



palestine NEWS

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palestine NEWS

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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

Did they die in vain?

What will be the legacy of the onslaught in Gaza? asks Gill Swain

Let's reflect, in the aftermath of the devastating bloodbath in Gaza, on what the 1400 people who were killed actually died for. What did Israel's Operation Cast Lead achieve by also maiming another 5,000 people and pulverising Gaza's industry and infrastructure?

Israel's stated aim was to stop rockets flying over the border from Gaza and landing on their southern towns. The Gazans died in vain then, for over 150 rockets and mortar shells have landed, albeit harmlessly, on Israeli towns since the ceasefire.

Did they die in order to obliterate Hamas? They died in vain then, for only around 200 of those killed were fighters. Indeed, it would be logical to assume that the rage and despair provoked by such brutality, coupled with dire prospects for employment or education, is likely to have proved a rich recruiting ground for Hamas.

Did they die in order to destroy popular support for Hamas? They died in vain then, for a public opinion poll has revealed that Palestinian support for Hamas increased as a result of the Gaza onslaught.

The poll, conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on January 29–31, showed that the majority of respondents — 46.7% — believed that Hamas came out of the war victorious, compared with 9.8% who said that Israel won the war.

The percentage of those who said they would vote for Hamas rose to 28.6%, compared with 19.3% last April, while the popularity of Fatah declined. Trust in Hamas rose from 16.6% last November to 27.7% in this poll, with the trend particularly clear in the West Bank.

And, despite being pounded mercilessly for three weeks by Israel's sophisticated, US-funded war machine, support amongst the near defenceless Palestinians for military operations against Israel increased from 49.5% last April to 53.5% in this poll.

Did the 1400 die in order for Tzipi Livni to prove herself vicious enough towards Palestinians to gain sufficient backing from the Israeli public to form the next government? They died in vain then, for despite winning the majority of seats at the election, she lost out to the even more vicious Binyamin Netanyahu.

Did they die in order to destroy any vestige of hope the people had left of creating a Palestinian state? This was shocked MEP Jill Evans' assessment of the purpose of the operation after she visited Gaza. Again, it seems they died in vain for, "miraculously" according to Evans, hope for their own state still has not expired under the weight of so much bitter experience.

What the victims' legacy will certainly be is the awakening — all around the world — of outrage and disgust at Israel's tactics of mass murder and the outpouring of sympathy and concern for the plight of the Palestinians.

Thousands of people new to the cause have joined mass demonstrations demanding not only that Israel cease its attacks on the open prison that is Gaza but that their own governments stop being complicit in Palestinian suffering by trading arms with Israel and letting the country get away with defying scores of UN resolutions.

In the UK it has been particularly encouraging to see the large numbers of students getting involved. In a phenomenon not seen on such a scale since the civil rights and Vietnam protests in the 60s and 70s, students held sit-ins at 30 universities and flocked to mass rallies.

Less burdened by 'Holocaust guilt' than their elders, perhaps, it is to be hoped that they will create a new wave of activism which will hold the government properly to account over its policies towards Israel and Palestine. In other words, they will not allow such injustice to be done in our name any longer.

Another legacy of the dead could at last be the recognition, by the Quartet and the rest of the international community as well as by Israel, that future peace negotiations will have to include Hamas. This reality has been backed by a roll call of the world's most experienced peace negotiators (see P21).

Egyptian-mediated talks between Israel and Hamas over a swap of soldier Gilad Shalit, who has been held in Gaza since 2006, for 1200 Palestinian prisoners, broke down in March and two days later talks in Cairo between Hamas and Fatah over the formation of a Palestinian national unity government also foundered. These are set-backs, but they need not be fatal if only western governments — and in particular that of Barack Obama — demonstrate the political will to work for justice and a long-term peaceful solution in the region.

But it would be a mistake to concentrate solely on Hamas. While the world's attention was absorbed by the horrific events in Gaza, Israel significantly escalated the scale and ferocity of its violent oppression of civil resistance to the separation Wall and the theft of their land in villages like Jayyous and Nil'in

in the West Bank, ploughed relentlessly on with the Judaisation of Jerusalem, and appropriated land for the massive expansion of the Efrat settlement.

Hamas has been around for only the last third of the 60-year occupation. Israel was colonising the occupied territories long before Hamas was formed and, if Hamas disappears tomorrow, Israel will carry on colonising the land and dispossessing the Palestinians unless the world stands up and shouts loudly enough:

In the name of the dead, this has to stop!

“What the victims’ legacy will certainly be is the awakening — all around the world — of outrage and disgust at Israel’s tactics of mass murder and the outpouring of sympathy and concern for the plight of the Palestinians.”

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War crimes — the charge sheet

By Paul Adrian Raymond

Human rights groups from around the world are demanding that the United Nations investigate suspected war crimes perpetrated by Israel against the imprisoned and defenceless civilian population of Gaza during the three week "Operation Cast Lead."

The 1,434 Palestinians killed in the onslaught included 960 civilians and a further 239 police officers — who also count as civilians — according to the Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. The World Health Organisation said that 431 of the dead were children.

Figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Health confirmed that 5,303 people were severely injured, including 1,606 children and 828 women.

The figures alone bear witness that this mass slaughter was no mere 'collateral damage' occurring in the process of striking legitimate military targets. In addition, a massive amount of physical and eye witness evidence has been collected attesting to Israeli forces deliberately murdering unarmed civilians, employing weapons banned under international law, bombing civilians from unmanned 'drone' aircraft, using Palestinians as human shields, murdering medical personnel and wantonly destroying civilian property and infrastructure.

Amnesty International has also called for an investigation into violations of international law by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups while Israeli officials have insisted that the IDF respected international law and said that they will investigate the reports.

The charge sheet reads:

■ Deliberately targeting civilians

A group of American lawyers from the National Lawyers Guild interviewed many witnesses and recorded several separate reports of civilians being rounded up into a single building which was then shelled. They also heard "numerous accounts of Israeli soldiers shooting civilians, including women, children and the elderly, in the head, chest and stomach."

Ibtisam Al Samouni from the Al Zaytoun neighbourhood of Gaza City said that on 4th January Israeli forces herded about 110 of her extended family into her home. The next morning at 7am they launched two tank shells at the house. Two of her children, Rizka, 14, and Faris, 12, were among 29 members of the family killed. As the survivors attempted to flee, Israeli forces shot at them.

Her son Abdullah, seven, was injured and with three other children was left in the home with their dead relatives, without food or water, for four days before Israeli forces allowed an ambulance through to rescue them.



The Samouni children with their father

■ Illegal use of weapons

There is substantial evidence that Israel used **white phosphorus** extensively. It is a substance that burns intensely on contact with oxygen, releasing a plume of smoke, and can be legally used as a smokescreen on the battlefield but firing it into Gaza's crowded urban areas violated the laws of war.

It was fired at the UN school where hundreds of Palestinians had sought shelter and many other targets. "We saw streets and alleyways [in Gaza City] littered with evidence of white phosphorus, including still burning wedges and the remnants of shells and canisters," Christopher Cobb-Smith, a former army officer and UN weapons inspector who is advising Amnesty International on its Gaza investigation, told the *Guardian*.



Darts from a flechette bomb

Both the NLG and Amnesty International found evidence that Israel fired **flechette** shells. These are sophisticated tank shells packed with razor-sharp darts designed to rip apart human flesh. They are banned under international treaties but were ruled legal by the Israeli Supreme Court in 2003.

There are unconfirmed reports of the use of **DIME** (Dense Inert Metal Explosive) bombs. These are packed with tungsten powder which has the effect of shrapnel but often dissolves in human tissue, making it difficult to discover the cause of injuries.

Erik Fosse, a Norwegian doctor who treated many of Gaza's injured, told the Independent that the wounds he saw strongly suggested that DIME bombs were responsible.

Sabah Abu Halima, 45, was at home in Beit Lahiya with her husband and eight children when missiles smashed through the roof. She fell to the ground then looked up to see her family burning.

"Fire came from the bodies of my husband and my children," she told the New York Times.

"The children were screaming, 'Fire! Fire!' and there was smoke everywhere and a horrible, suffocating smell. My 14-year-old cried out, 'I'm going to die. I want to pray.' I saw my daughter-in-law melt away."

Dr. Nafez Abu Shaban, head of Shifa's burn unit, said the family's burns were of a kind he had never encountered, reaching through to the muscle and bone. It is likely they were caused by white phosphorus.

■ Targeting people waving white flags

There are documented claims of 20 occasions when Israeli soldiers were seen executing or firing at women and children waving white flags. International humanitarian law strictly forbids the targeting of civilians.

Khaled Abed Rabbu described how he and his family were ordered out of their home in northern Gaza on 7 January by Israeli soldiers while bulldozers tore up their nearby agricultural land. Khaled, his wife Kawthar, mother Suad and daughters Suad, nine, Samar, four, and Amal, two, went out carrying white flags made from a broom handle and a white robe and white headscarves.

He said: "I saw two soldiers standing by a tank. One was eating chips and the other was eating chocolate. They kept looking at us but without saying a word. A third soldier got out of the tank carrying an M16 assault rifle. He looked at us, pointing his gun, and then fired."

Khaled heard more than 12 bullets

fired at his family. Toddler Amal was struck in the chest and died. Suad was shot multiple times in the chest, almost ripping her small body in half. Little Samar was struck in the chest and stomach and left with two five-centimetre holes in her back where the bullets exited her body. She survived but is unlikely ever to walk again.



Samar Abed Rabbu

■ Killing medical rescue teams



Muhammad Shurrab with pictures of his sons Kassab and Ibrahim

The Palestinian Red Crescent Society and the Palestinian Ministry of Health told the NLG that 16 Palestinian medics were killed and 21 injured in the course of Israel's assault. There were also many accounts of Israeli forces denying medical teams access to wounded civilians and firing on teams tending to survivors in collapsed buildings even when they had been notified in advance of their presence.

Mohammed Shurrab, 64, and his sons, Kassab, 28, and Ibrahim, 18, were shot by the IDF as they were returning from their fields in their jeep on January 16. Kassab was shot many times in the chest after being ordered from the car and died at the scene.

Mohammad, wounded in the left arm, called the media and the Red Cross to get help for himself and Ibrahim who had been shot in the leg. Israeli forces denied medical relief agencies clearance to reach them until almost 24 hours later. By then Ibrahim had succumbed to his wounds and died.

■ Bombing civilians from drones

More than a dozen incidents in which Israel's unmanned aerial vehicles — or drones — killed civilians were recorded by Amnesty International. The drones are operated from a remote position, use optics powerful enough to see the details of a person's clothing and are fitted with pinpoint accurate missiles.



Hermes 450 drone

Yet a group of girls and women were killed in an empty street, two small children were murdered in a field. Amnesty's Chris Cobb-Smith said: "There should be no excuse for these numbers."

Mounir al-Jarah told the *Guardian* that he heard and saw a drone as he was sitting with his sister and her family in their courtyard on January 16. He went inside for a moment and, as he returned, saw a "ball of light" hurtling towards them and there was a loud explosion.

Stumbling outside, he found his sister, her husband and four of their children dead in a scene of horror. "We found Mohammed lying there, cut in half. Ahmed was in three pieces, Wahid was totally burnt — his eyes were gone. Wahid's father was dead. Nour had been decapitated. We couldn't see her head anywhere. Even the next day we found limbs and body parts on the roof, feet and hands," he said.

Fatheyha Moussa, 17, a survivor of the attack, said: "I picked my brother Mohammed up but he was just pieces of flesh. Our house is like a cemetery."

■ Using civilians as human shields

The use of human shields is prohibited under article 28 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel has ratified. It states: "The presence of a protected person may not be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations."

But three Gazan brothers told the *Guardian* they were forced to kneel in front of tanks to deter Hamas from firing and were also sent into Palestinian homes to clear them. There were many instances of Israeli soldiers using a home as a base while the family remained inside, which could be a violation of international law.

Nafiz, 16, **Ali**, 15, and **Al'a al-Attar**, 14, were taken from their home at gunpoint and led through their town, Attartra, on January 5. Israeli soldiers would suddenly order them to stop, then fire over their shoulders and between their legs.

An Israeli army magazine, left behind by the troops, had a picture of Nafiz being led bound and blindfolded in a line of men before he was stripped of his clothes. The brothers said they were forced to kneel in an Israeli encampment for three days and three nights as tanks fired shells around them.

"If we even leaned to one side we were beaten by the soldiers. We couldn't sleep. Empty tank shells kept landing on us, a rock or shrapnel came flying towards us," said Nafiz.

The soldiers forced them into houses. "They would make us go first so if any fighters shot at them the bullets would hit us, not them," said Al'a. Ali and Al'a were released after five days, straight into a gun battle, while Nafiz was taken to Israel, interrogated for three days and beaten.

The *Guardian's* Clancy Chassay has collected harrowing video testimony of Israel's war crimes. Watch his three films at www.guardian.co.uk/world.

To read an analysis by the UN Rapporteur for Human Rights in the OPTs, Prof. Richard Falk, of Israel's claims of self defence in its Gaza attacks, go to <http://mondediplo.com/2009/03/03warcrimes>.

Wanted: the political and military leadership of Israel

It looks as though the IDF will try and explain away the atrocities reported by the soldiers themselves (see P7) as aberrant acts committed by rogue individuals. If the teams of international lawyers now on the case have anything to do with it, they haven't a hope.

Sixteen of the world's most experienced investigators and judges have called for a full international investigation into alleged abuses of international law during Operation Cast Lead.

The call was made to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and members of the Security Council and asks for an investigation into "all serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by all parties to the conflict", stressing that the UN investigation "should not be limited only to attacks on UN facilities."

The signatories — who have led investigations of war crimes committed in other trouble spots including former Yugoslavia, Darfur and Rwanda — say they have been "shocked to the core" by events in Gaza. They say they believe delivering justice for the victims "is a precondition to move forward and achieve peace in the Middle East."

“The signatories say they have been ‘shocked to the core’ by events in Gaza.”

Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the OPTs and a Professor of Law (expelled from Israel just before the onslaught), has said that the case for a war crimes tribunal hinges on the question of whether Israeli actions can be justified as 'defensive'. He asserts that they clearly were not since a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas had been in effect since 19 July 2008, Hamas had consistently offered to extend it even for as long as ten years and it was actually broken by Israel on 4 November.

"In other words, there were no grounds for claiming the right of self-defence as Israel was not the object of a Hamas attack, and diplomatic alternatives to force existed and seemed credible, and their good-faith reliance was legally obligatory.

"On this basis the focus of legal debate should not be upon whether Israeli force was disproportionate. Of course it was. The focus should be on whether the Israeli attacks were a prohibited, non-defensive use of force under the UN charter,

amounting to an act of aggression, and as such constituting a crime against peace."

Individuals and families are seeking redress through the Israeli courts; the al-Samouni family (see P4) has filed a case in Jerusalem, seeking \$200m in damages for "criminal negligence".

At the international level, the National

Court of Spain has instructed the seven top-ranking Israeli suspects to appear before them, in relation to war crimes committed in earlier assaults on Gaza. In addition, the Court announced that, if intent to exterminate the Palestinian population can be proven, the charge may be increased to genocide.

Russell Tribunal begins work

The Russell Tribunal on Palestine was launched in March with the aim of making international law the basis for solving the Israel-Palestine conflict and of waking up the international community to its responsibility in the continuing denial of Palestinian rights.

