

Anne Karpf, Brian Klug, Jacqueline Rose, Barbara Rosenberg (eds.)

Verso, 2008

Thinking Palestine

Ronit Lentin (ed.)

Zed Books, 2008



These books have a good deal in common: edited collections, with chapters written by smart people who

care deeply about the implications of the Israel/Palestine disaster.

A Time to Speak Out is the first substantial product of Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), a group that was formed in Britain in early 2007, in the wave of revulsion against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It could perhaps be considered their extended manifesto. There are 27 relatively short contributions by a distinguished and diverse set of authors. Academics are the largest group but there are also lawyers, novelists, journalists, activists and so on. All are Jewish and living in the UK. For example, the first section on 'Israel and Palestine' has chapters by Geoffrey Bindman, Lynne Segal, Tony Klug, Stan Cohen, Eyal Weizman and Gillian Slovo.

That section is the only one dealing directly with Palestine. The rest of the book is concerned with Jews and the very many problems they face and positions they take in trying to come to terms with Israel as the now pre-eminent bully in the Middle East and further afield. In fact IJV itself becomes an actor in many of the narratives. Time after time the writers feel compelled to describe the often convoluted paths of experience and inner wrestling which led them to sign up to the initial IJV declaration.

That declaration itself — distancing the signatories from the claim that the Israeli government, the Chief Rabbi and the Board of Deputies of British Jews were speaking for them — was not an especially radical affair. Its aim was to open up a space for dissent within the UK Jewish community; the requirement to attract a credible and creditable list of signatories militated against a unified and challenging position. But it is evident from the book that for many of those who did sign, that decision was deeply personal and painful.

IJV is only one of the specifically Jewish groups in the UK which are critical of Israel's occupation and outrages against human rights. Other include Jews for Justice for Palestinians, the Jewish Socialists' Group and the local section of the newly-formed International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network. BRICUP, which promotes the boycott of Israeli universities, has no ethnic or religious restriction but does have a significant Jewish membership. Authors who primarily identify with IJV tend to be at the more 'moderate' end of the spectrum of Israel-critique. But boy, can they write! The quality of the writing alone makes it easy to absorb their message of Jewish diaspora diversity.

The same is not uniformly true of *Thinking Palestine*. This is a book about trying to find terms and categories which can make sense of what is happening to Palestine and the Palestinians. All of its contributors are committed to supporting the Palestinian quest for self-determination. Some could perhaps have made more concessions to the limited ability of the non-specialist to absorb abstract formulations; but others are almost frighteningly clear. It is worth persevering.

Thinking Palestine is the product of an international conference on 'Palestine as State of Exception'. That phrase originated with the pro-Nazi ideologue Carl Schmitt, who argued that states of emergency (i.e. of 'exception'), in which the normal operation of laws and restraints on executive action are suspended, justify exceptional measures. Of course this perspective tended to justify dictatorship, and in particular that of the Nazi Reich. More recently Giorgio Agamben has built on these ideas, though from an opposite perspective, to look at the 'permanent state of emergency' as one of the essential practices of contemporary states. This involves the extension of military authority into the civil sphere, and the removal of individual liberties. One does not have to look too far from home to see this happening.

The book uses this theoretical base to shed light on the current situation in Palestine. Indeed it explores how the theory may need further development to accommodate some of the original twists to authoritarian practices that Israel has invented. For example, we can see the Israeli detention centres set up in the wake of their invasion

of Lebanon in 1982 as zones of exception in which prisoners were tortured and degraded (think Abu Ghraib). But then, what about the sealed off Gaza Strip? Or the isolation of the West Bank and its effective segregation into separate enclaves? Indeed, what is the appropriate way of thinking about these population containers: as ghettos, Bantustans, prisons, concentration camps? Or is a new name needed?

Within these controlled 'exceptional' spaces, emergency laws, indefinitely maintained, justify the expropriation and confiscation of

property. Violations of human rights are best seen not as arbitrary acts by individuals, but as patterned by the 'emergency' removal of full humanity from the Palestinians. They are indeed an almost necessary expression of the exercise of limitless state power.

Thinking straight is a necessary condition of acting straight. Not being able to think straight about oneself can undercut any purposeful action — hence the value of *A Time to Speak Out* to Jews opposed to the occupation. Not being able to think straight about your adversary is liable to produce irrelevant or damaging strategies. In that sense, for all its theorising, *Thinking Palestine* and what follows from it may be more intensely practical.

Jonathan Rosenhead

“Emergency laws, indefinitely maintained, justify the expropriation and confiscation of property”



Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair

Jonathan Cook
Zed Books, 2008

Campaigners for one state in the land of historic Palestine are often accused of being dreamers. In *Disappearing Palestine* Jonathan Cook eloquently defends his argument that on the contrary, a two-state solution is even less likely. Examining both the overarching Israeli system of control and the way it is experienced in everyday life by Palestinians, Cook explains what not only politicians, but many human rights and peace activists fail to see: that it is Zionism which perpetuates injustice in the historic land of Palestine.

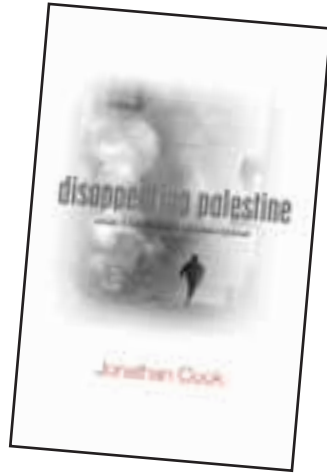
Zionism is the ideology of ethnic supremacy on which the existence and policies of a state defined as Jewish depends. This book gives Cook the space to elaborate on the underlying thesis of his journalistic work: "As long as Israel is a Zionist state, its leaders will allow neither one state nor two real states. There can be no hope of a solution until the question of how to defeat Zionism is addressed."

