



# Where do they stand?



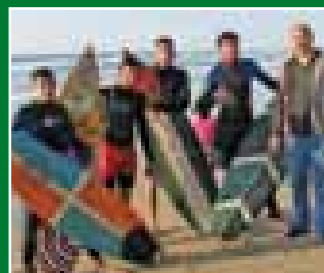
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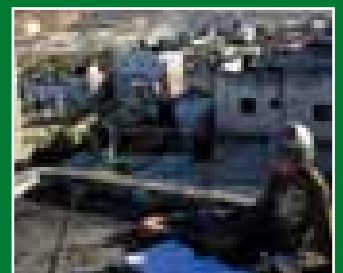
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Back page picture taken by Tariq Musleh, 15, from Aqabat Jabr Camp, for *Our Voice* magazine. See article, p15.

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our website

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

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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

# Make your vote count

By Nicolette Petersen

There isn't a Palestine supporter who isn't desperate for a political surge on this subject. Working in parliament, I see and hear MPs speak passionately about the rights of Palestinians. Similarly, I tolerate those who choose to turn a blind eye to Israel's atrocious behaviour and lobby on its behalf.

All parties have lukewarm policies on Palestine, at best. Yet, as Israel's arrogance increases, inspiring such appalling behaviour as Operation Cast Lead and the assassination of Mahmoud Al Mabhohu via the cloning of British passports, more MPs are speaking up from across the parties. We need to do everything within our power to bring about more of that.

Around 140 MPs are leaving parliament and many boundary changes will advantage the Tories as well as parties like the Greens, UKIP and even the BNP. We need to be particularly vigilant against the latter two; there is no room in a peaceful world for racism.

For every hard working pro-Palestinian MP who is leaving Parliament there is a parliamentary candidate to be elected, and it is your job to make a tactical decision that incorporates both their, and their party's views on Palestine — no easy task *unless* they've signed the PSC pledge. If you live in a marginal seat then your vote is even more important.

This government exhibits a distinct lack of interest in the plight of the Palestinians (seen most recently in the recent UN abstention on the Goldstone Report). That said, I've every reason to believe that the Tories would be pro-active *against* Palestine, and that is different.

Despite making much noise about doing so, Labour did not change the law on Universal Jurisdiction, preferring to procrastinate. But from what I hear, I believe the Tories are likely to amend the current UJ laws fairly swiftly should they gain a majority.

The Tories have much more financial support from the Israeli Lobby than any of the other parties so don't be fooled by individual politicians — you have to consider both party policy and personal promise. A candidate who is more ambitious than principled is unlikely to adhere to a verbal commitment when it comes to choosing between a ministerial career or supporting the Palestinians.

Historically, Labour plays a more active role in defending human rights, but when you see someone like Andrew Dismore doing a grand job as Chair of the Human Rights Select Committee in parliament, while also holding the position of Vice Chair of Labour Friends of Israel, it helps to be a little better informed.

Find out more by visiting the websites which have candidate information. Make PSC's website your starting point as we are inviting candidates to sign up to our pledge (see below).

There are several candidates who have truly shone on Palestinian issues and who will need a lot of support to keep their seats. They include Martin Linton (Battersea majority of only 163) who set up

Labour Friends of Palestine and the Middle East, Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes South West, 4010), Gerald Kaufman (Manchester Gorton, 5808), Richard Burden (Birmingham Northfield, 6454), Christine Russell (Chester, 915), Rob Marris (Wolverhampton and South West, 2879), Shahid Malik (Dewsbury, 4615), Andy Slaughter (Ealing Acton and Shepherds Bush, 5520), Mark Durkan (Foyle, 5957), Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington North, 7131), Dai Davies (Monmouth, 4572), Simon Hughes (Southwark North and Bermondsey, 5406), Adam Holloway (Gravesham, 654).

Lib Dem Friends of Palestine's Sarah Teather (Brent East, 2712) will have to fight it out with Labour's Dawn Butler so activists might want to see how Butler's position on Palestine compares. George Galloway is standing in Poplar and Limehouse against Jim Fitzpatrick (majority of 7129). Simon Danczuk is a candidate for Rochdale which the Lib Dems hold with majority of 442. Simon visited the West Bank on a study tour and remains keen to do all he can to raise Palestinian issues.

Read the *Jewish Chronicle* on line and look at websites that will show you who *not* to vote for: Conservative / Lib Dem / and Labour Friends of Israel list Andrew Gwynne MP (Chair) Louise Ellman, Glenis Willmott (vice chairs) and many more. The Director of Labour Friends of Israel, Luciana Berger, was selected from an all-women short list for Liverpool Wavertree.

So, there is a lot of work to be done and no clear cut answers. If you're not going to be around to vote, organise a proxy or postal vote.

Voting is a must. Not voting in democratic elections is about as irresponsible as finding oneself in the midst of a group of pro-Israeli people and not challenging their viewpoint. Get to it: and make your vote count!

**“Not voting in democratic elections is about as irresponsible as finding oneself amongst pro-Israelis and not challenging their viewpoint”**

The PSC pledge is to:

- Call on Israel to end its violations of international law, including ending its illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza
- Oppose any attacks on universal jurisdiction and support bringing alleged Israeli war criminals to justice
- Work to end the siege on Gaza
- Call on the government to ban the import of settlement goods
- Call on the government to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement
- Call for an end to Britain's arms trade with Israel



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# Outrage over jail for Gaza marchers

By Ben Soffa

**W**hile the perpetrators of Israel's war crimes against Gaza are greeted warmly by world leaders, the story is very different for some of those who protested against the onslaught. After the huge London protests last year over 70 people — almost exclusively young Muslims — have been arrested with nearly two dozen of them jailed. Many more grossly disproportionate prison sentences look set to follow.

As one of the organisers of the protests, PSC would have wished for them to have passed peacefully but the aggressive police tactics — later widely condemned when used at the G20 — goaded some into what were mostly minor acts of disorder. Since then the full weight of the criminal justice system has been used against them. In the words of a recent *Guardian* headline, we have now seen people “sent to jail for throwing a single bottle.”

Whilst the events of those days were not totally dissimilar to those seen after many a football match, vast resources were used to identify people from CCTV and detain them in dawn raids. Whole families have been handcuffed and their communities terrified. When being sentenced, defendants have been told their punishment goes beyond the penalty the offence requires, but is being set as a “deterrent” to others.

But to act as a deterrent, future protesters would have to be intent on violence —

something the judge has accepted none of those so far prosecuted had planned. Factors which should have provided significant mitigation seem to have been barely acknowledged. For example, it is far from surprising that one young protester was unwilling passively to accept the repeated police baton charges and being kettled merely days after two of his cousins had been killed in Gaza. What is truly shocking is that that protester is now beginning an 18-month jail term.