Based on the original Russell Tribunal on War Crimes in Vietnam which was initiated by the philosopher, Lord Bertrand Russell in 1966, the Tribunal acts as a court of the people which has no legal powers but enormous moral authority. It is designed to tackle injustices that are not dealt with by existing international jurisdictions or that are recognised but continue with impunity due to the lack of political will of the international community.

The Tribunal on Palestine is supported by over 100 eminent people from around the world including political leaders, academics, writers and film-makers. Experts' and Witnesses' Committees will establish the facts and build up legal arguments and National Support Committees will contribute to this preparation and publicise the work.

Once the case has been prepared and witnesses summoned, the sessions of the Tribunal will be organised in 2010 in several major capitals. A jury made up of well-known personalities who are respected for their high moral standing will then weigh the evidence.

It will examine the various responsibilities that lead to the continued occupation of the Palestinian Territories by Israel

and the non-application of the United Nations resolutions. The responsibilities of Israel, the US, the EU and Arab states will be scrutinised and it is hoped the jury's conclusions will attract widespread international public and political support.

At the launch, Dr Nurit Peled, an Israeli whose daughter, Smadar Elhanan, was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber, gave an extraordinarily moving speech in which she said that, as an Israeli, it had become "very painful to me to realise that the word 'Israel' has become synonymous with oppression, tyranny, ruthless apartheid and racism."

She hoped the Tribunal would encourage people to "arise and go to Gaza, the city of slaughter, to see with their own eyes the ghettos in which (the Palestinians) are incarcerated, get married, have families, educate their children and lead an impossible day to day life. I hope the free people of the world will have the courage to come to my country and defy all the blockades and high walls and not give up until all the barriers are broken and human dignity is restored."

■ To see a video of Dr Peled's speech and others at the press conference, go to www.russelltribunalonpalestine.net



IDF soldiers speak out

Testimonies by Israeli soldiers about how they were allowed, and sometimes ordered, to shoot unarmed Palestinian civilians during the Gaza operation stunned the Israeli public who had been told repeatedly — despite the mass of evidence pouring out of Gaza to the contrary — that the military did its utmost to avoid civilian casualties.

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published soldiers' stories taken from a transcript of a post-operation discussion by graduates of the Yitzhak Rabin pre-military course at the Oranim Academic College in northern Israel on February 13.

The course principal, Danny Zamir, said that after being “shocked” by the testimonies he told the IDF chief of staff, Gabi Ashkenazi, he “feared a serious moral failure” in the IDF.

“I call it murder”

Squad leader, Aviv, said: “At the beginning the directive was to enter a house with an armoured vehicle, to break the door down, to start shooting inside and to ascend floor by floor and — I call it murder — to go from floor to floor and to shoot at everyone we identify. In the beginning I asked myself, how could this make sense? Higher-ups said it is permissible because everyone left in the city [Gaza City] is culpable because they didn't run away. This frightened me a bit. I tried to influence it as much as possible, despite my low rank, to change it. In the end the directive was to go into a house, switch on loudspeakers and tell them ‘you have five minutes to run away and whoever doesn't will be killed’.”

“I don't think he felt too bad”

Soldier, Ram, said: “There was an order to free the [confined] families. The platoon commander set free the family and told them to turn right. A mother and two children didn't understand and turned left. [Officers] had forgotten to tell the sniper on the roof that they were being set free and that everything was okay and he should hold fire. You can say that he acted as he was supposed to, in accordance with the orders. The sniper saw a woman and children approaching him, past lines that no one was to be allowed to cross. He fired directly at them. I don't know if he fired at their legs but in the end he killed them. I don't think he felt too bad about it because, as far as he was concerned, he did his job according to the orders he was given. And the atmosphere in general, from what I understood from most of my men who I talked to, the lives of Palestinians, let's say, is something very, very less important than the lives of our soldiers.”

“Just because you can”

Squad leader, (unnamed) who described the killing of an elderly woman, said: “To write ‘death to the Arabs’ on walls, to take family pictures and spit on them, just because you can. I think this is the main thing: To understand how much the IDF has fallen in the realm of ethics.”

“We will cry about it later”

Reservist, Amir Marmor, described to the *New York Times* how civilian casualties were discussed in training talks: “Shoot and don't worry about the

consequences” was the message from commanders, he said. A lieutenant-colonel who briefed the troops was “extremely gung-ho. This is very, very different from my usual experience. I have been doing reserve duty for 12 years, and it was always an issue how to avoid causing civilian injuries. He said that in this operation, we are not taking any chances. Morality aside, we have to do our job. We will cry about it later.”

The accounts prompted the military advocate general Avichai Mendelblit to announce a military police investigation into the claims.

“Open fire also upon rescue”

Haaretz also reported that a sheet of paper, handwritten in Hebrew and left behind in one of the Palestinian homes the IDF took over during the operation, bore the message: “Rules of Engagement: Open fire also upon rescue.” A reservist officer who did not take part in the offensive believed it was part of orders a low-level commander wrote before giving his soldiers their daily briefing and referred to killing ambulance teams trying to reach the wounded.

“Shoot and don't worry about the consequences' was the message from commanders”



Grotesque t-shirts for the troops

Israeli soldiers ordered T-shirts to mark the end of Operation Cast Lead featuring grotesque images including dead Palestinian babies, mothers weeping by their children's graves, a gun aimed at a child and bombed-out mosques.

One of the most obscene designs bears the inscription ‘Better use Durex’ next to a picture of a dead baby, with his weeping mother and a teddy bear beside him. A shirt designed for the Givati Brigade's Shaked battalion depicts a pregnant Palestinian woman with a bull's-eye superimposed on her belly with the slogan, in English, ‘1 shot, 2 kills’.

Another depicts a child carrying a gun also in the centre of a target with the inscription: “The smaller, the harder.” One soldier told the *Haaretz* newspaper that the message has a double meaning: “It's a kid, so you've got a little more of a problem, morally, and also the target is smaller.”

Another shows an Israeli soldier blowing up a mosque and reads “Only God forgives”.

Israel's real heroes

By Hilary Wise

At the end of the three-week-long 'war' on Gaza, members of the Israeli army were given a heroes' welcome home. The general public rejoiced in the IDF's biggest ever demonstration of overwhelming military superiority against an imprisoned population that had no defence and no hiding place. But there were other Israeli voices — those of a growing band of conscientious objectors.

People in the UK were privileged to hear one of them in March



Tamar Katz

this year. Tamar Katz, a 19-year old high school student who has been jailed three times for refusing to fight in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, said: "I am not willing to become part of an occupying army that has been an invader of foreign lands for decades, which perpetuates a racist regime of robbery in these lands, tyrannises civilians and makes life difficult for millions under a false pretext of security."

Tamar is a member of the organisation *Shministim* ('twelfth-graders' in Hebrew), now numbering over 4000 members, who declare: "We oppose the actions taken in the name of the 'defence' of Israeli

society (checkpoints, targeted killing, apartheid roads — available for Jews only — curfews, etc), that serve the occupation and exploitation policy, annex more conquered territories to the State of Israel and trample the rights of the Palestinian population in an aggressive manner." (See december18th.org for the full text of their declaration.)

Military service is mandatory after high school for young Jewish Israelis. Hence, despite the fact that Israeli 'refuseniks' are in essence refusing to violate international law, they are deemed criminal draft-dodgers by the Israeli authorities. They face jail sentences ranging from 21 to 28 days in Israeli military prisons and those who refuse to wear a military uniform while in jail are put in solitary confinement. After completing their sentence, they are then drafted again and, if they refuse a second time, they face the same sentence. They also risk ostracism in a society for whom the army is a sacred symbol of the nation.

The *shministim* are just the most recent in an honourable line of individuals and organisations taking a principled stand against Israel's policies in the OPTs. The most indefatigable has been Peretz Kidron, an Israeli writer and translator who refused to serve in the IDF from the 1970s, and who helped to found Yesh Gvul ('There is a limit'); this initially took the form of a petition signed by 3000 reservists who refused to serve in the infamous invasion and occupation of Lebanon in 1982.

The first Palestinian Intifada in 1987 prompted further refusals with close on 200 reservists landing in jail. The second Intifada both swelled the numbers of Yesh Gvul and led to the publication of the 'Combatants' Letter' signed by 51 reserve soldiers and officers in January 2002. It declared their refusal "to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people." The movement, now many hundreds strong,

became known as The Courage to Refuse. Its hallmark has been its insistence that their stand is that of the true patriot and that they are acting in Israel's long-term interests.

Most recently, Breaking the Silence, founded by veteran IDF soldier Yehuda Shaul, has systematically challenged the unwillingness of Israeli society to face up to the role of the military in the OPTs. He said: "Cases of abuse towards Palestinians, looting and destruction of property have been the norm for years but are still excused as military necessities or explained as extreme and unique cases." Breaking the Silence have collected hundreds of testimonies from Israeli soldiers, including testimonies from Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, which are published on their website (www.shovrimstika.org). In addition, they organise tours of the OPTs, especially to Hebron, despite violence from the settlers in the area and harassment and imprisonment by the military authorities.



Yehuda Shaul

Yoram Peri, an Israeli sociologist who has studied the phenomenon in depth, explained that one major but little discussed issue is what is known as 'grey resistance' — people avoiding service by claiming mental health problems.

"The military has adopted the position of 'don't ask, don't tell' on the subject of the grey resistance," he said. "They take the view that if they need 100 soldiers, they will summon 200. Fifty will not be eligible because of religion or health and 50 will claim psychological problems. But in the end they get their 100 men."

What the military do not want is anyone to become a symbol, he explained: such symbols have to be shown there is a serious cost to openly refusing to enlist. Just such a symbol is Jonathan Ben-Artzi, nephew of far-right politician Binyamin Netanyahu. He spent 18 months in jail, 2003-4, and has strongly condemned the total disproportionality of the assaults on Gaza: "Relatively, there is so little violence coming from the Palestinians and such terrible violence coming from Israel," he said.

In the immediate aftermath of Gaza, Israeli TV covered a demonstration at which refuseniks from different backgrounds spoke forcefully and movingly of their opposition to the killing and imprisonment of civilians — and of the price they pay. They included the pilot Yonatan Shapira who has openly called the assaults on Gaza 'war crimes'.

Watch it on Youtube: <http://tinyurl.com/d95dc6>

“There has been an honourable line of individuals and organisations taking a principled stand against Israel's policies in the OPTs”

Arming Israel — the UK's role

By Megan Clay-Jones

Israel's campaign of mass murder against the imprisoned and defenceless people of Gaza would not have been possible without highly sophisticated weaponry supplied by its allies.

Chief of those is the United States but Britain also has a substantial and rapidly increasing arms trade with Israel, amounting to a massive £24 million in just the first quarter of 2008.

The F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache combat helicopters used to bomb civilians, sometimes with white phosphorus shells, contain UK components, including triggering systems for Apaches and Head-Up Displays for F-16s.

The UK sells Israel electronic warfare equipment, helmet-mounted display equipment, military aero-engines, naval radars, surface-to-air missiles and equipment for the use of military sights, according to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade.

The British government also buys millions of pounds worth of arms from Israeli companies every year. Major Israeli arms companies, Elbit Systems and Israel Aircraft Industries, were exhibiting their wares at the UK's Farnborough arms fair in July 2006, even while Lebanon was being bombed.

As Israel stands indicted for war crimes in Gaza, activists are demanding that the government put an end to our country's arms trade with this rogue state.

Protestors picketed the Israeli-owned British company, UAV Engines of Lichfield, Staffordshire, which is reported to be building engines that are used in the military drones which make constant surveillance flights over Gaza.

Kate, from the Nottingham Palestine Support group, told *Palestine News*: "We spoke to people working on the industrial estate and handed out leaflets. Many weren't aware of the connection to the Gaza conflict and were really interested. We got a very positive response and lots of support."

The protest followed a report by Amnesty International giving evidence that the specially-designed engines for the drones could be of UK origin.

UAV Engines told Amnesty that it manufactures the engines for Hermes 450s produced by its parent company, Elbit Systems of Israel. The Amnesty report said: "Hermes 450s are described by their manufacturer as the 'backbone' of Israeli army and air force ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) missions."

Amnesty International UK Campaigns Director Tim Hancock said: "Pilot-less aircraft have been used by Israel in previous attacks on civilian and humanitarian targets. The government should ensure that UK-based firms are in no way implicated in these attacks."

A protest was also held by the group Smash EDO at the arms factory EDO MBM Technology near Brighton. The factory produces the ERU-151 (Ejector Release Unit) and ZRFAU (Zero Retention Force Arming Unit), both of which are incorporated in bomb racks used by F16 war planes.

Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, called for an immediate suspension of all arms exports from Britain. In a letter to the *Guardian* on 7 January, Clegg said that the government had approved £6 million of arms exports in 2007 but in 2008 had licensed sales twelve times as fast.

He wrote: "Brown must halt Britain's arms exports to Israel, and persuade our EU counterparts to do the same. The

"The British government has clear obligations under international law not to render assistance to a state that is violating that law"

government's own figures show Britain is selling more and more weapons to Israel, despite questions about the country's use of force."

Legal pressure has come from the Palestinian NGO, Al-Haq, in cooperation with solicitor, Phil Shiner, of Public Interest Lawyers (PIL) who called for a High Court judicial review on the 25 February into the UK arms trade with Israel.

The lawsuit argues that the British government has clear obligations under international law not to render assistance to a state that is violating that law. The suit names Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, Defence Secretary John Hutton and Business Secretary, Peter Mandelson.

"The point of this case is to make the government focus on what it is legally obliged to do, beyond ineffective hand-wringing pleas for Israel to behave properly, which, to date, have fallen on deaf ears," said Shiner.

The Foreign Office said in a statement that it monitors the situation in Israel "with particular care in considering applications for licences.

"When there is a clear risk that proposed exports might be used for internal repression, or would be used aggressively against another country, a license will be refused."

"Furthermore, the increase in figures for exports to Israel in the first quarter of 2008 was due to a single approval in January 2008 of one license for high value naval communications equipment."

• MP Roger Berry, head of the Committee on Arms Export Controls, is calling for a ban on arms exports to Israel. Add your support via www.rogerberrymp.co.uk

Other UK arms companies known to have supplied to Israel include:

Sub-systems/components for F-16 fighter aircraft:

- **BAE Systems.** The company has numerous locations around the UK (see BAE Systems website), several of which might produce F-16 parts.
- **MPE.** Liverpool. www.mpe.co.uk
- **Smiths Group.** www.smiths-aerospace.com
Specific locations relevant to Israeli F-16s are not known. (Note: the bulk of Smiths' military production was sold to General Electric in May 2007.)

Components for Merkava tanks:

- **Airtechnology Group.** Sunbury on Thames, Middlesex. www.airtechnologygroup.co.uk

Sub-systems/components for Apache attack helicopters:

- **AgustaWestland** (exports the 'Jesus nuts' produced by Redmayne Engineering). Yeovil, Somerset. www.agustawestland.com
- **Brimar** (Helmet-mounted display systems). Manchester. www.brimar-ltd.com
- **Meggitt Avionics** (Air data system) Fareham, Hampshire. www.meggitt.com
- **Page Aerospace** (Light dimming system). Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex. www.pageaerospace.co.uk
- **Penny + Giles Controls** (Rotary variable differential transformers). Cwmfelinfach, Gwent. www.pennyandgiles.com
- **Redmayne Engineering** ('Jesus nut') Brockenhurst, Hampshire. www.redmayne-eng.co.uk
- **Senior Aerospace Baxter Woodhouse & Taylor** (Air ducting). Macclesfield, Cheshire. www.senior-bwt.com
- **SPS Aerostructures** (Engine air intakes). Annesley, Nottinghamshire. www.spstech.com

Main sources: *The Guardian* 29.7.06; *Airforces Monthly*, June 2004; *The Guardian* 9.7.02

For more information see www.stoparmingisrael.org

Elections and peace

What the Israeli and American election results mean for the peace process.