The first half provides a systematic introduction to the conflict as seen through this lens, covering a broad history from the development of Zionist ideology in the pre-state period to Israel's current "experiments to encourage Palestinian despair" in the "laboratories" of the West Bank and Gaza. The second part of the book is a selection of Cook's journalistic work from the past six years, reinforcing the more theoretical first part with specific examples of the ongoing destruction of Palestine.

In both sections, *Disappearing Palestine* addresses a whole range of topics, from the history of internal Zionist debate to Israel's success in convincing the world that there is such a thing as a 'benign occupation', and the role of the Jewish National Fund in erasing Palestinian history on both sides of the Green Line. The propaganda of 'withdrawal' from Gaza — i.e. unilateral Israeli separation — is seen as part of the ongoing plan to annihilate any concept of Palestine, rather than to end the occupation and control of Palestinian lives. Israel has not strayed from its objective of destroying both the Palestinian public and private sphere, attempting to create a situation in which effective leadership and organisation is impossible — as the post-'withdrawal' situation in Gaza has shown.

The text of *Disappearing Palestine* is both readable and challenging to someone unfamiliar with the fate of the Palestinians. The book will also serve those wanting to put the daily outrages in the West Bank and Gaza into a wider historical and analytical framework — or find sharp answers for that argumentative work colleague. Even for someone who has long since identified Zionism as the fundamental problem, there are insights into issues such as the current misuse of the term "anti-Semitism" and the increasingly public discussion of "transfer", in the Israeli political arena.

You may ask, if the situation really is as dire as Cook suggests, why do we not read clear analyses such as his in the mainstream press? The book opens with an account of his difficulty in getting a piece published in the *International Herald Tribune* and the apparently orchestrated Zionist letter-writing campaign that ensued. In the chapter *Our Embedded Media*, Cook examines how Israel has succeeded in influencing the shape of Western media, from banning certain prominent journalists to refusing visas to the all-



important freelance writers. Moreover, Israel has made sure foreign journalists are aware that it is not only Palestinians who can end up as casualties — as the killing of British filmmaker James Miller demonstrated. Cook also examines the manipulation of language: how even professional journalists end up not questioning that an Israeli soldier is "kidnapped" but a Palestinian politician is "arrested".

In eight years of living in Palestine/Israel, all the journalists I met were based in West Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, with a few attempting to brave it in Ramallah. As his website demonstrates (www.jkcook.net), Cook is quite different: he is a freelance professional journalist not tied to one editorial line and based permanently in Nazareth, a Palestinian town occupied in 1948. From Nazareth, Cook sees the programme of displacement as far older and broader than the occupation of 1967 — an ongoing history unknown to most foreign journalists. Israel doesn't want the world to link contemporary stories of individual suffering with a deeper understanding of the ultimate roots of the conflict. Which is precisely why you should read this book.

Isabelle Humphries is completing doctoral research on Palestinian internal refugees in the Galilee.

Palestinian Costume

Shelagh Weir
Arris Books, 2008

At last — Shelagh Weir's magnificent book has been published in paperback, making it, at £20, accessible to most pockets. Lavishly illustrated with 200 colour photographs and many archival pictures, it shows the extraordinary diversity of the styles of dress and embroidery motifs and techniques, that varied from region to region, sometimes from village to village. Tellingly, the first two-page illustration is a large map of pre-1948 Palestine, showing every town and village, including the hundreds that have been razed to the ground.

As an anthropologist, Shelagh Weir looks beyond the surface beauty of the costumes she describes; she sets them in their social, cultural and historical context. The most sumptuous fabrics, embroidery and jewelry are reserved for wedding clothes and the bride's trousseau, but some of the old photographs show that even everyday clothes were often beautifully adorned.

The function of much of the work has changed, as many women now embroider to help provide for their families. But the techniques are passed on, and the home village remembered in the patterns reproduced in the refugee camps and beyond.

If anyone needs to be reminded, or persuaded (a poorly informed Zionist friend, perhaps?) that Palestine had, and still preserves, a unique art form — this is the ideal gift.

Hilary Wise

“Israel is attempting to create a situation in which effective Palestinian leadership and organisation is impossible”



The produce of Palestine

Plant an olive tree...

Help to replant 50,000 olive trees in the West Bank.

\$20 covers the cost of the young tree. Every sponsor receives a certificate and an indication of the location of the tree.

For more details go to www.jai-pal.org.



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Join the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

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Protest the starvation and massacre of Palestinians in Gaza



Follow the ongoing calls for demonstrations on www.palestinecampaign.org

Boycott Israeli goods until the killing stops and the occupation ends

Join the Campaign on www.bigcampaign.org

Get your MP to act!

Send a PSC postcard to your MP, demanding Prime Minister Gordon Brown urgently works for:

- An immediate end to Israel's military assault on Gaza
- An immediate end to the blockade and siege on Gaza
- An end to Israel's violations of international law
- An end to Israeli occupation
- Suspension of the EU-Israel Trade Association Agreement, and an end to all military trade with Israel



A message from the children of Gaza....

These postcards are available free of charge from PSC



Palestine Solidarity Campaign: Box BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX.
Tel: 0207 7006192
www.palestinecampaign.org