Exceptionally harsh penalties have been handed down — up to two and a half years — even for those who pleaded guilty. Some travelled to the London court after telling their families they expected to receive the community punishment recommended in pre-trial court reports, only to be sent instantly to jail. Almost all those charged have no previous convictions, with the judge noting they are “of impeccable character.”

The question remains then, why are these particular protesters being pursued, and why such harsh sentences? One cannot avoid commenting on the fact that, despite a broad cross-section of society taking part



Gaza protesters “kettled”. Photo: Marc Vallee.

in the demonstrations, all but two of those prosecuted are Muslims.

The message that young Muslims should keep quiet and not engage in politics seems to be the one that many will take away from these cases — something quite at odds with the government's “counter-radicalisation” strategy of claiming the democratic process lies open to all.

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign, along with Stop the War Coalition, British Muslim Initiative and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, has launched a campaign to defend the demonstrators against these hugely disproportionate sentences. We will be pushing hard to defend the right to protest and to challenge racist targeting of those campaigning for Palestinian human rights.

## MEPs defy intense lobbying over Goldstone

By Gill Swain

**M**EPs were inundated with lobbying emails from the European Jewish Congress in the days before they voted narrowly in favour of backing the Goldstone Report into war crimes during Israel's bombardment of Gaza last year.

A spokesperson for the EJC told the website Euobserver.com that the campaign had been “definitely a really major effort by the EJC.” Moshe Kantor, the president of the group which

represents 42 Jewish organisations on the continent, travelled to Israel in the week before the vote in March to plan strategy with foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman.

On the day before the vote the level of lobbying had reached such a crescendo that Irish socialist MEP Proinsias de Rossa, the chair of the chamber's Palestinian Legislative Council liaison delegation, sent around his own email encouraging deputies not to buckle under the pressure.

“Tomorrow's vote is a test of the credibility of this parliament's commitment to human rights irrespective of political

considerations. The joint resolution is a fair and balanced position negotiated by all the main political groups. I appeal to you to support it,” he said.

The vote was on a joint resolution from the centre left, far left, Greens and Liberals which called on the EU's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, and member states to “publicly demand the implementation of [the report's] recommendations and accountability for all violations of international law, including alleged war crimes.” It was passed by 335 to 287, splitting the house between left and right.



# Ban Settlement Goods campaign

By Betty Hunter

The joint TUC-PSC Ban Settlement Goods campaign has been launched in what is a highly significant move. The campaign kicked off with adverts in *The Guardian* and *The Independent* on March 27.

Since the TUC took its historic decision at its annual congress in September to back a boycott of goods from the illegal Israeli settlements, we have worked hard to produce effective lobbying materials to turn intentions into action. Over six million workers now have access to information and campaign materials aimed at changing government policy on Palestine.

Whatever government is elected, MPs will be subjected to our postcard mailshots pressing for settlement goods to be banned from our shops. We also have briefing materials so that trade unionists are informed of the political context of the campaign and will be able to discuss the situation facing Palestinians at their trade union branches and workplaces.

The initial focus for trade unions on settlement goods is to enable us to raise important political issues with those who may not have previous knowledge of Palestine. However, active trade unionists have long understood the issue of colonialism and nowhere is Israel's colonial project clearer than in the settlements.

There is increasing evidence that Israeli exporters are misleading consumers with incorrect labelling. The EU-Israel trade agreement exempts most products made in Israel or the Palestinian Authority from tax, while goods made in the settlements are subject to different customs laws. The European Court of Justice ruled in February that products manufactured in West Bank settlements are not Israeli and must be taxed accordingly.

Activists in Palestine and Israel are researching mis-labelling as it is clearly in breach of European Union agreements and customs laws. *Ha'aretz* reported recently that Shamir Salads, an Israeli company located in the West Bank, markets its products in Europe using a false address

west of the Green Line, while its internet address is in Barkan Industrial Area.

The PSC sees the Ban Settlement Goods campaign as part of the broader Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign and will be seeking joint action with trade unions in the coming months. In particular we are urging all of our branches to make contact with local trade unions to plan a joint day of boycott actions on June 26th.

## The campaign tool-kit comprises:

- TUC-PSC postcard, leaflet and briefing
- Basic facts about settlements
- Information on organising consumer action
- Model letters to send to your MP, MEP and local supermarkets
- A local media strategy
- E-tools to use in the virtual world
- Useful links, resources and more

All available at: [www.palestinecampaign.org/ban-settlement-goods](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/ban-settlement-goods)



# Egyptian complicity in the siege of Gaza

Egyptian journalist **Issandr El Amrani**, who runs the blog [Arabist.net](http://Arabist.net), explains why his government helps Israel heap misery on the Palestinians

**T**owards the end of 2009 came reports that Egypt was building a metal wall on its 14km border with Rafah which would go deeper into the ground than any previous structure, threatening the tunnels that are Gaza's lifblood.

This wall symbolises a shift of enormous magnitude in Egyptian policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one that is the result of the equally important changes within the Palestinian polity, but also of Egypt's domestic problems and its dwindling regional influence during the era of the George W. Bush administration.

## Determined to defeat Hamas

Ever since Hamas scored an electoral victory in the OPT elections in January 2006 — only a few weeks after Egypt's own Muslim Brothers won an unprecedented 20% of parliament — Egyptian policy aimed to reverse the group's fortunes. Cairo has not only failed to achieve this but has suffered significant setbacks.

For instance, Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 came as Fatah security forces had received funding from the United States and training in Alexandria by Egyptian military officers. It is believed that these forces were being prepared for a coup against Hamas' power base in Gaza, which Hamas says it pre-empted.

The Hamas takeover was a blow to Egyptian prestige and security, not only because the regime of President Hosni Mubarak abhors the idea of an Islamist group in control on its borders, or because Egypt fears a radicalising influence from Hamas, but also because the extensive Egyptian security network in Gaza failed to see anything coming.

The situation was perceived as a disaster



*Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu meeting Egypt's President Mubarak*

and the priority for Omar Suleiman, the head of Egypt's General Intelligence Service, became to undo it. In that endeavour, too, he has been unsuccessful. But he has succeeded in ensuring that Egypt regained a central role in the Middle East peace process — a role the Bush administration denied Mubarak between 2000 and 2007.

## Egypt's role in the blockade

With Hamas in control, Egypt's first problem was how to deal with Gaza, especially as the Middle East Quartet saw Hamas' move as illegal and gave de facto backing to Israel's blockade of the territory. The Mubarak regime essentially adopted that as its own position, using the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) to justify it.

The AMA stipulated that troops from the Palestinian Authority (and, possibly, EU monitors) should man the border after Israel withdrew its own troops. As well as wanting to make life as difficult as possible for Hamas, the government also feared that if Gaza came to rely too much on Egypt in the absence of a connection to the West Bank, Israel would try to dump the problem of Gaza onto its lap.

The second problem was that it made reconciliation talks between Palestinian factions all the more urgent, at least in theory (since the Palestinian groups themselves have proved lukewarm at best about reconciliation).