By Professor George Joffe

Barring a miracle, Binyamin Netanyahu is going to be Israel's next premier, even though his Likud party only won 27 seats in the legislative elections held at the start of February, one less than Tzipi Livni's Kadima.

That, in itself, is bad enough for the virtually moribund peace process, whether in its Road Map or Annapolis variants, for Mr Netanyahu has resolutely set his face against the two-state solution. For him, something less than independence on something substantially less than the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is all that can be hoped for by Palestinians under occupation or isolation, with an 'economic solution' being the way forward amidst the settlements.

Mr Netanyahu's 'economic solution,' by the way, basically means turning Palestinians into helots ultimately subjected to the demands of the Israeli economy, a solution not dissimilar from Israeli President Shimon Peres's old vision of the border-based industrial parks.

A new Israeli government

Actually, the situation will be even worse, for Mr Netanyahu has been forced to accept Avigdor Lieberman's Ysrael Beiteinu party, which came third in the elections with fifteen Knesset seats, as a coalition partner. And Mr Lieberman, a former Russian nightclub bouncer who is to become Israel's next foreign minister, may be prepared to consider some form of independence for Palestinians but also wants to force the Arab inhabitants of the 'Triangle' villages in the Galilee into whatever Palestinian political entity is created, in return for equivalent land seized from the West Bank. In addition, he also insists that Israel's Arab citizens must swear a loyalty oath to the Israeli state, although so far Mr Netanyahu has resisted this demand.

And then the coalition will be completed by a gaggle of rightwing religious parties, all of whom will make their own demands on the Likud leader over denying Palestinians any kind of acceptable peace process. It is not the outcome Mr Netanyahu sought; he had wanted to bring both Kadima and Labour, which under the highly unpopular Ehud Barak won only thirteen seats, fourth behind Ysrael Beiteinu, into a grand coalition. Ms Livni has stood firm against this option, no doubt because she, in principle, supports the peace process. Mr Barak, however, who began with a similar resolve, has succumbed to the appeal of power and now intends to join after being bribed with the defence portfolio once again and four other ministerial posts. Although he protests his support of the peace process, the result will be a coalition openly hostile to peace processes whilst other policy disputes make it less than stable. And disputes there will be; Ysrael Beiteinu wants to make Israel more of a secular state but its religious coalition partners will fight tooth-and-nail to preserve their privileges.

All of them will, however, agree on two other issues. The first is that the new government will try to destroy Hamas in the Gaza



Avigdor Lieberman

Strip and will, no doubt, look to Fatah and the Palestinian Authority on the West Bank to help it, on the grounds of ensuring Israeli security.

That also means that any hope of releasing the Israeli soldier held by Hamas since 2006 — hope already severely damaged by the outgoing Olmert government's intransigence over counterpart prisoner releases and the ending of the Gaza embargo — will now vanish.

The second will be Israel's resolve to face down Iran, by military means if need be, over the latter's insistence on its right to nuclear fuel enrichment which Tel Aviv believes is merely the prelude to nuclear weapons.

Yet Israel's new government, however hostile it may be to a peace process with the Palestinians, has to reckon with both its own public opinion and, of course, with its key international backer, the United States.

As far as public opinion is concerned, it should have few worries — even if repeated opinion polls suggest that a majority of Israelis, in principle, actively want peace. The problem is that a majority also believe that the Palestinians have betrayed the peace process, both by electing a Hamas-led government in 2006 and by not preventing it from raining rockets down on Sderot and, latterly, Ashkelon as well. Therefore there is, they believe, 'no partner for peace'.

Recent history demonstrates that this is not the case and that the opposition to peace has essentially come from Israel itself, but this is something that Israelis simply do not believe. And, on top of that, Israeli opinion, from right to left of the political spectrum, is incandescent over accusations of war crimes and brutality levelled against its army after the war in Gaza.

The view from the United States

There is therefore likely to be little pressure, in short, on the domestic front for peace with the Palestinians, in the near term at least. What, then, about the United States?

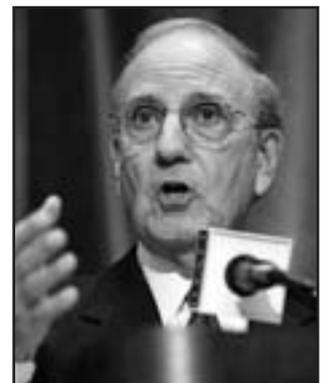
Here the future is much murkier for, although the Obama administration is determined to tear up the Bush legacy as quickly as it can, it is also clear that the new president is a deliberate and cautious pragmatist, despite his promise of 'change'.

It was noteworthy, for example, that, although he was explicit about his determination to bring the occupation of Iraq to an end and about his anxiety to defuse hostility with Iran through diplomatic engagement, he made no mention of early initiatives on peace between Israel and the Palestinians during his presidential electoral campaign. Indeed, on the contrary, he made his support for Israel crystal-clear instead.

Nor did he make any comment on events in Gaza before he took up office, on the ostensibly reasonable grounds that he was not yet in charge of the affairs of the United States. The problem, however, was that he made no comment after he was sworn in as president either!

Nor have his actions since he took up office done much to challenge these impressions. His new Secretary of State and old electoral opponent, Hillary Clinton,

“There is likely to be little pressure, on the domestic front, for peace with the Palestinians”



George Mitchell



Binyamin Netanyahu with Barack Obama

is unabashed in her open support for Israel even if, on her first tour of the region, she voiced her concerns about proposed settlement expansions. She also, however, refused point-blank to engage with Hamas until it fulfilled the three conditions originally laid down by Israel for its recognition.

The special envoy for the Middle East is, it is true, the highly-respected former senator, George Mitchell, who gained his spurs negotiating peace in Northern Ireland and had a similar role in the Middle East in 2001, and General Jones, President Obama's national security advisor, is an old Middle East hand. Most of the State Department's new team dealing with Middle Eastern affairs, however, are, like Dennis Ross, retreads from the Clinton era and tainted by their failures then and by their open sympathies for Israel's concerns today.

Given the president's innate caution and the immense pressures upon him to resolve the domestic crisis in the United States, his unwillingness to engage actively in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians is, perhaps, not surprising. After all, recent events in Washington where one of his chosen advisors, the former ambassador to China and Saudi Arabia, Charles Freeman, has just been forced to resign, is a warning of the power of the pro-Israeli lobby.

Even though new anti-lobby groups, such as 'J Street' are emerging there and contesting the control of American Jewish opinion, and even if the campaign against Ambassador Freeman turns out to have been a spectacular own goal as many are suggesting, the lobby is still powerful.

Israeli representatives, too, are engaging the new administration — the Israeli chief-of-staff, Gabi Ashkenazi, was recently there warning yet again of the danger of Iran and providing fresh evidence of Iran's nuclear and missile ambitions.

Yet the delay also seems to be a deliberate act of policy. Sources close to the new administration have hinted that the first Levantine item on its agenda will be peace between Israel and Syria, an initiative originally fathered by Turkey until it abandoned its mediation in disgust over the war in Gaza.

“The biggest obstacle of all is Mr Netanyahu and his government, for they don't want peace at all, at least, not on terms that would be acceptable to the United States and the wider global community”

According to the Syrian president, the indirect negotiations came 'within a hair's breadth' of success and the feeling seems to be that, irrespective of the situation in the peace process itself, peace there is still achievable.

And peace with Syria will bring Lebanon along in its train. Then, apparently, the Obama administration would be prepared to engage, at its own pace, with the question of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The question is, however, whether Mr Netanyahu is prepared to be as generous as Mr Olmert apparently was, since he was ready to abandon the Golan in its entirety; something which Mr Netanyahu by temperament and constrained by his coalition partners, not to speak of public opinion, is unlikely to emulate.

And then there is a little matter of how patient the Palestinians in Gaza or the West Bank are prepared to be after so many years of barren promises.

Outcomes

It seems likely, in short, that the new administration is soon going to learn that there are no shortcuts in the Middle East, nor is there much more time. The Assad regime is unlikely completely to abandon the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, even if offered the glittering prize of all of the Golan. And Hamas is still a reality with which both the United States and Israel are going to have to come to terms.

It demonstrated in December that its destruction — the apparent objective of the new government in Israel — would be an immensely costly and brutal operation. Now that presidential and legislative elections are due in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, its potential electoral success may well be enhanced by its resistance, as well as by Mahmoud Abbas's lacklustre performance, ably assisted by Israeli intransigence over recent years. In any case, Palestinian appetites for peace-making are dying despite their immense war-weariness.

But the biggest obstacle of all is Mr Netanyahu and his government for they don't want peace at all, at least, not on terms that would be acceptable to the United States and the wider global community. And that is the true measure of the challenge facing President Obama and his new administration.

The author is a Research Fellow at the Centre of International Studies, University of Cambridge, and Visiting Professor of Geography at King's College, London. He specialises in the Middle East.



Hilary Clinton with Shimon Peres

Violent suppression of peaceful protests

PHOTO: PENGON/ANTI-APARTHEID WALL CAMPAIGN



Demo heading towards the fields, Jayyous, January 2009.

While the world's attention was captured by the appalling slaughter in Gaza, the Israelis increased the scale and viciousness of their violent suppression of the unarmed popular resistance movement in the West Bank.

The IDF reintroduced the use of live ammunition and started using a new type of high velocity, extended range tear-gas projectile against demonstrators as well as continuing widespread beatings, the invasion of homes and kidnapping peace activists in the middle of the night.

Dozens of Palestinians have been injured in recent weeks for daring to object to their land being stolen, but international attention was awakened when an American citizen, Tristan Anderson, 37, was critically injured on March 13. He was hit in the forehead by a tear-gas canister shot directly at him from a distance of 60 metres during a protest in Ni'lin.

At a hospital in Tel Aviv, Tristan, who was working with the International Solidarity Movement, underwent several operations to his brain and may lose his right eye. Four Palestinians have been killed by the IDF during protests about the theft of their land, including a ten-year-old boy, Ahmed Mousa, who was shot in the head last July.

The new tear-gas canister, labelled '40mm bullet, special/extended range' in Hebrew, has a range of over 400 metres, emits a very faint sound when fired and leaves hardly any smoke tail at all — making it extremely difficult to avoid.

Against the army's own regulations, soldiers routinely shoot it directly towards demonstrators, as opposed to in an arched trajectory. The combination of all these factors has led to numerous severe injuries from the projectiles, including a fractured skull and a broken leg suffered by Palestinians earlier this year.

Tristan was supporting the 500 protestors in Ni'lin in Ramallah District where construction of the Wall will leave nearly 40% of the villagers' land on the Israeli side. Since the building of a new section began on February 17, demonstrations have been taking place two or three times a week. Israeli soldiers react to the peaceful marches by invading the village and shooting sound grenades, tear gas and rubber-coated steel bullets at people in the street.

In addition to Ni'lin, there are weekly actions in Jayyous, Bil'in, Ma'sara and Burin where the Israelis are stealing and destroying land. In Jayyous the residents were told in September that the route of the Wall was being moved and all access gates closed.

The result is that the Israelis will permanently annexe 6,200 dunums of fertile Palestinian farmland.

Protest marches every Friday have been met with increasing violence from the IDF. In mid February, Israeli Occupation forces raided the village, blocked off roads with mounds of dirt, occupied ten houses, erecting Israeli flags on each, arrested 45 people and imposed an indefinite curfew.

The 75 soldiers arrived in 25 jeeps just after midnight, forced their way into homes at gunpoint and beat up whoever tried to get in their way, including at least one elderly woman. Every Friday sees similar raids where soldiers indiscriminately fire live ammunition and tear gas and beat up men, women and children.

New protests began in March in the isolated communities of Wadi Rasha and Ras Tira in the Qalqilya district which have been told the route of the Wall around the Alfe Menashe settlement will be modified, cutting off 2,500 dunums of their land of which 70% is planted with olive trees.



PHOTO: PENGON/ANTI-APARTHEID WALL CAMPAIGN

Tear-gas fired at homes, Jayyous, January 2009.

The new path of the Wall will sever the villages from their main sources of income. Wadi ar-Rasha will lose 80% of its land, while Ras Tira will lose 60%. Further, the construction of an alternative road for settler road 55 is included in the plans, ensuring the destruction of additional land.

One Friday, after it was announced that 50–60 trees would be uprooted, demonstrators made their way to the construction area early in the morning and managed to halt work for several hours. In response, a large contingent of soldiers arrived and began to beat protestors and fire sound bombs.

Meanwhile, the construction of the Wall has resulted in disastrous flooding of farmland in the Qalqilya and Tulkarm districts during recent heavy rains. This is because the entrances to the drainage system, which consists of exposed tunnels built under the Wall, is fenced over and debris, and dirt build up at the entrances blocking the floodwater.



PHOTO: ISM

Tristan Anderson

“They call me number 59”

By Alex Matthews

In a further example of Israel's policy of aggressive ethnic cleansing, it has put a total of 88 houses in one Jerusalem neighbourhood under imminent threat of demolition. Israel's plans will make 1,500 Palestinians homeless in order to construct a 'national park' and a tunnel linking giant illegal settlements to the east of the city to Jerusalem.

The Palestinians' homes are in the Bustan area, an enclave in Silwan, a densely populated neighbourhood tucked in a valley adjacent to Jerusalem's Old City which is subject to intense settler harassment. Each house has been given a number and eviction orders have been distributed stating the houses have been built without proper licensing.

“They call me number 59,” resident Mousa Muhammad Ahmad Ouda told a Ma'an News Agency reporter. “They used to number the Jews, and now look at the situation we're in.”

Since Israel seized control of East Jerusalem from Jordan in 1967 and declared the whole city its 'eternal undivided capital,' the Municipality of Jerusalem has sought to reduce the Palestinian and increase the Jewish populations through urban planning.

It began demolishing homes in Silwan in 1985. This latest threat of mass destruction came in February at the end of a long appeals protest when the Jerusalem Regional Committee for Planning and Construction rejected a community proposal to rezone the area for residential use.

The Committee's rejection of the plan paves the way for the execution of pending demolition orders issued in 2005.

The move has at least provoked some international protest. Hillary Clinton, the new US Secretary of State, called the demolition orders 'unhelpful' to peace efforts during a meeting with Israeli officials. And the British consul general in Jerusalem, Richard Makepeace, said the action would cause many to question Israel's commitment to peace with Palestinians.

The European Union also said it was “deeply concerned.” It stated the action would be “the largest destruction of Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem since 1967” and “threatens the viability of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, in conformity with international law.”

The Israelis claim that Silwan is built on the ruins of the home of the Biblical David. The mayor, Nir Barkat, said in a statement that it had “holy sites important to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Because its significant importance to the more than 3 billion people of faith around the world, it is also a tourist destination.”

Tourists can pay to take a tour of the 'City of David' archaeological

site which runs beneath the streets of Silwan, but many historians and archaeologists dispute the historical accuracy of the claims. The Municipality also plans to build a tunnel linking the vast settlement of Ma'ale Adumin to other neighbouring illegal settlements and the Jewish west side of the city.

The beleaguered residents of Bustan live in dread of the arrival of the bulldozers. Most say their houses date back long before 1967, others say their families have lived in the area for generations and they had no choice but to build without licences as they are never granted to Palestinians.

In his interview with Ma'an News, Mr Ouda produced a Jordanian government document from 1950, signed by his grandfather and bearing three official stamps. The document stated that the Ouda family owns the plot and named the owners of the adjacent plots, north, south, east, and west.

Mr Ouda said that it was only after the house was finished that he was told he had not obtained the necessary permissions. He also produced receipts showing that he pays property, electricity, and water taxes to the Municipality.

Residents have set up the Bustan Committee to protest against the demolitions and erected a tent to serve as a meeting place for visitors and supporters. Committee member Mazen Abu Diab told Ma'an News about the terrible anxiety the pending demolition orders create.

“Yesterday I saw a little boy walking home from school carrying a backpack that was much too large for him. When I asked him why, I found that he had put his most treasured possessions in the bag, his family photos — he was afraid that his house would be destroyed while he was not there.”

Thousands of other Palestinians live with this daily dread as there are hundreds of outstanding demolition orders for Palestinian-owned structures in East Jerusalem.

There is an urgent need for pressure to be put on the government to demand that the Israeli authorities abandon their demolition plans. The Palestine Return Centre (PRC) has drafted a letter to be sent to Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, which points out that Israel's actions have been condemned in several Security Council resolutions.

Resolution 476 (1980) says that all measures taken by the Occupying Power “which purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.”

In addition, Israel's policy of denying building permits to Palestinians and demolition of their homes contravenes Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which provides that, “Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property... is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.”



Children holding the numbers assigned to their homes



A devastated family after their home has been demolished

You can download the full text from the PRC website: www.prc.org.uk. For more information email: info@prc.org.uk

Read the full interview with Mr Ouda at www.maannnews.net

Continuing siege compounds the suffering

By Gill Swain

The mass murder may have ceased — for now — but the enormous suffering of the people of the Gaza Strip goes on for the Israeli siege, which causes malnutrition, numerous unnecessary deaths and widespread physical and mental anguish, has barely eased.

Conditions are terrible as much of the densely populated area was reduced to rubble and its infrastructure and businesses pulverised by the 22-day bombardment in December and January. Up to 35,000 people are still displaced and forced to cram in with relatives or shelter in tents amongst the debris of their former homes.

Huge spring storms causing mass flooding have added to their misery in recent weeks. Yet the Israelis refuse to allow any building materials for reconstruction to cross the borders. Other essential supplies such as spare parts for water and sewage works, industrial items and livestock have also been banned along with a bizarre list of humanitarian aid, including cooking gas, certain cheeses, toothbrushes, soap, toilet paper, paper, crayons and tomato paste.

Pasta — a dangerous substance

Though over 90% of the people are now totally dependant on UN food aid, under 700 truckloads of goods a week were entering Gaza in March, compared to 246 per day in July last year. The list is ever changing. "It's totally surreal," one European diplomat told Reuters. For a while, the banned items included pasta.

The international aid group Mercy Corps tried for seven weeks to send in 90 tons of macaroni. Israeli officials said they wanted to make sure it wasn't destined for a Hamas charity, then that macaroni was banned because they didn't consider it an essential food item. The ban was only lifted when US Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, spoke personally to Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak.

So, though the US has pledged \$900 million to rebuild what the weapons and the aid it supplies to Israel contributed to destroying,



PHOTO: JILL EVANS MEP

Jill Evans outside the bombed American School

Israel is making it clear that it will block any projects that it considers will support Hamas. This is expected to include reconstructing buildings such as the Palestinian Authority parliament building, the presidential compound and police stations.

"We want to make sure that reconstruction for the people of Gaza is not reconstruction for the Hamas regime," said Mark Regev, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The result is, no reconstruction for anyone, including thousands of homeless and psychologically traumatised children.

Farmers shot dead

In addition to the misery of living in tents, farmers are being prevented from working their fields by Israeli sniper fire. Since the cease-fire on 18 January, at least four farmers have been shot while trying to work their land, two were killed and two wounded.

On 11 March the IDF announced their decision to restrict fishing to within three nautical miles of Gaza's coastline, effectively putting an end to the industry. Since 2002, fishermen have been restricted to 6-8 nautical miles despite the 20 nautical miles agreed by the Israeli government under the Oslo Accords

Medical facilities are struggling to cope as over 5,000 were seriously injured in the onslaught — the numbers of walking wounded have yet to be documented. A report by doctors working for the charity, Medical Aid for Palestinians, who visited Gaza in February, identified over 400 amputees south of Gaza City and 88 in northern Gaza. There are also people with spinal cord injuries, head injuries and massive burns who will be disabled for life.

This is in addition to the large numbers of injured from previous bombardments, especially since 2006, who still need complicated reconstructive procedures. "These injuries are overwhelming in complexity and numbers," they said.

"There are massive psychosocial needs in Gaza, especially those of the children. In this area, it is not only the physical health, but also the mental recovery of people who have been terrorised by siege, bombardment, watching the killing of their family, living on starvation rations. The children of Gaza are already putting on canvas and paper tanks, burning phosphorus, dead bodies — some on the ground, others in heaven."



PHOTO: JILL EVANS MEP

Children's hospital in Gaza

Recovery very distant

The prospect of recovery seems very distant. A recent report from the UN's Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said that private industry in Gaza had already been decimated by Israel's 18-month-long blockade.

"As of February 2009, only 258 private sector establishments, employing 1,878 workers, were partially functioning, at an estimated average of 20-30% of their full capacity. This is around a 90% decrease compared to the 2,400 active establishments, employing over 65,000 people, recorded in 2006."

Israel shelled Gaza's biggest wastewater treatment plant which usually treats raw sewage from approximately 400,000 people. Around 50,000 people, including 28,000 children, have no access to piped water and a further 100,000, (56,000 children) get water only every five or six days and a torrent of raw sewage flowing into residential areas, agricultural land and the sea was visible from outer space, according to a report on the Electronic Intifada website.

Because Israel restricts the import of industrial fuel, power cuts affect 90% of the population while the other 10% has no power at all.

MEPs shocked by calculated destruction

Jill Evans, the Plaid Cymru MEP for Wales, was one of a five-strong EU delegation to Gaza in February and says she was profoundly shocked by the calculated nature of the mass destruction they witnessed.

"It became so clear that the whole operation had been planned with the aim of completely undermining the entire society in Gaza at every level," she says.

They saw whole residential areas totally demolished and heard "awful, awful" stories of human suffering. "Schools were also destroyed for no security purpose whatever.

"And we saw factories which had not only been bombed but bulldozers had come in afterwards to make sure that not a single piece of machinery could be used again, meaning the loss of hundreds of jobs.

"There is now no possibility of rebuilding the economy under the continuing siege. The whole operation was clearly designed to destroy any vestige of hope the people had left of creating a Palestinian state. Miraculously, it hasn't succeeded. The Palestinians are still determined and motivated to work towards that goal."

Ms Evans says the politicians the delegation met from all parties



PHOTO: JILL EVANS MEP

One of the many families who lost their homes

were committed to forming a 'unity' government of Palestinians to work for peace and justice.

"If such a government is formed, we must recognise it and work with it and put pressure on Barack Obama to do the same. In the last six months there has been a lot more awareness and concern in the EU about the situation in the Occupied Territories and especially that it is being allowed to go on and on."

Statistics from the Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (www.pcbs.gov.ps) and various NGOs:

- 1434 killed, 5303 injured
- 100,000 displaced, 50,000 made homeless
- 4,100 residential homes and buildings destroyed, 17,000 damaged (14% of all buildings in Gaza)
- 29 destroyed educational institutions, including the American International School
- 92 destroyed or damaged mosques
- 1,500 destroyed shops, factories and other commercial facilities
- 20 destroyed ambulances
- 35-60% of agricultural land ruined
- \$1.9 billion in total estimated damages

Racist incitement in the Israeli army

The extreme brutality and excessive force used in the recent Gaza operation, in which children were executed in front of their parents and civilians incinerated by phosphorus bombs, could be in part due to the rapid "theologisation" of the Israeli army, according to critics.

There are now entire units of religious combat soldiers who answer to extremist rabbis bent on waging holy war against the Palestinians and establishing a Greater Israel, say some military historians.

Jonathan Cook, in a report in the Electronic Intifada, quoted Yigal Levy, a political sociologist at the Open University who has written several books on the Israeli army, as saying there was now a "critical mass of religious soldiers" creating a new atmosphere in the army.

"When soldiers, including secular ones, are imbued with theological ideas, it makes them less sensitive to human rights or the suffering of the other side," he said.

The army rabbinate handed out a booklet to soldiers preparing for the 22-day Gaza offensive which contained messages "bordering on racist incitement against the Palestinian people," according to Israeli human rights group, Yesh Din.

The booklet quoted extensively from Shlomo Aviner, a far-right rabbi who compared the Palestinians to the Philistines, the Biblical enemy of the Jews. He advised: "When you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers ... This is a war on murderers." He also cited a Biblical ban on "surrendering a single millimetre" of Greater Israel.

The booklet was approved by the army's chief rabbi, Brig Gen Avichai Ronsky, who is a settler in the West Bank community of Itmar, near Nablus. He is said to visit jailed members of Jewish terror groups and to have offered his home to a settler who is under house arrest for wounding Palestinians.

Breaking the Silence, a project run by former soldiers seeking to expose the army's behaviour against Palestinians, said the booklet had originated among Hebron's extremist settlers. Mikhael Manekin, one of the group's founders, said it had been around since 2003. "But what is new is that the army has been effectively subcontracted to promote the views of the extremist settlers to its soldiers."

People live in alarm and pain

The respected medical journal, *The Lancet*, has published a series of articles which paint a devastating picture of the dire effects of the Israeli occupation on the physical and mental health of the Palestinians.

By **Victoria Brittain**

Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet*, spent two years devoted to the ambitious goal of changing the way health professionals, politicians, policy makers, media, and the public view, think about, and discuss Palestine. The *Lancet* collaborated with Palestinian public health academics, the World Health Organisation and academics and doctors from the United States, Britain, Norway, and France to produce academic data of the highest possible standard, extensively peer reviewed and impossible to dismiss as propaganda.

Introducing the resulting series of five authoritative articles on Palestinian health, Horton wrote: "The pursuit of health as a political objective and the creation of a strong health system for Palestinians could be one fruitful diplomatic path to reconciliation, peace and justice.

"The people of the Palestinian territory matter, most importantly, because their lives and communities are continuing to experience an occupation that has produced chronic de-development for nearly four million people over many decades. But the future of Palestinians also matters because of the continued conflict with Israel, the failure of the peace process to make any substantial progress and the internally catastrophic and violent divisions within Palestinian politics."

Horton's hopes for the endgame are the same as those every western leader has paid lip service to in recent decades while their actions, or inactions, pushed in the opposite direction: "If a way could be found to strengthen Palestinian political institutions and find common ground for negotiations with Israel and western governments, great regional and even international benefits could follow."

A tipping point for public opinion

The *Lancet* series (which can be read in full online at www.thelancet.com) deserves a far wider readership than the medical profession. And it should be a tipping point for international public opinion, especially coming as it does while the recent systematic destruction of Gaza's agricultural and industrial base has been seen across the world, along with the use of illegal weapons.

Professor Rita Giacaman, founding director of the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University in Ramallah, was the moving spirit behind the work done on the ground for this series.

Introducing the series in London, before launches in Birzeit and the US, she spoke of how the 40 years of occupation underlie every statistic and finding on health.

She spoke of the 690 checkpoints (up from 518 in 2006), the separation Wall with its confiscation of thousands of hectares of fertile Palestinian agricultural land, the lack of sovereignty and control over borders, movement of people, or even of water, the forced aid dependence of Palestinians, and the incompetence of the Palestinian authority. She stressed how both conventional and unconventional indicators of health had been used to draw up a complete picture.

A people who are never safe

The first paper in the series, co-authored by Prof Giacaman and seven others, covers the quality of life in the OPT and the people's overwhelming feelings of *hamm* — a word meaning the heaviness of worry, anxiety, grief, sorrow, frustration and anger. The profile of wellbeing is especially tragic in children. One table quantifies the life satisfaction scores of 15 year olds in 35 countries — it shows Palestinian girls at 45.7% (Palestinian boys were at 62%), compared with the top scoring Dutch boys at 95.5% and Dutch girls at 89.5%.

The paper goes on: "Palestinians are people who were never safe, even before the 1967 Israeli invasion of the West Bank and Gaza. The trauma of the 1948 *nakba* is imprinted in the collective consciousness to this day. Palestinians' quality of life is very low and their daily lives are constantly under threat. People live in alarm and pain because of current life events but also because of the history of mass trauma that is part of their collective consciousness."

Introducing the second paper, on maternal and child health, Samia Halileh, also of Birzeit

University, pointed to the rise in stunting, which is an indication of chronic malnutrition, over the last decade, especially in Gaza where it has risen from 8.2% to 13.2%. The paper cites the general high unemployment, closures and wage depreciation for the declining quantity and quality of food intake. It also draws attention to the worrying doubling of caesarean births because of anxiety about access to hospitals, illustrated by the 69 births at checkpoints where half the babies died.

A lack of reliable data

The third paper covered cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer, which together account for around half the deaths in the OPTs, and high costs of care. Improving treatment was hampered by the lack of comprehensive data. The paper said

"The academic data is of the highest possible standard, extensively peer reviewed, and impossible to dismiss as propaganda"





that risk factors such as hypertension and tobacco smoking were exacerbated by poor dietary habits, sedentary life style and obesity.

The fourth paper used human security and its link to health, as a framework, and was introduced by Rajaie Batniji of Oxford University. He spoke of the “dire picture of the social determinants of health,” the permanent dislocation of people, and the conclusion that there was no basis of human security. He referred to the on-going destruction of homes and underlined how the indirect threats to human security such as checkpoints, curfews and permits were a constant factor in everyone’s lives. He also mentioned the poverty levels of 30% in the West Bank and 76% in Gaza, along with the aid dependence for one third of income.

The fifth paper, gloomily assessing the health care system after one and a half decades of the Palestinian Authority, was presented by Dr Awad Mataria of Birzeit. He spoke of the crisis of human resources, the lack of access, the poor coordination of donors and their tendency to focus on emergency and to set inappropriate priorities, the nature of the Palestinian National Authority and its little authority in reality. The military occupation exacerbates and perpetuates all these weaknesses, the paper demonstrates.

What is going to be different here?

This careful and deep *Lancet* research and analysis builds on a large and respected body of evidence from others over the years: the WHO has repeatedly drawn attention to its concern about the health situation in the occupied territory, especially Gaza, and at the end of every paper in this report is a list of references to previous academic and other studies long enough for a PhD thesis.

So, what is going to be different here? Perhaps one factor is how this series shows the outside world the extraordinary achievements of Palestinian academics in maintaining rigorous standards and links with the top of their professions around the world. A second factor is the current mobilising of men and women outside the OPT in one of the most universally respected of professions, refusing to divorce ethics from politics.

Last October I was invited by the Gaza Community Mental Health Project to a conference of health professionals, supported by the WHO, but the group was denied entry in the last few days. It was unsurprising with hindsight, given how far advanced the planning for the attack on Gaza — two months later — was.