The talks dragged on and off at a swanky hotel in the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis.

Members of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, plus other smaller groups, would promise reconciliation but then leave for consultations and never quite reach an agreement.

## Cairo acted as "Fatah's lawyer"

The Egyptians were playing a similar role in the negotiations as that of the United States throughout the Oslo process: if Washington had then been "Israel's lawyer," in the phrase used by former Clinton administration official, Aaron David Miller, Cairo was being Fatah's lawyer — or perhaps more precisely, Mahmoud Abbas' lawyer. The reconciliation the Egyptians were pushing was blatantly one-sided and, by October 2008, Hamas turned down the "white paper" they had proposed.

A hardening of the Egyptians' position then took place, and they got a taste of what pressure Hamas could apply in January 2008, when crowds of Gazans

**A** lawsuit has been launched in Egypt to halt the government's construction of the underground wall and the closure of the Rafah border crossing gate. It involves around 300 plaintiffs, including many from the US and the UK, acting against Egypt's President Mubarak, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Interior and the Commander of the Rafah border crossing.

stormed over the Rafah border after Hamas operatives destroyed sections of the barrier. It took three weeks for the Egyptians to return the situation to normal.

Shortly after the breach, Egyptian Foreign Minister, Ahmed About Gheit, famously threatened that “whoever breaks the border line will have his legs broken.” By late 2008, the Egyptians were both frustrated with Hamas and worried that the blockade’s continuation would lead to a replay of the January 2008 incidents.

## Cast Lead shook Mubarak regime

There has been some speculation that when then Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, came to Cairo in late December 2008, it was to tell the Egyptians about the impending start of “Operation Cast Lead,” Israel’s brutal assault on Gaza. Whatever the truth, the timing of the visit certainly did not help the image of the Mubarak regime, already seen as complicit in the blockade, and the first two weeks of the Gaza war shook the regime to its core.

In Beirut, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah of Hizbullah urged the Egyptian military and people to rise up to open the border. In the pro-Hamas pan-Arab media — and on al-Jazeera most of all — Egypt was depicted as a traitor to Arab causes. Egypt’s relations with Iran, Syria and Qatar rapidly deteriorated and images of the horrors of the war were more persuasive for many Egyptians than the pro-regime media’s attempts to hold Hamas responsible.

Many could not believe Egypt appeared to be in the same position as in 1979 when the Camp David agreement was signed and Egypt was booted out of the Arab League. For Mubarak, it was the rebirth of the “resistance front” that denied Egypt a role in regional politics for most of the 1980s.

## Peace talks with an Egyptian face

But by the second week of January 2009, the tide began to turn as Egypt found itself thrust in the middle of the effort to end the onslaught. European officials rallied to support the Mubarak regime and mediation efforts launched by France among others



**A calf being smuggled into Gaza through a tunnel**

were given an Egyptian face. This allowed the government to claim that it was leading efforts for peace and by the end of the war Egypt found itself as the indispensable middleman for three concurrent processes: permanent ceasefire and prisoner exchange negotiations between Hamas and Israel, and relaunched inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

Moreover, the arrival of Barack Obama at the White House suggested a relaunch of the Middle East peace process which in the 1990s had given Egypt a central diplomatic role and the goodwill of its Western allies. In other words, Egypt regained control of the situation and was able to placate domestic criticism by pointing to its role in bringing the war to an end.

Of course, this could not last. Over a year after the war, Gaza is still blockaded, there is no permanent ceasefire or prisoner exchange between Hamas and Israel or reconciliation among Palestinians. Egypt has failed in its stated goals, and arguably was never very interested in achieving them.

Egypt will not encourage real reconciliation, because it fears that the Obama administration will back out of the peace process if Hamas reintegrates with the Palestinian Authority, as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has made clear. Keeping the process alive is Egypt’s priority, and it may very well be that the construction of the new wall is mostly designed at giving it an edge over Hamas, much like recent decisions to restrict travel permits for the group’s officials or confiscation of cash Hamas officials have tried to bring back to Gaza.

## Arresting Free Gaza activists

As the blockade of Gaza worsens, many Egyptians are incensed by its effects.

Attempts to organize around this cause are severely restrained, however, and Egypt’s security services have made arresting or dissuading “Free Gaza” activists a top priority, as can be seen from the arrest of several Egyptian activists and the treatment reserved for the two international groups that tried to get into Gaza from Egypt in December 2009.

The message put out by the Mubarak regime is clear: policy towards Gaza is a matter of national security and no activism will be tolerated. There are plenty



**Gazans storming across the broken Rafah crossing barrier, January, 2008**

of individual Egyptians who write against their countries’ policies, donate to charities for Gazans and carry out campaigns online or abroad in favour of the Palestinian cause. But collective action, especially on the streets, is currently harshly repressed — indeed it has become easier to criticise Mubarak personally than to criticise Egypt’s stand on Gaza.

Many Egyptians are incredulous that their country now plays a part in augmenting, rather than relieving, Palestinian suffering. But in the face of Palestinian disunity and Egyptian domestic problems ranging from high inflation to the mystery over who will succeed the 81-year-old Hosni Mubarak, Gaza has been put on the backburner.

It is likely that it will eventually resurface, as Egypt’s foreign policy is inextricably linked to its domestic issues. As Egyptian pro-Palestine activists have put it in recent years, “the road to Jerusalem goes through Cairo.”

**T**wo other factors were decisive in Egypt’s complicity in Gaza’s suffering, according to Seamus Milne, writing in *The Guardian* in January. The first was a US threat to cut its hundreds of millions of dollars of aid unless Cairo cracked down on arms and other smuggling. The second was the need for US acquiescence in the widely expected hereditary succession of Mubarak’s ex-banker son, Gamal, to the presidency.

Milne commented: “Far from protecting its sovereignty, the Egyptian government has sold it for continued foreign subsidy and despotic dynastic rule, sacrificing any pretence to its historic role of Arab leadership in the process.”

He said it was precisely the West’s embrace of repressive and unrepresentative regimes such as Egypt’s, along with its unwavering backing for Israel, that was at the heart of the crisis in the Middle East and Muslim world.



# Lowkey: supporting Palestine is an honour

The London born, Iraqi-British hip hop artist, **Lowkey**, 23, electrified rallies for Gaza with his powerful rap, *Long Live Palestine*, and became a patron of PSC last year. Here, in a Question and Answer interview with **Maha Rahwanji**, he explains why he's such an ardent supporter of Palestine.

**When you were asked to be a patron of PSC, you said it was “an honour.” Why?**

Well, I think it's an honour to have my name associated with the word “Palestine.” It's an entity, it's a nationality, it's a country which is constantly being denied. I've always looked positively upon those who strive to draw attention to what is going on. The people who have over time resisted what is going on, who have spoken out about what is going on, I always have held them in the highest esteem in terms of humanitarians and I think that PSC do a lot of very worth while work and so I am honoured to be part of it.