As the conference went ahead by video link from Ramallah, I watched the utter astonishment and outrage of dozens of professors and eminent psychiatrists from the US and Europe turn to a determination that what they were witnessing was so deeply damaging, not just to Palestinians, not just to the peace and development of the region, but to world civilisation, that they would, individually, all have to act to stop it.

The *Lancet* series, with all its academic weight, gives them, and everyone else who works for justice for Palestinians, new tools of analysis, backed by empirical evidence meticulously collected. Horton and his colleagues hope that the series “could contribute to a mass international social movement for peace and justice through health in, and with the people of, the occupied Palestinian land. Justice in this context is about fashioning a fair and sustainable future for the people of Palestine.”

Evicted from ancestral home

Hajj Abdul Mu’ti Salah is 80 years old and lives in the house he was born in which he inherited from his father in the 2,000 year old northern West Bank village of Kafr Jammal. On March 15, the IDF handed him a warrant telling him his home was on Jewish land and he must get out immediately.

Mr Salah is so sick with anxiety he can’t speak and he and his wife feel powerless to prevent their eviction. Local residents, politicians and protest groups are trying to rally resistance.

Since the beginning of March Israeli forces have been seen in the village, which lies halfway between Qalqilya and Tulkarm and is home to 3,000 people, filming, plotting maps and making detailed notes.

Local resident Hazim Abd As-Salam told Ma’an News that their ancestors had never mentioned their village being on Jewish land. “The village has been an Arab-Palestinian village since the beginnings of history. The area they claim to be Jewish property is an archeological site dating back to more than two thousand years. It’s full of Roman and Byzantine artifacts and there is no single clue to support what they claim.”

Mr Salah’s house, added Abd As-Salam, “is next to an ancient mosque,” that his great-grandparents prayed in. “The whole village belongs to the Arab and Islamic civilisation,” he said.

American Jews for a Just Peace

A new alliance of Jewish activists has been formed in the United States which calls on the international community to “bring the apartheid policies and criminal activities of the Israeli government to an end.”

American Jews for a Just Peace condemned the US government’s support for Israel which it called “a rogue state that flouts international law while justifying its atrocities by invoking the suffering of our forebears.”

It wants an immediate suspension of U.S. military aid to Israel, an investigation by Congress into possible war crimes and a boycott of Israeli produce.

It also demanded that the Israeli government sign the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid that was adopted by the United Nations in 1973, or explain its refusal to do so to the world community, and end the siege of Gaza.

www.ajjp.org

Massive expansion of settlement planned

Breaking yet again the promises it has made in every peace negotiation, Israel took control of a large chunk of land near the prominent West Bank settlement of Efrat in February, paving the way for a massive expansion.

Efrat is a settlement of about 1,600 families south of Jerusalem. At the end of a lengthy appeals process pursued by Palestinian landowners, the Israeli military designated 425 acres (172 hectares) next to it as so-called “state land.” Subject to government approval, Efrat plans to build 2,500 homes, expanding to a sizeable city of 30,000 people.

Settlement expansion continued apace throughout 2008, according to a report by the Israeli NGO Peace Now. A total of 1,518 new structures, including 261 outposts, were erected in the West Bank. In East Jerusalem illegal construction accelerated particularly in the E-1 area which connects West Jerusalem with Ma’ale Adumim.

Settlement expansion has been defined by Washington as an obstacle to peace and President Obama’s new Middle East envoy, George Mitchell, has long pushed for a freeze. But successive Israeli governments have broken promises made to the US to halt settlement building and Binyamin Netanyahu supports expansion.

Viva Palestina! Breaking through the barriers

A big, red, shiny fire engine, a sleek new fishing boat on a trailer, 12 ambulances and an assortment of a hundred vans formed the amazing Viva Palestina convoy which set off on St Valentine's Day with vital supplies and a message of love and support from Britain to the people of Gaza.

The vans were packed with around £1 million worth of medical supplies, food, clothes, bedding and toys. A further 100 vans joined them in Libya, donated by the Gaddafi Foundation for Charity and Development, and by the time the convoy reached the Gaza border it was 1.8 miles long.

More than 200 people shared the driving over the 5,000 mile route through France, Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to the Rafah crossing. They faced many mental and physical challenges along the way to finish utterly exhausted but triumphant in Gaza on March 10.

"Arriving there was one of the most memorable moments of my life, something to tell my children and grandchildren," driver Muhammad Muazzam told Palestine News. "I had never joined any kind of movement before this, never even thought about it, but three and a half weeks after setting off, I had broken through the blockade of Gaza."

The convoy was organised at breakneck speed by Respect MP George Galloway. As soon as Muhammad, a 27-year-old architectural technician from Rochdale, heard about it he asked his employers for unpaid leave and signed up.

Muhammad, who is married with a six month old daughter, and his two co-drivers joined the Manchester team which convened with vans from all over the country in Hyde Park before setting off for Ramsgate. Once over the Channel, the convoy split into regional teams to travel through Europe before converging again in Morocco.

"We only got a couple of hours sleep at a time in tents we pitched by the side of the road or in neck breaking positions in the vans because events had been arranged along the way and people were waiting for us," said Muhammad. "But one day in Morocco we drove for 20 hours in thick fog and people were getting completely exhausted."

"One of the local police drivers accompanying us lost control after probably falling asleep, so then we decided to do no more than 350 km a day, change drivers every three hours and stop at a reasonable time. It was very hard work but a great atmosphere all the way which kept us going."

The Morocco-Algeria border, which has been closed for 15 years,

was especially opened for the convoy but serious problems arose in Egypt where the authorities delayed the convoy, searched all the vehicles and refused to let the fire engine, the boat and a giant generator pass over the border.

"Some of the locals threw stones at us and three or four of our guys were hurt, one needing stitches in his head," said Muhammad. "It was a shock. We couldn't believe that people would want to stop us helping others."

All their pain and exhaustion was forgotten, however, when they drove through the crossing, attracting media attention from all over the world, and delivered their vehicles and supplies to the battered people of Gaza.

"We were all so relieved, we were hugging and congratulating each other and the Palestinians were hugging and kissing us. We were so elated and moved that we have found it difficult to adjust back to normal life. Everyone is just itching for the next Viva Palestina project to get going."

Gill Swain



The fire engine leading the Manchester team setting off to join the convoy

"I had never joined any kind of movement before this, never even thought about it, but three and a half weeks after setting off, I had broken through the blockade of Gaza."

Interpal vindicated

Interpal, the British charity which provides humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, was cleared by the Charity Commission in February of funding partner organisations which promote terrorist ideology.

The Commission found no evidence that funds had been used for inappropriate or non-charitable purposes. It declared that Interpal maintained "clear financial audit trails in their delivery of aid for humanitarian purposes" and that "allegations of bias in the distribution of aid were unfounded."

This was the third Charity Commission inquiry into Interpal in 13 years. The first two investigations vindicated the charity in 1996 and 2003.

The latest inquiry began in December, 2006, after a BBC Panorama programme called "Faith, Hate and Charity" reported allegations that Interpal sent funds to local partners which promoted the ideology of Hamas and that a trustee of the charity had links with senior Hamas figures.

The charges caused Interpal great difficulty when they led Lloyds TSB to instruct the Islamic Bank of Britain to shut its bank account in December.

The US government, at the request of the Israeli government, declared Interpal to be a "special designated global terrorist entity" in August 2003, for allegedly supporting Hamas. Yet they failed to provide any evidence to support this decision and failed to respond to the inquiry.

Moreover the Commission's report says that the Israeli government lobbied the inquiry over its concerns about Interpal but their "evidence" was never identified to Interpal and "did not reach the standard of proof required under UK civil law."

Ibrahim Hewitt, Chairman of Interpal, said: "Given the obvious collaboration between the Israelis and Panorama, it is hard not to conclude that we are the target of an ongoing and concerted political campaign designed to bring a halt to our humanitarian work in the region. We fully understand the pressure to which the Charity Commission itself has been subjected."

www.interpal.org.uk

Erase our grandparents' names from Yad Vashem

Three prominent Jews have written to Israeli President Shimon Peres asking him to remove their grandparents' names from the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem dedicated to the Jewish victims of Nazism.

French author Jean-Moïse Braitberg said that the bombardment of Gaza and 60 years of injustices to the Palestinians "disqualifies Israel to be the center of the memory of the harm done to Jews, and thus to all humanity."

Braitberg's grandfather, Moshe Brajtberg, was gassed at Treblinka in 1943. He said he grew up among survivors of the death camps and "saw the numbers tattooed on their arms, I heard the story of torture; I knew the impossible grief and I shared their nightmares."

"I was taught that these crimes must never happen again, that never again must man, because of ethnicity or religion, despise other man, mock his human rights such as living a safe, dignified life without barriers, and destroy his hope, however remote it be, for a future of peace and prosperity."

Yet, despite numerous UN resolutions and "glaring evidence" of injustices done to Palestinians, "the only answers given by successive governments of your country have been violence, bloodshed, confinement, incessant controls, colonization, deprivations."

He said that, by displaying his family's names at Yad Vashem, "your state imprisons my family memories behind the barbed wires of Zionism and makes it hostage of a so-called moral authority which commits every day the abomination of denying justice."

Michael Neumann, a professor of philosophy at a Canadian university and author of *What's Left: Radical Politics and*



Hall of remembrance at Yad Vashem

the Radical Psyche and The Case Against Israel and his brother, Osha, a defence lawyer at Berkeley in California, asked for the name of their grandmother, Gertrud Nuemann, who died in Theresienstadt, to be removed.

Michael Neumann said his action was "an expression of my disgust and contempt for your state and all it represents."

"I do not believe that the Jewish people... can ever rid itself of the shame you have brought upon us. Nazi propaganda, for all its calumnies, never disgraced and corrupted the Jews; you have succeeded in this."

He added: "In life, our grandmother suffered enough. Stop making her a party to this horror in her death."

Osha Nuemann said: "Israel has twisted the Holocaust into an excuse for perpetrating more holocausts. It has spent the treasure of the world's sympathy for the victims of the Holocaust on a fruitless effort to shield itself from all criticism as it massacres and tortures Palestinians and suffocates them under a brutal occupation."

"I do not wish to have the memory of my grandmother enlisted in this misbegotten project."

The Braitberg letter, in French can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/dgobaq> and an English translation at <http://tinyurl.com/arwf9v>.

Labour Friends of Palestine launched

There has been Labour Friends of Israel for many years but — strangely — not a similar group for Palestine until now. Better late than never, the Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East was launched in January.

Its aim is to provide a voice for Labour members and supporters who want to see the establishment of a Palestinian state. It will:

- Press for international laws to be upheld and the human rights and equality of Palestinians and all peoples in the region to be respected
- Call for an end to the Israeli occupation
- Foster a greater understanding of the Middle East in the UK, promote conflict resolution and political reform and encourage friendships between people of the region and the UK

Chair is Martin Linton, MP for Battersea, Balham and Wandsworth, and a former *Guardian* journalist. He visited the OPTs in September '07 and resolved to set up a Labour organisation mainly as a result of witnessing the continual expansion of the settlements.

The chair of the Policy Committee is Richard Burden, MP for Birmingham Northfield, who also chairs the Britain-Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group which seeks to foster good relations between Britain and Palestine.

See www.labourfriendsofpalestine.co.uk



Richard Burden MP in Gaza

• A very useful and well-researched website www.whoprofits.org lists companies directly involved in the occupation.

It is a grassroots initiative, compiled through two years of rigorous research by the Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace www.coalitionofwomen.org, includes an unprecedented database listing around 200 companies and an information centre.

It exposes specific examples of direct involvement of many international and Israeli companies for the first time and allows for advanced searches, such as: Which of the companies are listed on the London stock-exchange? Which companies are directly involved in military checkpoints?

Eye on the web



• Watch a pointed and very poignant cartoon depicting the plight of Gazans imprisoned on their strip of battered land at www.closedzone.com

• A detailed chronology of events in Gaza between the Israel-Hamas ceasefire on 19th June and the launch of Israel's Operation Cast Lead on 27 December reveals that many of the rockets fired from Gaza during this period were in retaliation for IDF incursions, kidnappings and extra-judicial murders in the West Bank or attacks on Gazan

fishermen. Read it at <http://tinyurl.com/d8a8hm>

• A Palestinian journalist and poet who lives in Bristol, Iqbal Tamimi, has created a network, 'Palestinian Mothers,' containing much good, up-to-date information and photographs. Iqbal has worked as a TV producer, radio presenter, journalist, writer and PR officer but says her 'best achievement of all' is being a mother of four.

Anyone can join the network which Iqbal says is "dedicated to our children." Find it at www.palestinian.ning.com

In Brief

BANNING PALESTINIAN CULTURE



PHOTO: WAFA 2009

Israeli police in Umm al-Fahm

The Israeli authorities have banned peaceful cultural activities in Jerusalem, organised as part of the Palestinian Cultural Festival marking the declaration of Jerusalem as the 'Capital of Arab Culture, 2009.' This is part of UNESCO's ongoing Capitals of Culture programme.

On 19 March, Israeli police dispersed a meeting at the Ambassador Hotel in East Jerusalem of the organisers of the planned cultural activities and seized documentation and computers. They also entered a number of schools in East Jerusalem and community centres to prevent the performance of sports and cultural activities. A number of the organisers were arrested and peaceful gatherings were broken up by Israeli police — who even felt impelled to burst balloons in Palestine's national colours.

The Israeli Minister of Internal Security described the planned events as an "attempt to demonstrate Palestinian sovereignty in Jerusalem in an illegal manner," and asserted that Palestinians are obliged "to respect the sovereignty of Israel within the boundaries of the State of Israel, including East Jerusalem."

In fact, under international law Israel has no jurisdiction over East Jerusalem since an Occupying Power cannot extend its sovereignty over the territory it occupies. On several occasions the UN Security Council has held Israel's annexation of occupied East Jerusalem to be "invalid" and "null and void." This is the official position of the international community, including the US government.

The Israeli authorities also issued orders preventing related cultural events in Nazareth from taking place. By contrast, the Israeli High Court of Justice permitted extremist Israeli settler Baruch Marzel to lead a march through the Palestinian town of Umm al-Fahm on 24 March which led to violent clashes with the local population. Eight inhabitants of the town were injured, one critically, and 22 young Palestinian men were arrested.

See the report of Palestinian human rights organisation AlHaq for more details: www.alhaq.org.

SETTLER VIOLENCE ENCOURAGED

On 11 March extremist Israeli settlers attacked dozens of Palestinian homes and shops in East Jerusalem. Busloads of demonstrators arrived in the Old City in the early morning and held prayers at the Western Wall before marching through the streets of Jerusalem. The police closed main roads in the Old City barring Palestinians from



using them in order to allow the settlers to march.

They chanted "death to Arabs" and other racist slogans, calling for their expulsion from the Old City. The Israeli police did not attempt to intervene and allowed the settlers to continue their march and to attack Palestinian property, local sources reported.

In the West Bank settler attacks continue, especially in the south. On 16 March, a 22-year old woman, Ayat Abd Al-Karim Al-Ja'bariwas, was injured during attacks on homes in the Wadi Al-Hussein neighbourhood in Hebron.

Although settlers are sometimes portrayed in the Israeli media as a marginal, out-of-control element of the population, it is clear that they are spearheading government efforts to drive out the indigenous population and seize more land. Most recently, in violation of Israeli promises to the US administration and the Quartet, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak approved a plan to construct a new Jewish settlement on Palestinian lands near Hebron where some of the worst settler violence is concentrated.