**(Lowkey went on the American Viva Palestina Convoy last summer). Was that the first time you visited Palestine?**

No — I went on a tour of the West Bank in February–March 2009, performing in different places... Jenin, Bethlehem, parts of Jerusalem, we even did a show in Haifa. The tour was organised by Hip Hop for Gaza, Sabrina Foundation, who flew a bunch of artists from America, the Middle East and the UK over there to perform.

As soon as I arrived in Ben Gurion Airport I was detained for nine hours so that was my first taste of Israel. I got a small fraction, a tiny taster, of the level of humiliation and the level of degradation that one feels when strip-searched, when detained, basically when Israel is playing God with the lives of people in the West Bank and Gaza. I was released at midnight into Tel Aviv and I had to get to Ramallah on my own. For someone who doesn't speak Hebrew and speaks very bad Arabic, it wasn't easy!

What I found interesting about the West Bank was there was very much an effort of normalising the military occupation and this is what the people have grown up with on a daily basis and have had to become accustomed to living with — it is the complete normalisation of having checkpoints set up wherever the Israelis want — they can spontaneously just set up a checkpoint.

What people don't realise, and what the rest of the world doesn't even know, is that you never hear on the news a woman had to give birth to a child today at a checkpoint and the child died, because for what? Because the Israelis didn't let her through. That's something that you never hear whereas that should be the news because when

you're just talking about the phenomenon of a people strapping bombs to their bodies, blowing themselves up...

They'd love the people to think that it was some kind of religious thing... well, it's not! It's when you are humiliating people, degrading people and subjugating people on a daily basis. When you control every single aspect of their life, everything from water, to the electricity, to where they can go, where they can't go, you are going to get resistance. It's going to take all shapes and all forms.

More and more people are waking up to it now, it's not just Muslim people that are opposed to Israel, and it's not just Muslim people that are the victims. And we are not just talking about Muslim land... we are talking about a huge number of Christian Palestinians that are equally degraded, the Israelis make no difference: a Palestinian is a Palestinian, that's the bottom line.

When the Israelis come and knock down a person's house in order to make way for a settlement, they tell the person whose house it was to remove the rubble that was caused by the demolition. Each day the rubble remained, the authorities would fine that person. When you do that to people, you know how they are going to react. You cannot play God with people's lives and not expect them to grasp at whatever they can to fight back. People are turning to religion to find comfort; it's their only weapon to console themselves: this life is hell, so I will get heaven.

**What do you find is the reaction of uncommitted audiences?**

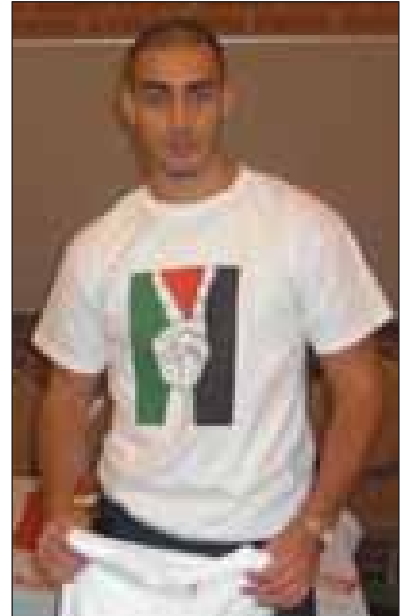
It depends on how it's packaged. I don't get the mainstream media support I would like, I do think that audiences everywhere in essence relate to humanity and that's what we are talking about... Once given the platform, people relate because humanity is humanity.

**Do you find young people receptive?**

I do! More than ever, I have a larger fan base now than ever before.

**Even from those that you initially found uncommitted to the cause?**

It's not uncommitted, they just don't know. Their perception is completely skewed by a media which is 100% pro-megaphone to the Israeli, British and American governments. It's hard to even know what's going on if they are always taking the side of the Israeli story.





In a book I read by John Pilger, called *Freedom Next Time*, he makes a reference to a survey carried out in 2001 which stated that 80% of those surveyed were under the [false] impression that the Palestinians were occupying the Israelis! And you think, where does that come from? Well there is a movement of people who are paid huge wages every single day to make that seem like the reality.

### **It's very brave of you, fairly early on in your career, to be a spokesperson for something "un-Vogue."**

Well, I don't think so. I've been doing this since I was seventeen... I don't even consider it to be separate from me, it's part of me being me. This is what occupies my conversation in my house, every single day. It's not like it's a conscious decision. It just happened because there was a protest and I had a song about it and I went and did it at the protest and that was it. It took off from there.

### **What do you plan to do in the future?**

We are meant to be touring the West Bank in May with a few American artists: M1 from Dead Prez and hopefully Immortal Technique, doing two shows over seven days.

### **How do you relax?**

Rarely, the best way I really find relaxing is just reading a good book and lying in bed.

### **Are you happy and when were you the happiest?**

Never. Never have been and never will be until I feel like the world is different from how it is now. I find it impossible to just sit there when people around me, that could just as easily be me and my family, are living the way they are. I was probably happiest when I was a child, when I was innocent to the world.

### **Who or what is the greatest love of your life?**

My family.

### **What do you love about London, Palestine and Iraq?**

I love London because it's home to me, that's where I was born and brought up. I love it because of the mix, for example, you could live next door on one side to a family from Trinidad and on the other side next to a racist man who's lived there since it was an all-white area.

So you have a place where there are abundant views and opinions. I think it's definitely something positive about London.

From when I went to Palestine, the hospitality and kindness of the people was really touching. When I was in a refugee camp and complimented someone on say, their shoes, and they offered them to me, it teaches you their humility and admirable ability to give, especially because it comes from someone without a passport, without the ability to travel, without citizenship, without a country and living in a refugee camp.

I've never been to Iraq but



**Lowkey with members of his supergroup, Mongrel — Drew McConnell of Babyshambles, Andy Nicholson of Arctic Monkeys, Jon McClure of Reverend & the Makers**

I love its history and, despite all the hardships it's faced over the years, it's given so much to the world.

### **If you were a statesman for one day, what would you do?**

If it were in the United Kingdom, I'd remove British troops from Afghanistan, I'd nationalise the railway and the banks. I would put sanctions on Israel in order for them to lift the siege of Gaza, to withdraw to the '67 borders. I would also stop MI6 from interfering with other countries' affairs.

### **Who have been your musical influences?**

Sam Cooke, Gil Scot-Heron, Tupac Shakur — people who make soulful music.

### **What's been your biggest single achievement?**

It's hard to define what the biggest achievement for a person is. To be honest, to keep sane and be alive is an achievement, but one I would like to be proud of is managing to connect with young people through Hip Hop, something I really liked and related to, and voice what mattered to me as it was not reflected in Hip Hop nor popular music before.