The plan includes 440 homes to host nearly 2500 Jewish settlers. The first part of the plan is to legalise 50 homes already built by the settlers in what the Israeli government itself considered a "random settlement outpost".

TURKEY TO THE RESCUE

For years the AlKurd family fought eviction from their home in East Jerusalem, enduring endless legal and physical harassment from the Israeli authorities and settlers (see Winter 2008 issue of *PN*, page 10). The family was forcibly evicted last November and about 500 other people from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood are facing the same fate.

However, they have received help from an unexpected quarter. The Turkish government, once a staunch ally of Israel, was one of the most outspoken in condemning the onslaught on Gaza. The



A defiant message from the inhabitants of Sheikh Jarrah

Turks have for the first time given Palestinian lawyers access to the Ottoman land registry archives in Ankara.

These contain documents relating to the ownership of property in East Jerusalem which indicate that the title deeds produced by the settlers are in fact forgeries. (The latter purport to show that the land was purchased by the Sephardic Jewry Association in the 19th century when Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire.)

The documentation has been presented to an Israeli court which must assess the evidence before any further evictions can be carried out.

The case opens up the possibility of many more legal appeals against the seizure or demolition of Palestinian property— and, hopefully, a halt of the process of ethnic cleansing which has accelerated over recent years.

TREES FOR LIFE

The Co-operative Party in Nottingham is promoting the Trees for Life campaign which aims to replace some of the half million olive trees destroyed by Israeli tanks and bulldozers.

One tree costs £4 and every penny goes to the Olive Co-operative in Manchester who pass it on to the Palestine Fair Trade Association which selects farmers to plant the trees. The oil is then imported back into Britain by Zaytoun. In the first fortnight of the campaign more than £600 was raised.

At the same time Zaytoun launched the first ever Fairtrade-certified olive oil and olives, imported direct from Palestinian farms and available at a wide range of food shops, delicatessens and online stores.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown said he was “delighted” by the launch which marked the beginning of Fairtrade Fortnight. He said: “Olive oil production provides an essential part of the West Bank economy. In buying this oil, British shoppers will be helping the farmers of Palestine to make a living.”

At present, Palestinian producers only use about a quarter of the 2000-tonne a year EU quota for their olive oil, but campaigners hope the formal recognition and first supermarket sales will establish a more secure market. They also hope that products such as dates, almonds and olive oil soap might soon qualify for the internationally recognised certification. For stockists, visit www.zaytoun.org/sellers/

Donations to the Trees for Life campaign can be made by cheque to ‘Olive Co-operative Ltd’ and sent to ‘Trees for Life’ at 2 Devonshire Promenade, Lenton, Nottingham NG7 2DS, or by BACS transfer to 08-92-99 65136016 ref ‘T4L GN’. Phone 0115 978 2705 for more information or see www.nottscooparty.org.uk/trees



Palestinian olives for oil

CALL FOR TALKS WITH HAMAS

On 26 February in a letter to *The Times*, 14 former foreign ministers and veteran peace negotiators said that the US and Israel must engage with Hamas if progress is to be made on peace.

The signatories included Lord Paddy Ashdown, Lord Chris Patten, Gerry Kelly of Sinn Fein, Alvaro de Soto (UN Special Coordinator for the ME Peace Process), Dr. Shlomo Ben-Ami (Israeli Foreign Minister 2000–2001 and a key negotiator at the 2000 Camp David talks), and other eminent statesmen from Australia, Uganda, Norway, South Africa, Ireland, Sri Lanka and the UN.

The letter said: “The latest and bloodiest conflict between Israel and Hamas has demonstrated that the policy of isolating Hamas cannot bring about stability. As former peace negotiators, we believe it is of vital importance to abandon the failed policy of isolation and to involve Hamas in the political process [...] Since its victory in democratic elections in 2006, Hamas has sustained its support in Palestinian society despite attempts to destroy it through economic blockades, political boycotts and military incursions. This approach is not working; a new strategy must be found.”

In an indirect appeal to President Obama, the letter went on: “The new US administration and the appointment of George Mitchell as the Mideast Envoy give hope that a new strategy grounded in realism and not ideology will be pursued... We must recognise that engaging Hamas does not amount to condoning terrorism or attacks on civilians. In fact, it is a precondition for security and for brokering a workable agreement.”

In the same week, Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that talking to Hamas was the “right thing to do” — but that Egypt and other parties were best placed to do this.

CHILDREN BEHIND BARS

The number of Palestinian children jailed by the Israeli authorities rose dramatically in the first few months of this year. Defence for Children International (www.dci-pal.org) reported that 423 children aged 12-17 were detained at the end of February, representing a 37.8% increase over the corresponding period in 2008.

DCI-Palestine said: “We cannot be sure why the Israeli army is now arresting more children but we suspect that it is related to the increase in the number of public demonstrations in the West Bank against the recent war in Gaza.”

Among the children in detention are seven girls, with a further six children held in ‘administrative detention’ – i.e. without charge or trial.



VANUNU REFUSES PEACE PRIZE NOMINATION

Mordechai Vanunu, who blew the whistle on Israel’s atomic energy programme and spent 18 years in jail, asked the Nobel Peace Prize Committee to remove his name from the list of this year’s nominations.

He wrote to the Committee on 1 March saying he could not be part of a list of laureates which included Shimon Peres, the man behind Israel’s atomic policy.

His letter went on: “Peres was the man who ordered the kidnapping of me in Rome on Sept. 30, 1986, and for the secret trial and sentencing of me as a spy and traitor for 18 years in isolation in prison in Israel.

“Until now he continues to oppose my freedom and release, in spite of my serving the full sentence of 18 years.

“For all these reasons I don’t want be nominated and will not accept this nomination. I say No to any nomination as long as I am not free, that is, as long as I am still forced to be in Israel.”

Worldwide surge in boycott actions

By Zoë Mars

From train drivers in Norway to community groups in Japan, the boycott message is spreading like wildfire. The tally of recent actions is so widespread that it seems a tipping point has been reached in responding to the Palestinians' call for a global campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS).

Activists across the UK demonstrated against the arms trade with Israel and continued to lobby supermarkets about importing settlement products. A special campaign was conducted in February to persuade shoppers not to buy their Valentine's Day flowers from Israel, with a demo held at the premises of Carmel Agrexco, the largest importer.

A great wave of revulsion and grief provoked by Israel's attacks on Gaza lies behind this astonishing surge. Many people found themselves desperate for ways to express their anger and to target the activities and institutions of the Israeli state, and all those political and commercial agents complicit with it, just as a previous generation used boycott to oppose the South African apartheid regime.

We must build on this surge in every way we can. We must make boycott campaigns graphic and meaningful and link them into the channels of influence that will make them effective — both in building grassroots support and in opposing the Israeli oppression of Palestine. Unless we do this, the mass protests we have seen since the Gaza invasion will not translate into real gains in support for Palestine.

What can we learn?

What can we learn from the reports of BDS actions around the world? First, and unsurprisingly, there are not many cases in which there has been action at government level. But in Latin America and North Africa we have seen diplomatic sanctions applied. Both Bolivia and Venezuela broke diplomatic relations with Israel in January, after previously expelling the ambassadors, and Mauretania — one of the three Arab states to have relations with Israel — expelled diplomatic staff and froze relations in March.

In Greece the government announced, with reference to a potential US Navy tender for delivering arms to Israel, that 'neither the private port of Astakos... nor any other location in Greece will be used for supplying of the Israeli army'.

Calls on the British government to break relations with Israel did not succeed. But other means of exerting pressure on the government must be found. One success has been the campaign against plans for the British embassy to move into a new building in Tel Aviv owned by Africa-Israel Investments, an Israeli company implicated in building infrastructure in the illegal settlements in the



Protest at Carmel Agrexco, 7 Feb. Photo: Peter Marshall, mylondondiary.co.uk

West Bank. The plan was abandoned in March, provoking sharp protests from Israel.

A second example is the campaign to pressure the Foreign Office and DEFRA to issue explicit guidelines on the status and labelling of Israeli settlement produce imported into Britain. This 'ban stolen goods' campaign mobilises people from grassroots shoppers to government departments and links into the wider Boycott Israeli Goods (BIG) campaign which has recently demonstrated impact with Israelis reporting produce stuck in warehouses, as importers, especially in Jordan and Europe, cancel contracts.

Workers take action

Another batch of international BDS actions has involved trade unions and workers. In February, dockworkers of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) in Durban and Western Australian dock worker members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) pledged to refuse to handle Israeli cargo. In the South African case the immediate boycott action was thwarted by the ship-owners arranging for the ship to dock at another port but the principle was established and backed by COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). This was in the fine tradition of the Liverpool dockers who, in 1988, refused to handle cargo for apartheid South Africa.

A very striking case of trade union action was the Norwegian locomotive, metro and tramway workers who declared that all trains in Norway would stop for two minutes on 8 January with a plea to passengers to support their demand for 'immediate withdrawal of all Israeli troops from the Palestinian territory'.

Many other unions have called for significant sanctions or

divestment policy. In Britain UNISON, the main public sector workers union, passed a motion in 2008 calling for members' pension funds to divest from companies complicit with the occupation, such as Caterpillar, suspension of the EU/Israel Association Agreement until Israel complies with human rights clauses and a ban on the import of settlement goods.

In Italy, FIOM, the largest metal-workers union with 360,000 members, also called on 13 January for the suspension of the EU Agreement and for the prosecution of Israel for its war crimes in Gaza. And the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, Te Kauae Kaimahi, called upon their government to take a raft of BDS actions, including ensuring that the country does not import settlement goods or make use of Israeli products in procurement processes, and ends the 'Working Holiday Scheme' for young Israelis.

Academics and professionals protest

As well as trade union actions there have been notable interventions by civil society — professionals and groups of 'the influential' including politicians, but with academics particularly prominent. Sometimes there is an overlap with union action, as in the case of university workers in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) who in February called on the union to back sanctions and boycotts against Israel and research Canadian connections to the occupation.

"It's just unconscionable for us not to take some sort of action," said a CUPE branch spokesperson (Toronto Star, 23.2.09). It will be left to each university branch to decide how to apply the motion but at least one Toronto university has voted to implement an academic boycott through breaking ties — financial and academic — with Israeli universities.

In the US an open letter to President-elect Obama was signed by 900 American academics. Referring to the South African anti-apartheid struggle, it argued: 'The divestment movement... came together in the spirit of the Civil Rights movement... It changed the direction of US foreign policy, disgracing its support of a racist regime... Through a combination of diplomacy and divestment, we did end apartheid... It is time for the United States to place a similar pressure on Israel' (republished in *The Daily Star*, Beirut, 12.1.09).

Similarly, an open letter from 300 French academics called on their government to apply a programme of boycott, divestment and sanctions and committed the signatories "to cease all collaboration with Israeli institutions participating in the occupation, and to declare our solidarity with those who in Israel struggle courageously for the human, social and political rights of Palestinians".

An 'Irish Call for Justice for Palestine' appeared in the *Irish Times* on 31 January signed by 300 people, including five MEPs and many

national politicians from the major parties, leaders of the major trade unions, professors, well known musicians and cultural figures. The demands included a call for the Irish government to stop buying Israeli military products, to demand a reversal of settlement growth and for "the Irish people to boycott all Israeli goods and services until Israel abides by international law".



Sport and cultural boycotts

Like the academic boycott, sporting and cultural boycotts provoke a sharp reaction from Israel — a sure sign that they touch a very sensitive nerve.

Even if it is not possible to get events cancelled, it is increasingly possible to make them harder and more expensive to stage. In January, an Israeli basketball team was forced to flee to the changing room as hundreds of fist-pounding Turkish fans protested over the violence in Gaza. Soon afterwards, the Tel Aviv Maccabi basketball team, playing in Barcelona, was greeted by dozens of Palestinian flags and a stunning chant: "Boycott Israel, Viva Palestine".

In February a Davis Cup tennis match, due to be played in Malmo, Sweden, seemed under threat when the local council expressed doubts about Israel's right to take part. An offer by the city of Stockholm to host the match proved not practicable so it ended up being played in Malmo without spectators and presumably also without takings.

Cultural boycott protests can be extremely graphic. The boycott of the recent North American tour by the Israeli Batsheva dance company engendered a lot of media debate and striking placards expressing the message that the company was 'complicit in Israel's campaign to (literally) whitewash its bloody image' (The Dance Insider website, February 09).

The Palestine Forum in Japan is one of many groups which have attempted to put pressure on writers not to take part in the Jerusalem Book Fair. The Japanese concentrated on the renowned novelist Haruki Murakami who was also due to receive the 'Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society' on 15 February. Unfortunately, he did not decline the invitation but the title of the prize afforded great scope for telling him and the public why he should have done so, given the drastic absence of freedoms of all kinds experienced by the Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

A lesson to learn is that we should never be pessimistic about how high to set our sights with BDS action. An inspiring recent example is the loss by the French transport company Veolia of a 3.5 billion Euro contract to operate the Stockholm metro system. This was achieved by a campaign through the media and massive petitions about the company's ethical policy credentials, given its involvement in the Jerusalem settlement-supporting tramway project. This is the kind of impact we need to see replicated round the world.

"A lesson to learn is that we should never be pessimistic about how high to set our sights with BDS action"

Artists who have recently cancelled engagements in Israel:

**Jean-Luc Godard
Bjork
Chris Cornell
Siouxie Sioux
Snoop Dogg**



Poster calling for a boycott of the Batsheva Dance Company performance at the University of Minnesota

• campus watch

Student occupations across the UK

In actions not seen on such a scale since the 70s, student sit-ins at over 30 universities win concessions.

By **Bryony Shanks**

An unprecedented upsurge in sit-down protests by students campaigning for justice for the Palestinians was launched in response to Israel's brutal war on Gaza.

On over 30 university campuses buildings were occupied by campaigners who aimed to raise awareness of the suffering of the people of Gaza and demand both divestment by their universities from companies linked to Israel and commitment to provide practical help to Palestinian students and universities.

The wave of actions involving thousands of students was seen as a 'seismic change' by commentators who noted that, until now, the 'iPod generation' of young people has been largely politically apathetic.

But as the first generation of students to pay substantial direct fees to universities, their concern over their college's investments and relations with overseas students has a new legitimacy because it is partly their money.

John Rose, one of the original London School of Economics (LSE) students to mount the barricades alongside Tariq Ali in 1968, gave lectures on the situation in Gaza



at 12 of the occupations.

"This is something different to anything we've seen for a long time," he said. "There is genuine fury at what Israel did."

The actions began with a 24-hour sit-in at the **School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)** on 13 January. The students occupied the Brunei Gallery Suite where, to their disgust, the university was allowing the Ministry of Defense to stage an exhibition.

The exhibition was removed the next day and word of the success rapidly spread across the country, helped by the new technology of communication. Emily Dreyfus, 21, who is in her third year of reading classics at **Oxford**, was one of around 80 students to occupy the historic Bodleian library building.

She said: "I found Oxford politically very dead when I arrived, but it's completely different now. There seem to be more and more people talking about politics, which is so exciting. It's really been aided by the communication tools we've got, things like Facebook."

Many of the occupations scored solid successes. Vice-chancellors and principals

were brought to the negotiating table and mostly bowed to at least one of the demands.