### **Can you send members of Palestine Solidarity Campaign and all the people we are trying to reach a message?**

There are people who have given their lives, and I don't mean like a song or a speech but their lives to this cause, and that takes a hundred times more dedication, commitment and selflessness than anything I've ever done. I always want to pay homage to those people who have given their lives to this struggle, and for everybody like that, your example inspires me, and pushes me to be better than I am.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign does incredible work that is so vital and I am just thankful to be a part of it in some way.

- Listen to the interview on [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org) Sound by Carlos Martinez.
- Lowkey's singles, *Tears to Laughter* and *Long Live Palestine, Part 2*, are available to download from iTunes. Profits go to Interpal and Islamic Relief.



# The moment is ripe

**V**eteran campaigner, Ronnie Kasrils, who fought apartheid in South Africa and served in Nelson Mandela's government, told a meeting organised by the PSC in the House of Commons in March that the time is ripe for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions on Israel.

Kasrils, who is descended from Jewish grandparents, listed the many types of discrimination suffered by black South Africans and by Palestinians. But he echoed Archbishop Tutu's view that the situation is much worse in Palestine because "the Zionists are far more clever than the Afrikaaner Nationalists were."

He recalled meeting late Palestinian president Yasser Arafat in his bombed compound in Ramallah who waved his arms

at the destroyed walls and asked: "What do you think of my Bantustan?"

Kasrils told him: "It's not like a Bantustan... the Bantustans in South Africa never had fences around them, let alone walls; they were open. You only realised you were coming in when the road became degraded, when it became a gravel road and there was a sign which told you what area you were entering.

"You only had soldiers or police in times of tension. They never bombed people in those Bantustans, never sent in tanks or fired rockets and missiles at people. Yes, there was repression, but these were police actions, never full-scale military actions. It was nothing like what we see happening in Palestine."

## Progressives were disarmed

Before the meeting, **Ronnie Kasrils** spoke to **Victoria Brittain** about his long term intellectual and emotional commitment to Palestine.

**A**s a schoolboy in South Africa in the 1950s, Kasrils was always one to side with the underdog and questions about Israel and Palestine came high on his agenda as his political life began to develop under his mentors in the South African Communist Party. Then as a young man he was catapulted into politics by the horror of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre.

It was during his years in exile, first in Dar es Salaam and then in London, that he began to cross paths with Palestinians and people from the Israeli left. As he socialised with Arabs from many countries, he was drawn in by the culture, food and poetry, especially of Mahmoud Darwish.

### "The bombardment of Gaza last year was a tipping point"

In the late 1960s at the London School of Economics, as cover for his underground work for the ANC, Kasrils sprang to prominence in debates over the Six Day War and led a protest to the Israeli embassy. Reflecting now on how international awareness has changed, he said: "We were only about 12 people, mostly from Asia and Latin America — the left in the UK was very confused." The group was let into the embassy for a briefing from the press attaché, with maps. Kasrils immediately asked where Deir Yasin was on the map "and that was more or less the end of the encounter."

Apartheid South Africa and Palestine were the key items on every international conference agenda for Third World leaders and for their people at home. But then came Oslo, and "progressives were disarmed, as were Palestinians... we became muted, instead of calling for the end of occupation. In those years we were very quiet and also of course deeply preoccupied with our own transition. So, although two states never seemed quite right, or realistic, we went along with the Oslo line. We didn't have our thinking caps on."

In 2000 Kasrils was the star of a parliamentary debate in which



he weighed into Israel as "Nazis," guilty of collective punishment. A predictable firestorm of criticism hit him but he went on to publish an open letter criticising Israel. "Not in my name" was signed by 330 prominent South African Jews. "This is what really got me going." He accepted the toll his actions would take on his personal life — close relatives shunned him.

His first visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories was in 2004 and the second in 2007 when he was Minister of Intelligence. "The impact on me was overwhelming, seeing Arafat holed up in the Mukatta, meeting families in Gaza and East Jerusalem, the grim wall, Qalquilya... so evil... having settlers spit at the car with a South African flag.

"When I gave a lecture in Bir Zeit on South Africa Freedom Day, 22 April, 2007, I went through the four pillars of our struggle: politics, mass movement, armed underground, international solidarity. And then, as always, I emphasised the essential element of unity — without that, you're treading water."

These days, out of government, he is more active than ever, writing and speaking on Palestine. "I feel very positive, there has been a paradigm shift in human knowledge with the mythology of Zionism undercut by writers like Shlomo Sand\*, and the bombardment of Gaza last year was a tipping point, there is far more analysis of what Israel represents by media, academics and so on. The point now is not to allow the momentum to die down."

\* *The Invention of the Jewish People* by Shlomo Sand, Verso 2009

# \$2bn stolen from Palestinians

By Jonathan Cook

Over the past 40 years Israel has defrauded Palestinians working inside Israel of more than US\$2 billion by deducting from their salaries contributions for welfare benefits to which they were never entitled, Israeli economists revealed in February.

A new report, "State Robbery," said that part of the money was supposed to be transferred to a special fund on behalf of the workers. In fact, most of the deductions were invested in infrastructure projects in the Palestinian territories — a presumed reference to the massive state subsidies accorded to the settlements.

Complicit in the deception, the report adds, is the Histadrut, the Israeli labour federation, which levies a monthly fee on Palestinian workers even though they are not entitled to membership and are not represented in labour disputes.

## "A clear-cut case of theft on a grand scale"

"This is a clear-cut case of theft from Palestinian workers on a grand scale," said Shir Hever, a Jerusalem-based economist and one of the authors of the report.

The deductions began in 1970 when Palestinian workers started to enter Israel in significant numbers, most of them employed as manual labourers. Nearly 50,000 people from the West Bank are now working in Israel and continue to have such contributions docked from their pay.

Typically, the workers lose a fifth of their salary in deductions that are supposed to cover old age payments, unemployment allowance, disability insurance, child benefits, trade union fees, pension fund, holiday and sick pay, and health insurance. In practice, however, the workers are entitled only to disability payments in case of work accidents and are insured against loss of work if their employer goes bankrupt.

According to the report, compiled by two human rights groups, the Alternative Information Centre and Kav La'Oved, less than eight per cent of the total contributions was used to award benefits to Palestinian workers. The rest was secretly transferred to the finance ministry.

The workers were defrauded of at least

\$2.25bn in today's prices — more than the PA's annual income which last year stood at about \$1.6bn. Excluded from the authors' calculations were two substantial groups of Palestinian workers — those employed in the Jewish settlements and those working in Israel's black economy — because figures were too hard to obtain.

Mr Hever said the question of whether the bulk of the deductions — those for national insurance — had been illegally taken from the workers was settled by the Israeli High Court back in 1991. The judges accepted a petition from the flower growers' union that the government should return about \$1.5 million in their workers' contributions.

"The legal precedent was set then and could be used to reclaim the rest of these excessive deductions," he said.

Israel continued requiring contributions from Palestinian workers after the creation of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, arguing that it needed to make the deductions to ensure Israeli workers remained competitive.

However, the report notes that such practices were supposed to have been curbed by the Oslo process. Israel agreed to levy an "equalisation tax" — equivalent to the excessive contributions paid by Palestinians — a third of which would be invested in a fund that would later be available to the workers.

In fact, however, the Israeli State Comptroller, a government watchdog official, reported in 2003 that only about a tenth of the money levied on the workers had actually been invested in the fund.

The finance ministry has admitted that most of the money taken from the workers was passed to Israeli military authorities in the Palestinian territories to pay for "infrastructure programmes." Hannah Zohar, the director of Kav La'Oved, said she believed that the ministry was actually referring to the construction of illegal settlements.

The report is highly critical of the



**Palestinians crowding through a checkpoint to get to work in Israel**

Histadrut, Israel's trade union federation, which it accuses of grabbing "a piece of the pie" by forcing Palestinian workers to pay a monthly "organising fee" to the union since 1970, even though Palestinians are not entitled to membership.

Despite the Histadrut's agreement with its Palestinian counterpart in 2008 to repay the fees, only 20 per cent was returned, leaving \$30m unaccounted for.

## "The Histadrut implicated in rip off"

The Histadrut was also implicated in another "rip-off," said Mr Hever. It agreed in 1990 to the Israeli construction industry's demand that Palestinian workers pay an extra two per cent tax to promote the training of recent Jewish immigrants, most of them from the former Soviet Union.

Mr Hever said that in effect the Palestinian labourers were required to "subsidise the training of workers meant to replace them." The funds were never used for the stated purpose but were mainly issued as grants to the families of Israeli workers. In one especially cynical use of the funds, the money was spent on portable stoves for soldiers involved in Israel's three-week attack on Gaza last year.

In response, the finance ministry called the report "incorrect and misleading," and the Histadrut claimed it was "full of lies." However, neither provided rebuttals of the report's allegations or its calculations.

# Israeli prisons as revolutionary universities

**Khaled al-Azraq** has been a political prisoner of Israel for 20 years and is currently being held in Nafha (Hadarim) prison in southern Palestine. Here he describes some aspects of the prisoners' movement's struggle to build a system of education as a pillar of the liberation movement.

It was at a very early age I learned the meaning of occupation in the all-too-frequent days of curfew imposed on our refugee camp. Any questions I asked were met with the same answer: "It's Israel, it's the occupation."

Little by little I learned the meaning of Palestine through the stories narrated by my father and grandmother about the Nakba and the difficult early years of exile and refuge. I fell in love with Palestine through the stories of "al-blad" (the land), memories of the times before the Nakba, or "real life" as my grandmother used to call it.

In the early '80s, Palestinian society transformed into a volcano of protest against the Israeli regime's attempt to impose the "village leagues" as a kind of political leadership that would replace elected municipal leaders and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. This period of protests changed my life. I became an active part of the growing popular movement.

My activism was not limited to participating in strikes, rallies and protests, for I had begun the lifelong process of political self-education. This was harder than it may seem. Finding books about Palestinian political history and the Zionist colonisation of Palestine required a great deal of effort and discretion; all of these books were banned by Israel, and most of them had been burned or confiscated by the army.

I quenched my thirst for these texts by



consuming the secret books and pamphlets which, you may be surprised to hear, were not instruction manuals for making explosives, but historical, literary, political writings that we would secretly pass around. If an Israeli soldier caught you with one of those texts, you would most likely end up in prison.

I also fed my revolutionary fervour with patriotic songs which were also illegal as far as the Israelis were concerned. We recorded these songs on tapes with foreign love songs just in case a soldier decided to check. It was through these banned songs and poems that I learned the meaning of struggle for freedom, the meaning of international solidarity and how a victory for one can be a victory for all.

Despite the harshness and difficulty of those days, I miss them. Today, after two decades of isolation in prison, I say "if only I could relive those days!"

I was first imprisoned in 1982 at the age of 16. In prison I found what I was not expecting: Palestine's political, national, revolutionary university. It was in prison that I realised that knowledge is what paves the road to victory and freedom.

Through a long and arduous struggle, the prisoners' movement has been able to win and maintain the right to a library. Members of the prisoners' movement came up with ingenious ways of smuggling in books and the movement organised workshops, seminars and courses to educate prisoners on every relevant topic one can imagine.

Every day, the prisoner holding the position of "librarian" would pass through the different cells and sections, and prisoners would exchange the book they had just finished for the one they were about to begin. The librarian

carried the "library book," a record of the books available, and a list of the books each prisoner had requested.

In one of the most memorable prison library moments, we had found out that the movement had managed to smuggle Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* into the old Nablus prison. We all raced to get our names on the list to borrow it and the wait lasted weeks! Several times, we resorted to making copies of sought-after books like this. I remember copying Naji Aloush's *The Palestinian National Movement* of which we made five hand-written copies.

Through the will and perseverance of the prisoners, prison was transformed into a school, a veritable university offering education in literature, languages, politics, philosophy, history and more. I still remember the words of Bader al-Qawasmah, whom I met in the old Nablus prison in 1984, who said to me, "before prison I was a porter who could neither read nor write. Now, after 14 years in prison, I write in Arabic, I teach Hebrew, and I translate from English."

Prisoners passed on what they knew in an organised and systematic fashion. Simply put, learning and passing on knowledge and understanding, both about Palestine and in general, has been considered a patriotic duty necessary to ensure steadfastness and perseverance in the struggle to defend our rights against Zionism and colonialism. There is no doubt that the Palestinian political prisoners' movement has played a leading role in developing Palestinian national education.

■ This article was originally published in *al-Majdal*, the quarterly magazine of the Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights — [www.badil.org](http://www.badil.org)



**Prisoners' wives and mothers protesting**



# Surfing in Gaza

**Rada Daniell** reports on Gazans looking for support to develop maritime sports

**O**n a sunny day by the sea in Gaza it is easy to forget that this is not one of those picture postcard places where people go for the holiday of a lifetime. Especially on Fridays, Gazans descend on the beaches; families picnic while children and teenagers play games and perform with jaw-dropping skill gymnastics and break dancing.

And the Gazan surfers are there — a small team of about ten surfing devotees in their well-worn wet suits clutching their hand-painted surfboards which have seen better days. Their shabbiness does not seem to matter as they master the waves or chat afterwards happily with the kids who idolise them.

Surfing is more than just hobby for Gazans, according to an enthusiast for all things maritime, Mahfouz Kabariti, President of the Palestinian Sailing Federation. Because of the siege, the youth especially have little to keep them occupied and he is determined to create more opportunities for them than were available to his generation.

**“Mahfouz has been asking sportsmen from around the world to show support”**

He is convinced that surfing, sailing, angling and other sea sports would help people cope with the isolation and overcome the hopelessness and negativity which dominates their lives as well as improving their physical health and developing their life skills.