A three day sit-in by around 100 students at **Cardiff University** ended when the authorities gave the students written confirmation it had sold its shares in BAE Systems and General Electric, both of which are involved in the arms trade with Israel, and instructed fund managers not to reinvest.

One student said: "We've been the most successful across the UK. It confirms the power of student action."

A week-long occupation of the Old Theatre at the **London School of Economics** ended when LSE director, Sir Howard Davies, issued a joint statement with student protesters saying he understood their concerns.

He promised to waive scholarship application fees for students affected by the conflict, help students organise a fundraising day and donate surplus computers and books to institutions in Gaza. But he refused to issue an official university statement condemning the Israeli bombardment or to spell out LSE's investment in companies involved in supplying arms to Israel.

The University of **Manchester** Students Union, which is the biggest in Europe, held a week-long sit-in at the administration block and a meeting attended by over 1000 students which resolved to boycott Israel.

They also demanded that the university end all research on campus with companies involved in the arms trade, condemn Israel's actions in Gaza, send surplus furniture from buildings being renovated to the Viva Palestina convoy and publicise the DEC appeal.

A few examples of the successes of the occupations:

Goldsmiths College promised two scholarships for the next ten years. The **University of East London** agreed to provide six scholarships for students affected by conflict, of which three will be reserved for students from Gaza.

LSE raised almost £2,000 for Medical

Aid for Palestinians and fundraising is continuing at many other universities.

Many universities issued statements expressing concern at the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The director of LSE noted "wherever in the world scholars or their institutions are threatened, or their lives are disrupted by conflict, I believe all parties should respect the integrity of scholarship and intellectual and academic freedom and should work to minimise suffering".

The University of **Oxford** agreed to

donate surplus books, journals and other educational materials to universities in Palestine. **King's College** London agreed to provide support for Palestinian universities wherever practical.

Strathclyde University agreed to stop buying Eden Springs bottled water, which is extracted by an Israeli company from land in the occupied Golan Heights. Many other universities agreed to work with students to explore ending links with other companies, including weapons manufacturers, who are complicit in the Israeli occupation.

The British students' actions inspired similar occupations in other countries such as Canada and the US where around 80 protesters held a sit-in at **New York University**.

At many universities students used the occupied rooms to host events such as speaker meetings with politicians and representatives from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and film showings to make students aware of the need to campaign against Israel's illegal occupation.

The sit-ins were welcomed by students in Palestine who sent messages of support. Access to education in Gaza has been devastated by the siege and is severely affected in the West Bank where many students are detained for hours at checkpoints or refused permission to pass through. At An-Najah University, 64% of students reported they had been physically abused at a checkpoint.

The Islamic University of Gaza was bombed, resulting in the destruction of buildings which housed the science and

engineering departments and severely damaging other buildings including the library. The Gaza Music School, located in the Palestinian Red Crescent headquarters, was also destroyed.

Hundreds of students have been awarded scholarships at prestigious universities around the world but due to the siege they are unable to leave Gaza to attend, according to the Israeli human rights organisation, Gisha.

The British sit-ins helped establish important links between beleaguered students in Palestine and British students which should now be expanded, for example through encouraging British universities to twin with Palestinian universities or arranging opportunities for British students to visit Palestine.

The occupations have made a significant



Students from Manchester University

step forward in raising awareness of the difficulties faced by Palestinian students and of the need to obtain a just peace for all Palestinians. Palestine Solidarity Campaign looks forward to working with students involved in occupations and other campaigns in the future to build a mass movement for change.

Message of support from students at Birzeit University

“As students, you are best able to understand the struggle that we as Palestinian students living under occupation go through daily in our basic pursuit of education. Through the stance you have taken against the attacks on Gaza, you have shown us that we are not alone in our struggle for freedom and justice. You have broken the sense of isolation we feel when governments have remained silent as we are harassed and delayed at a checkpoint on the way to university, arrested for exercising our right to freedom of expression or mourn fellow students who were taken from us by the bullets of the Occupation.

“We greatly appreciate your efforts

and request that students worldwide take action in this way or in whichever way they can, to put pressure on their universities to take a stand for the universal values of education and to push towards the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions of Israel until it stops depriving us of our rights. Such non-violent campaigns on campus are the only way forward and they say to us and to the world that Israel's policies of apartheid are not welcome in the world we want to live in — a world which we, as students, will inherit, and also have the power to shape.

“We deeply appreciate your ongoing efforts in refusing to be silent in face of the ongoing barbarities and crimes carried out by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian students and teachers.”

For the full statement visit: <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu>

Union solidarity with the Palestinians

Many unions made clear statements condemning the actions of the Israeli government, including UNISON, UNITE, NUT, PCS and the TSSA, whilst the NUJ and BECTU complained to the BBC about its decision to refuse to broadcast the Disaster Emergency Committee's appeal for Gaza.

Numerous trade union banners were seen on the demonstrations and a wide range of union branches have had speakers on Palestine, affiliated to the campaign and made donations to bodies like the Medical Aid for Palestine and Viva Palestina.

On 5 March the Zionist Federation, in conjunction with seven Israeli universities, sponsored two 'Israeli Days of Science' in London and Manchester. Members of the two unions, PCS and Prospect, at the Science Museum in London objected to the use of the facilities for the promotion.

As a result none of the 90 union members helped run the event and the organisers had to use private security staff. A protest outside was run by BRICUP and one PCS activist who attended said that the number of visitors to the exhibition “fell way below organisers' expectations.”

Unions played a major part in developing international solidarity against Apartheid South Africa. These are modest beginnings, at least here in Britain, but they augur well for the future. Now is the time to really build on the excellent policies that many unions have and turn the good words into effective action.

Bernard Regan

Who occupied

- School of Oriental and African Studies, London
- London School of Economics
- Cambridge University
- St Andrews University
- University of the Arts London
- Edinburgh University
- Bradford University
- Warwick University
- Plymouth University
- King's College London
- Essex University
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Nottingham University

- University of East London
- Sheffield Hallam University
- Sussex University
- Strathclyde University
- Newcastle University
- Oxford University
- Leeds University
- Birmingham University
- Manchester University
- Sheffield University
- Byam Shaw University
- University of the West of England
- Goldsmiths College
- University of East Anglia
- Glasgow University
- Queen Mary University of London

Massive upsurge in concern and action

The outpouring of public outrage at Israel's murderous assault on Gaza was brilliantly harnessed by PSC members who are translating it into long-term support for justice for the Palestinians.

Hundreds of members joined in the two recent lobbies of Parliament and the Global BDS Action Day on March 30. Lots of other imaginative boycott campaigns have been going on, plus highly successful fund-raising and participation in the inspirational Viva Palestina convoy to Gaza.

As **West Midlands** branch reported, there have been surges of interest in Palestine before, but "this one has been altogether different. Firstly, concern has gone beyond humanitarian issues with people wanting to know the wider background to Palestine and Israel and, becoming aware of this, wanting to be actively involved in working for Palestine.

"Secondly, hundreds of young people, including school pupils, have become supporters. Thirdly, there have been demonstrations, protest meetings, vigils and other events in many towns which have not previously been active in our campaign."

The branch achieved very large attendances at more than 40 events culminating in a major rally attended by over 5,000 people. There was also a well-attended demonstration at the studios of BBC West Midlands to protest about the BBC's refusal to broadcast the DEC appeal for Gaza.

The membership of PSC has soared by over 50%, resulting in the formation of new branches such as **Waltham Forest** which joined the lobby of Parliament on March 11, and the revival of others such as **Norwich** which held regular Saturday vigils and collected £2,000 for Gaza relief.



No shortage of sympathy

Gaza galvanized the people of **Exeter** and the branch had its largest ever Palestine demo with over 1000 marchers. "There is no shortage of sympathy for Gaza from the citizens of Exeter," says the branch, which capitalised on this support with a Gig For

Gaza. **Lambeth and Wandsworth** report a great increase in membership. "We hope to go from strength to strength in 2009!" they say.

Most branches have been co-operating with faith groups and the Stop the War Coalition in organising Gaza protests. **Bradford** joined with a number of groups to form United 4 Palestine which held demos, candle lit vigils, regular stalls and leafleting.

West Kent managed to wake up the normally 'politically quiet' towns of Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone by helping to organise demos attended by up to 100 people and covered by local newspaper and radio. In more politically aware **Liverpool**, two major rallies attracted several thousand people and raised nearly £4,000.



A large group from **Bristol** branch attended the Council to read a statement of support for Councillor Abdul Malik, who alone spoke out about UK support for US/Israeli action in Gaza and the presence in Bristol of weapons' manufacturer, Raytheon. A three-man rooftop vigil on Raytheon's office in December and January was supported by members.

They also smuggled Gaza placards into the Council House public gallery. A call was made for a "minute's silence for Gaza" and nearly all councillors got to their feet. "We got what we could that day," says Bristol.

Veolia will not be included in the shortlist

Branches have energetically pursued Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaigns with considerable success. A particularly stunning example came in the **West Midlands** where they campaigned against the inclusion of Veolia on the shortlist of companies invited by Sandwell Council to tender for its waste management contract, worth £1 billion over 20 years.

Veolia is a leading partner in a consortium contracted to build a tramway linking West

The Birmingham-Ramallah Twinning Initiative (BRTI) hosted two visitors from Ramallah as part of the British-Palestine Twinning Network International Women's Day tour.

The women told members which of our activities they thought most helpful to the Palestinian cause:

- Much more twinning activity — forges relationships and gives tangible evidence of support
- Keep demonstrating — Palestinians feel much encouraged by demos across the world
- Boycotts are useful
- Spread the word so that wide public concern puts pressure on the government
- Work in unity with other groups and individuals who campaign for Palestine
- Aid helps but does not deal with the core problems

The visitors were particularly enthused by their visits to schools, where pupils recognised that they did not know enough about Palestine and were eager to learn more. BRTI is soon to send information packs to 500 Birmingham schools, to be followed up by talks by volunteers.

Jerusalem to illegal Israeli settlements in occupied East Jerusalem. After two months of vigorous lobbying, widely supported by local people, the council announced that Veolia had not been included on the shortlist.

West Midlands is also running boycott campaigns focussing on local shops. "Enabling new activists to campaign in their own areas rather than asking them to come to city-centre events all the time is a way of keeping them involved longer term," they say.

Lambeth and Wandsworth members made replicas of the bombs dropped on Gaza and wounded babies from dolls for a boycott demonstration outside Waitrose. Leafleting of supermarkets was carried out by many branches, including **Norwich, Richmond and Kingston, Glasgow, Edinburgh** and **Brighton**, where members covered each weekday evening on a rota basis.

A sub-group to discuss cultural boycott, including an approach to the psychoanalytic/psychotherapy world, has been formed by **Camden** and will report to

the national BDS workshop.

Interestingly, a member discovered that her local library was blocking the PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel) website. It aroused interest in what software public bodies might be using to block PACBI and other pro-Palestinian websites. Camden says: "It would be helpful if anyone discovering similar blocking in their own library services would let us know, via the PSC office."

Warm greetings for Palestinian visitors



Liverpool's Bil'in twinning group welcomed their first exchange visitor, Najat, a nursery teacher and member of the Popular Resistance Committee to the Wall, who was accompanied by Wasfia, a social worker from a village near Tulkarm which is twinned with **Pendle**, Lancs. "Their visit was a great success on many levels and it was an inspiration to see how warmly they were greeted everywhere, how intently people listened to them speak and how moved they were by their personal stories," says the branch.

Two successful public meetings were held by **Kingston and Richmond** branch with Leila Sansour, director of Open Bethlehem, who spoke about the devastation of her city's economy, and Derek Summerfield, who highlighted the collusion of Israeli medical authorities with the torture of Palestinians and the need for an academic boycott.

Norwich, with the STWC, held a public meeting, 'Palestine, Justice and the Key to Peace,' attended by local politicians. **Exeter** linked with Zaytoun and the Exeter Fair Trade group to host Palestinian olive farmer Riziq Abu Nasser who "raised the profile and awareness of Palestine with so many new people in the region."

A **Glasgow** meeting was addressed by the inspirational figure of South African anti-apartheid campaigner and cabinet minister, Ronnie Kasrils, while a **Hackney** member invited Gazan photojournalist, Sameh Habeeb, to speak at a local UNISON meeting.

West Kent held a fund-raising social with Palestinian food and music, which raised £100 for PSC, and a public meeting with Alwyn Knight of the CPT (Christian Peacemakers' Team) while in **Brighton** two Palestinian women from Tubas and Jenin described their lives under Israeli occupation.

Arts for Palestine

Hackney continued to screen films at its Catastrophe Film Club, including the award winning documentary 'Palestine Blues' and 'Arna's Children.' In **Liverpool** the sub-group, Arts for Palestine, hosted a performance of 'Palestine Monologues' — first-hand testimonies from the occupied territories.

Sheffield held a Gig For Gaza with Reem Kelani and friends while **Manchester** helped organise a Gaza benefit concert. **Lambeth and Wandsworth** member Frank Barat screened the short film he made while visiting the West Bank in 2008 (you can watch the film online at www.archive.org/details/Occupation2008).

Hurry and sign up for the annual National Sponsored Walk on the weekend of July 4 and 5!

This year it will be in the stunning landscape of Dartmoor with two walks per day of different lengths.

Places are limited so it is first come, first served. **Exeter** branch are organising and particularly want to encourage members in the South West.

Contact postmaster@exeterpsc.org.uk for more details, or go to their website www.exeterpsc.org.uk

Church dumps Caterpillar

HALLELUJAH! The Church of England has finally done the right thing and dumped its shares in Caterpillar, which means that Anglicans are no longer complicit in war crimes — bulldozers are used to flatten Palestinian homes and rip up olive trees, both of which contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention.

And who could forget that US peace activist Rachel Corrie died under a dozer during a house demolition?

The campaign began four years ago when members discovered their church was profiting from the illegal occupation. The Rev Roger Pollard from Somerset alerted his local peace group and the Rev Stephen Sizer marshalled his considerable intellect to power the campaign.

In 2006 General Synod (the church's "parliament") voted to divest but the suits in charge of investments refused. They would monitor the situation and consult interested parties which included the British Board of Deputies.

Members' protests fell on deaf ears and the issue was ignored in the Ethical Investment Advisory Group's annual reports. Then news leaked out in January that EIAG had sold the holding — but the spokesperson emphasised the reason was economic.

The plight of Palestinians was, apparently, not a factor. How shaming is that?

Sharen Green

Twinning and boycotting

Several councils took the unusual step of reacting to the Israeli onslaught on Gaza and in **Worcester** a media storm blew up when a councillor proposed twinning the historic Midlands city with Gaza City.

Cllr Alan Amos called his suggestion "a humanitarian reach-out from the people of Worcester to the people of Gaza" and attracted media attention from all over the world. Despite vocal opposition from some quarters, the City Council supported the motion and referred the proposal to the Twinning Association.

Supporter Cllr Simon Cronin said after the council vote: "I'm very pleased we got the motion passed and was impressed by the overwhelming vote in favour (no votes against.) The important thing was to show our sympathy for the innocent victims of the onslaught on Gaza and to protest at the behaviour of the Israeli military and the uncritical backing it receives from this country."

In **Birmingham** politicians from all four parties on the City Council called on the leadership to boycott Israeli goods and services. They also recommended that the Council Executive lobby the government to permit local authorities to exercise moral, ethical and human rights considerations when awarding contracts.