So Mahfouz wants to start a surfing and sailing school and encourage Gazans to take part in international events as participants and judges. “People abroad sometimes wrongly see us as troublemakers. We would like to show that we are peace loving people who have lots to offer to the world,” he says.

The enthusiasm, the talent and the beautiful sea are all there but there is lack of almost everything else, including the basics such as experienced trainers, surfboards, sailing boats, wetsuits,



*Mahfouz Kabariti with some of the young surfers*

maintenance and repair kits — you name it.

Mahfouz has been asking sportsmen from around the world to show support for their Palestinian colleagues. He invited the organisers of the annual East Mediterranean Yachting Regatta (EMYR), which sails from Turkey to Egypt between April and June, to make a stop in Gaza. The organisers were very interested but concerned about the three-mile sailing limit imposed by the Israelis who frequently shoot at Gazan fishermen or attack them with water cannon.

However, Mahfouz is not giving up. He hopes that Gazans will be able to welcome EMYR sailing boats, if not this year, then in the years to come or that some of the participants might want to visit independently at the end of the regatta.

In their efforts to gain their rightful place in the world of maritime sports Mahfouz and Gazan sportsmen are counting on all the solidarity they can get. If you can offer skills or equipment or just moral support, please contact Mahfouz on [palsailing@hotmail.com](mailto:palsailing@hotmail.com)

## Freedom flotillas to sail again

**T**wo major challenges to Israel's illegal imprisonment of the 1.5 million citizens of Gaza are planned for this spring and summer involving hundreds of activists, boats large and small, possibly an aircraft, and even musical accompaniment.

The first flotilla was due (at the time of going to press) to set sail in April consisting of two cargo ships loaded with reconstruction and educational supplies accompanied by at least three passenger ships. Coordinated by the Free Gaza Movement in conjunction with the Turkish Relief Foundation (IHH), the ships were to carry MPs from various countries, human rights and Trade Union activists and journalists.

After five successful sailings by the Free Gaza Movement between Cyprus and Gaza since August, 2008, delivering vital supplies and a huge boost to morale, their last three attempts were aggressively obstructed by the Israelis who impounded boats and detained activists. Greta Berlin, one of Free Gaza's organisers, said: “We're

committed to creating a sea opening for Palestinians, so the supplies needed to rebuild their devastated homes, villages and cities can be delivered.”

Meanwhile the US-based Free Palestine Movement, which was launched in September 2009 to broaden the Free Gaza techniques and principles to all of Palestine, plans to set sail in July in a ship that can carry up to 200 passengers and several hundred tons of cargo. They are also investigating using an aircraft.

They plan to make it “a world-class event, with U.S. members of Congress, internationally known humanitarians and celebrities and entertainers who will perform a concert in Gaza.” There will be simultaneous concerts in London and other places round the world.

PSC intends to be actively involved with all these projects. For more information, see [www.freepalestinemovement.org](http://www.freepalestinemovement.org), [www.freegaza.org](http://www.freegaza.org)

# Women soldiers break their silence

**S**ix years after the first collection of soldiers' testimonies was published by the Israeli organisation, *Breaking the Silence*, a new booklet has been released telling the stories of Israeli women soldiers who served in the Occupied Territories. Their stories include the killing of innocent people, the systematic humiliation of Palestinians, reckless and cruel violence, theft and cover-up.

Many of these young women end up engaging in acts, or turning a blind eye to acts, that will burden them years later. But the organisation's director, Dana Golan, noted that female soldiers were no more sensitive to the Palestinians than their male comrades.

"We discovered that the girls try to be even more violent and brutal than the boys, just to become one of the guys," she said.

## Here are just a few of the testimonies.

"A female combat soldier needs to prove more... when I arrived there was another female there with me... everyone spoke of how impressive she is because she humiliates Arabs without any problem... You have to see her, the way she humiliates, the way she slaps them, wow, she really slapped that guy."

A seam line border guard spoke of what they did with Palestinians caught inside Israel. "There's the well-known border guard song (in Arabic): 'One hummus, one bean, I love the border guard' — they would make them sing this. Sing, and jump... And if one of them would laugh... they would punch him. Why did you laugh? Smack... It could go on for hours, depending on how bored they are."

A soldier in Sachlav Military Police unit, stationed in Hebron, recalled soldiers taking revenge on a Palestinian child for throwing stones. "Two of our soldiers put him in a jeep and two weeks later the kid was walking around with casts on both arms and legs... they talked about it in the unit quite a lot — about how they sat him down and put his hand on the chair and simply broke it right there, on the chair."

A border guard said: "We caught a five-year-old... the officers just picked him up, slapped him around and put him in the jeep. The kid was crying and the officer next to me said 'don't cry' and started laughing at him. Finally the kid cracked a smile — and suddenly the officer gave him a punch in the stomach. Why? 'Don't laugh in my face,' he said."

A non-commissioned officer took her soldiers for a Sunday of culture — a show in Tel Aviv. When they got back to the Gaza Strip,



Female recruits on parade, photo Rob Sheridan

they were appalled by the dissonance — one moment they're clapping in a theatre, the next moment they're acting like beasts.

"Crossing the checkpoint, it's like another world... Palestinians walk with trolleys on the side of the road, with wagons, donkeys... so the border guards take a truck with the remains of food and start throwing it at them... cottage cheese, rotten vegetables... it was the most appalling thing I experienced in the territories."

A soldier who served at the Erez checkpoint

said: "Many times the soldiers would open the Palestinians' food."

And would they take it as well?

"Yes. They take things all the time at checkpoints in the territories. You'll never see a soldier without musabaha (chickpea paste similar to hummus). And that is something they give many times... They are so desperate to pass that they even sort of bribe the soldiers a little..."

A Sachlav soldier in Hebron spoke of shooting toy guns at Palestinians. "Those plastic pellets really hurt... you're sitting on guard and 'tak,' you fire at a kid, 'tak,' you fire at another kid."

Some soldiers were shocked by the violence of the Hebron settlers' children. "They would throw stones at them... Because the one child is Jewish and the other is Palestinian, it's somehow okay... And you also don't really know which side you are on... I have to make a switch in my head and keep hating the Arabs and justify the Jews."

The same soldier told of how she once spat on a Palestinian: "I don't think he even did anything. But again, it was cool and it was the only thing I could do to... you know, I couldn't brag that I caught a terrorist... But I could spit on them and degrade them and laugh at them."

A border guard said that, despite clear orders to fire in the air or at demonstrators' feet, it was common procedure to fire at the abdomen. Another from Jenin spoke of a nine-year-old Palestinian who tried to climb a fence, failed, and fled. "They fired... when he was already in the territories and posed no danger. The hit was in the abdomen area, they claimed he was on a bicycle and so they were unable to hit him in the legs."