Cambridge City Council adopted a resolution saying: "Cambridge City Council go on record recognizing the grievous impact of the loss of lives in the conflict on families and communities, mourning those lives on both sides of the conflict, condemning the attacks and invasion of Gaza by the Israeli military and the rocket attacks upon the people of Israel and call for an immediate end to all attacks on civilians on both sides."

Read the full text at www.cambridgema.gov/cityClerk/PolicyOrder.cfm?item_id=24033

Pens and Swords

Pens and Swords: How the American Mainstream Media Report the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Marda Dunsky

Columbia University Press

By Shervan Sardar

In this brilliant new book, Marda Dunsky analyses the politics, culture and theory of coverage of the conflict in the United States.

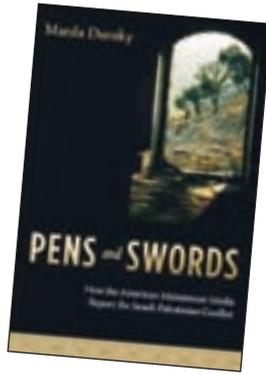
Dunsky, a former Arab affairs reporter for *The Jerusalem Post* and editor at the national/foreign desk of *The Chicago Tribune*, examines a wide array of news reports from television and print media and argues that mainstream reporting mostly leaves the American public without important contextual information about why the conflict remains so intractable.

He analyses the contradiction of the US often being portrayed as an “honest broker,” with regular updates on shuttle diplomacy missions, while in practical terms US foreign policy is overwhelmingly tilted toward Israel.

The US has provided over \$100 billion in aid to Israel since 1949 and has vetoed 31 UN Security Council Resolutions critical of Israel between 1970 and 2006. Dunsky contends that the mainstream coverage does not account for the extent of this US bias, nor does it examine how the US bias affects the trajectory of the conflict.

A recurring theme is the absence of nonpartisan experts in the coverage. Dunsky maintains that specialists on the conflict are needed to assess independently the claims of the parties. Instead, the reporting is more likely to reflect “without challenge” the typical explanations emanating from Washington which downplay the lack of progress and the US role in the conflict.

These axioms are known as the “Washington consensus”



and they include the following: “Israel and the Palestinians are responsible each in their own way — for the sustained failure of the peace process... and while the United States has vital interests in Middle East peace, it is not a direct party to the conflict.”

In the chapter ‘Reporting the Refugee Story,’ Dunsky shows how the portrayal of the Palestinian right of return is distorted. In one scenario, the right is “largely the stuff of dreams and myth.” Alternatively, the reporting will consider “the refugees themselves as an obstacle to peace” rather than focusing on their displacement and the failure of the international community to restore the right.

When the right is mentioned in the reporting, it is typically done by the refugees or by Arab leaders; independent, nonpartisan experts are not called in to evaluate the claims and there is no acknowledgement of the international consensus of the right.

Dunsky maintains that the reporting reflects US policy which favours Israel, and by extension promotes a historical narrative favourable to Israel. The fact that the ‘new historians’ have refuted much of the traditional Israeli historical narrative is not likely to be considered.

In ‘Reporting on Settlements,’ Dunsky notes the virtual omission from the coverage of the international consensus position that Israeli settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and numerous UN Security Council resolutions.

He asserts that: “Without exception, US mainstream reporting on settlements... has failed to address the key question of how, directly or indirectly, American aid has contributed to Israel’s ability to absorb the cost of building, enlarging, and defending the settlements.”

He goes on to say that the US media “has essentially missed the story of the degree to which the settlements have inhibited prospects for peace and the role that American compliance has played in the process. Failing to provide the public with a political and legal context for understanding the settlement issue leaves readers with the sense that the conflict is a hopeless and unstoppable spiral.”

Shervan Sardar is a Washington, DC-based lawyer. A longer version of this review was published on The Electronic Intifada, 26 January 2009. www.electronicintifada.net

“All of these scenes, I’ve seen them before”

As the siege of Gaza continued after Israel’s pulverization and no materials for rebuilding were allowed in, people were forced to live amongst the rubble. But the unquenchable spirit of the Palestinians was epitomized by the creation, just days after the ceasefire, of a makeshift art gallery in the burned out section of Al Quds Hospital which was hit by three Israeli shells on January 15.

The display of work by three Gaza artists was organised by a local youth group. Three ambulances destroyed during the war were parked outside and visitors stepped through a charred doorway. They were met by photos of dead and injured children dangling from the charred ceiling and paintings decorating the soot-stained walls.

In one room, Mona Musa, 22, placed a chalkboard next to a school desk to remember the UN schools where thousands of Gazans sought refuge from the fighting. A salvaged teapot and some tin cups sat on the desktop and charred paper Musa said she found in a burned classroom was scattered on the floor.

Visitor Rihab Kanan, 56, said she had lost 54 family members to Middle East fighting. Her mother, father, son and eight siblings were killed in the Lebanese civil war and her husband was killed in Gaza during an earlier round of violence.

“All of the scenes, I’ve seen them before,” she said.

Right: A painting on the wall of Al Quds hospital, Gaza. Photo taken by Jill Evans MEP



Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present

Kamal Boullata

Saqi Books

By Andy Ganf

Have readers been to the new Saatchi Gallery in Kensington? If not, go now — *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* is the major new exhibition and amply demonstrates many of the themes — displacement, exile, fragmentation, identity, protest and survival — in this massive and splendid new book by Kamal Boullata.

The Palestinian author is primarily a painter but came to be known as a writer, critic and art historian through his studies of Islamic art. *Palestinian Art* is built around a collection of essays he wrote over 20 years and published in academic journals and exhibition catalogues which he has now updated and revised.

I have had the privilege for over 20 years to have worked with and supported many of the ethnic minority groups in London. Cultural identity is absolutely central to their survival and successful progress.

To take an obvious example, the Notting Hill Carnival is the highlight event for the Afro-Caribbean community where they express themselves through competition,



Vera Tamari, *Going for a Ride*, 2002

performance, music and dance and promote a positive awareness of their contribution to the cultural mix of the city. *Palestinian Art* does just that for the Palestinians.

The book has a heartfelt introduction by John Berger who makes 'identity' central to his argument for the support of the

Palestinians' fight for survival.

The book is a very weighty tome! Over 360 pages are copiously illustrated and divided into four parts — From Religious to Secular Iconography, Memory and Resistance, Art from the Ghetto and the Evocation of Place.

It begins by describing the birth of Palestinian art just after the Ottomans took the country back from the rule of Egypt's Muhammad Ali Pasha and traces its development through to where Boullata delves into his own practice as a painter and writes about artists experimenting with new media.

He concentrates largely on the visual arts but also goes into some detail with stories on the artist Vera Tamari's car-crash installation and on the controversy over misrepresentations, plagiarisms and distortion of the facts by other historians and reporters.

Palestinian Art is the most authoritative account yet — in English — of the complex, but fragmented development of Palestinian art. This well researched book is a wonderful introduction to the subject.

It is a large format paperback book, selling at £25.00 and published by Saqi Books, ISBN 978-0-86356-648-6.

Andy Ganf, formerly the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) representative in London.

Caryl Churchill play sparks controversy

Caryl Churchill's 10-minute play, *Seven Jewish Children*, written in response to the bombardment of Gaza, was greeted by levels of praise and outrage which were testament to its power.

Staged at the Royal Court Theatre in London in February, it consisted of seven cryptic scenes in which relatives debated what to tell a young girl about seminal events in Jewish history from persecution in Europe, through the Holocaust, the foundation of Israel and the 1967 war to Operation Cast Lead.

The advice reflected how a feeling of vulnerability amongst early Israelis hardened as they committed more acts of injustice in the name of "security" into a ruthless justification for mass slaughter.

It ends with a devastating diatribe: "Tell her we're the iron fist now, tell her it's the fog of war, tell her we won't stop killing them till we're safe... tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? Tell her all I feel is happy it's not her."

"I had a lot of support from Jewish people who said it was not anti-Semitic"

"Don't tell her that. Tell her we love her. Don't frighten her."

Directed with clarity by Dominic Cooke, the play was "a political event," according to Churchill. And that's how it was taken by *Spectator* and *Jewish Chronicle* columnist, Melanie Phillips, among others, who came up with the perennial wail whenever Israel is criticised that it was 'anti-Semitic'.

Phillips used the predictable tactic of trying to provoke Holocaust guilt by shrieking in her *Spectator* blog that the play was "an open vilification of the Jewish people" and "drawing upon an atavistic hatred of the Jews."

Howard Jacobson was equally strident in *The Independent*. Saying the play was "wantonly inflammatory", Jacobson, like Phillips, raised the issue of "blood libel", where Jews are depicted as revelling in the sacrifice of innocents.

Caryl Churchill told *Palestine News* that the outcry was "not entirely unexpected" since the accusation of anti-Semitism is always hurled when Israel is criticised. "The intensity and vehemence of it was slightly surprising but I also had a lot of support from Jewish people who said it was not anti-Semitic."



A scene from 'Seven Jewish Children'.

In reality, the play was an insightful and thought-provoking portrait of how victims of inhumanity can turn into perpetrators and of the stories an ethnic group tells itself to excuse inflicting mass death and destruction on another race.

The play can be downloaded and performed by anyone for free, so long as a collection is made for Medical Aid for Palestinians. It has already been performed widely, including in Italy, Greece, the US, South America and five productions in Dublin. See www.royalcourttheatre.com

Go to Gaza, go to hell

Four thousand old shoes piled into mounds evocatively representing the rubble and the slaughter of Gaza formed the stunning set for the multimedia production, "Go to Gaza, Drink the Sea."

The event, which combined verbatim testimony with film, music and dance, dramatised some of the worst atrocities committed by the Israelis in their three week onslaught.

Linking the scenes together through the story of a young man so lacking in hope that he is just searching for a place to die, the play vividly conveyed the suffocating restrictions of life under siege in Gaza as well as the injustice and tragedy of so many civilian deaths.

The ingenious set was designed by artist Jane Frere, best known for her haunting installation, "Return of the Soul: the Nakba Project," consisting of 3000 small carved wax figures, each portraying an actual Palestinian driven from their home in the nakba.

Shoes have been an important theme in Frere's work ever since she set a production about refugees in a disused shoe factory in Athens in 1992. A decade later she visited the former concentration camp at Majdenek in Poland and was overwhelmed by the vast scale of the massed piles of shoes left behind by the victims.

"Shoes are very evocative of the person who owned them," she told Palestine News. "They come in all sizes, representing all ages, they mould themselves to people's feet and when the wearer has long since gone, the shoe retains an element of that person's spirit. They are also very useful as a theatrical device."

She found the shoes for "Go to Gaza," — the title is an Arabic slang phrase equivalent to "go to hell" — in a recycling plant in Kent and spent five days spattering them with grey paint to resemble rubble. The actors clambered on them, dived into them or tunneled out of them covered in concrete dust.

In the most moving scene, the actors picked out pairs of shoes and arranged them in a circle while reciting the names and ages of the 29 members of the Samoudi family who were murdered by Israeli soldiers after they had been herded into a supposedly safe house.



PHOTO: STEFANO CAGNONI

Amir Boutrous as Sharaf and Fisun Burgess as his mother

A filmed report projected on screens told the story of the Abu Halima family who were incinerated by a phosphorus bomb in one of Israel's many war crimes. The story of the execution of two little girls from the Abed Rabbu family and the shooting of their four-year-old sister, Samar, leaving her paralysed, was related by George Couyas, playing BBC reporter Christian Fraser, and Nizar Issa, playing the girls' father.

Nizar Issa, accompanying himself on the oud, also supplied lyrical songs of lament at the destruction of his homeland, some written by himself and others by the late poet Mahmoud Darwish.

Writer Justin Butcher, best known for his 2003 critique of the Iraq war, *The Madness of George Dubya*, collaborated with Palestinian writer, Ahmed Masoud, film-maker Zia Trench and Jane Frere to create the piece.

It was supported by the Amos Trust, Interpal, Jews for Justice for Palestinians and the PSC and ran in March in the Theatro Technics in North London.

For more information see www.gotogaza.wordpress.com

A feast of films on Palestine

The 10th annual Palestine Film Festival which runs from April 24th to May 8th in London's Barbican Centre features 34 films by artists from Tokyo to Beirut and includes a number of thematic sessions, UK premiers, and rarely seen films from the PFF archive.

It is the largest festival of its kind in Europe and numerous speakers will be in attendance for Q&A sessions after showings. Alongside the Festival a photographic exhibition will showcase the work of multi-award winning photojournalist, Ryuichi Hirokawa, whose film, *Nakba: Palestine 1948*, will also be given its UK premier.

Recommended highlights of the Festival include the UK premier of *Shadow of Absence*, a remarkable documentary by Nasri Hajjaj charting the Palestinian experience of exile through a series of moving tales of love, loss, and burial from Hanoi to Kensington.

Introduction to the End of an Argument by Elia Suleiman and Jayce Salloom, is a montage deconstruction of mass-media

racism and orientalism — a rare screening of a film recognised as a classic of its genre. Two compelling new documentaries, *Smile! You are in South Lebanon* by Dalia Al-Kury and *Re-Existence* by Marco Pasquini, explore the aftermath of the 2006 war in Lebanon.

An extraordinary fusion of science fiction and political drama, *Friendship's Death*, by Peter Wollen, starring Bill Paterson and Tilda Swinton, is shown prior to its DVD re-release. A whole day will be devoted to the life and work of the late Edward Said, including a screening of *Said in conversation with Salman Rushdie*. And *Memory of the Cactus*, a film by Hanna Musleh which won the Arabic Documentary Award in 2008 and recalls the destruction and expulsions of 1967 in the Latroun enclave of the West Bank, gets its first UK showing.

Speakers will include leading writers, film-makers, actors, journalists and academics. Ryuichi Hirokawa, founder



and editor-in-chief of photojournalism publication *Days Japan*, and one of the first journalists to get into Gaza, will be in conversation with Prof Ilan Pappé and Prof. Karma Nabulsi on April 26.

Following the Festival, an evening of readings by Palestinian poets from Gaza will be held at the Brunei Gallery, Russell Square. Full details and tickets are available from the Barbican Cinema and the Palestine Film Foundation.

www.barbican.org.uk/film
Tel: 0845 120 7527
(10am–8pm Mon–Sat & 12–6pm Sun)

PFF (queries and contacts):
www.palestinefilm.org
E-mail: info@palestinefilm.org

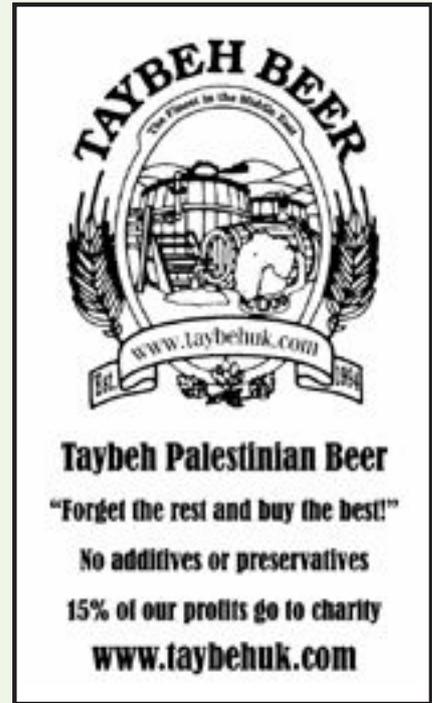
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