The four soldiers present then "immediately got their stories straight... An investigation was carried out, at first they said it was an unjustified killing... In the end they claimed that he was checking out escape routes for terrorists or something... and they closed the case."

# Voice of refugee youth

Aida refugee camp's Lajee Centre has launched a new magazine, *Our Voice*, created by young refugees. **Nidal Al Azza**, director of the Lajee board, reflects on the significance of this exciting project.

**T**he statistics are stark — and essential for campaigners to use in their work: seven million Palestinian refugees from 1948, of whom 28% live in the 58 camps administered by UNWRA in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Many thousands of these have been repeatedly displaced in what can be described as an “ongoing Nakba.”

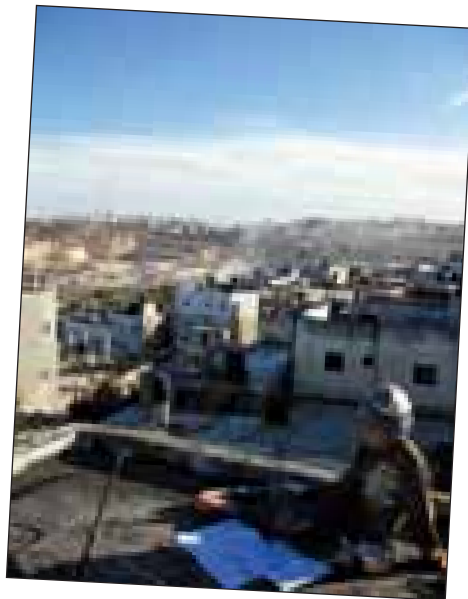
But numbers on their own fail to convey the tremendous human suffering which is the reality of displacement. Refugees can be seen as figures without life, people without agency.

In addition, the humanitarian assistance provided by the camps continues to fall short of refugee needs, especially those of young people. Neither UNWRA, nor the Palestinian Authority, nor local municipalities, provide any regular extracurricular support for educational, cultural, recreational and social development.

Yet creative activity within the community can be used as a tool of resistance and to maintain human dignity. This creativity demonstrates the willpower of a new generation of Palestinian refugees struggling today to raise their voice.



Workshop sessions helped create the magazine.  
Photo: Rich Wiles



Prize winning photo which made the front cover by Ihab abu Isba'.

It was for these reasons that in 2000 volunteer refugees established the Lajee ('refugee' in Arabic) Centre in Aida Camp, near Bethlehem, which is home to around 4,700 people from 27 different villages depopulated in 1948 and from other seven villages occupied in 1967. Activities at the Centre are designed to foster a wider understanding both of the world and of issues relating specifically to Palestinian society, culture and history.

Last year the Centre linked up with five other refugee youth organisations in camps across the West Bank in a new project to create a 64-page, full colour magazine, in Arabic and English, called *Our Voice*.

The hope is that working collectively will help to bridge the physical isolation imposed upon refugees through spatial and political restrictions that have contributed to the breakdown of Palestinian society. Through the creation of a youth forum in print, it is hoped that future leaders will be empowered to transcend the borders imposed on them. This magazine will function as a tool by which they will be able to raise their voice.

The project is funded for three years by the European Union and Broederlijk Delen and in the year leading up to the first edition, published on January 28th, 90 children aged 14 to 16 took part in weekly workshops on issues including human rights and democracy, freedom of expression and conflict resolution, communication skills, journalism and photography.

Participants then began working on writing and photographic assignments, eventually choosing one topic to concentrate on. In a literal sense their contributions are the materials of the magazine but for those involved it is more than that; the magazine is an expression of their lives, suffering, rights, dreams and hopes, expressed in their own words and images, not by others. It is their voice, a voice that has been neglected since the Nakba.

**“A voice that has been neglected since the Nakba”**

When I finally held the first issue in my hand, all I could say was: “I have always believed in our children; our future leaders who will bring us freedom and return.”

For the participants, that moment was also very special. One, Shorouq Asa'ad, said: “I never imagined that my name would appear in Arabic and English in a magazine. Now I believe in myself much more.”

Ihab abu Isba', whose photo is on the cover of the magazine, said that he wants his picture to say: “We (the Palestinian refugees) will find a place to study even if we are forced to live in crowded camps and small houses surrounded by Israeli settlements and army watch towers.” He feels now that he has succeeded in raising his voice to speak out against the “the silence of the world.”

■ OUR VOICE: [www.refugeevoice.org](http://www.refugeevoice.org)  
Order directly from Lajee Center:  
[www.lajee.org](http://www.lajee.org) [info@lajee.org](mailto:info@lajee.org)  
In the UK from Rich Wiles:  
[www.richwiles.com](http://www.richwiles.com), [info@richwiles.com](mailto:info@richwiles.com)

**A**t the first Annual Evaluative Conference in December, co-ordinators from the six centres involved heard project manager, Salah Ajarma, report on some significant successes and some possible improvements for the coming year.

Rawia Al-Alam, the Field Coordinator at Aqabat Jabr Social Youth Centre in Jericho, described how the project had very positive effects within the camp and that many parents asked if their children could join. She talked about participants using their newly acquired knowledge of issues such as human rights and democracy within their school and family life. The director of Aqabat Jabr, Mustapha Bahlam, described *Our Voice* as “the best project I have seen in my 15 years at the centre.”



# Trade unionists see the reality of occupation

By Pete Bevis

**W**hen I was privileged recently to take part in a trade union delegation to Palestine, what really struck me was the total control that the occupying forces and so-called settlers exert over every aspect of Palestinians and their lives throughout the occupied lands and East Jerusalem.

Permanent and mobile checkpoints supported by huge, ugly army towers that literally peer through the windows of Palestinian houses control and restrict the daily lives of all Palestinians. This control strips away the dignity of those who live under occupation.

Whilst around 500,000 highly armed invaders, who illegally and in defiance of international law occupy Palestinian land, its resources and houses, live protected by their army and often with their "Jews only" roads, the Palestinians are subjected daily to every sort of indignity. One day it might be that a soldier at a checkpoint demands a cigarette to allow passage, the next day it might be the whole packet.



*Pete Bevis in Jerusalem*

One account of a Palestinian teacher who had to endure the sight of a colleague being spat in the face by a young female Israeli soldier and who dared not complain for fear of not being allowed to pass through to his school, was especially distressing. As was the behaviour of another Israeli soldier at an army checkpoint who insisted a Palestinian man crawl on all fours, then bark like a dog and bray like a donkey before he could continue his journey.

It is also common for Palestinians to be delayed for hours for no reason at all or

refused passage altogether across their own land. Protest is futile when faced with the barrel of a gun pointed at you. One particular recollection was of the Palestinian house we visited which had had its front door welded shut by the army so that the family's only means of access was by ladder through a rear window. Another Palestinian house close by had its occupants prevented from having any visitors as the Israeli army had set up an outpost in the next-door property.

I travelled with others from the FBU, Unite, NUT, PCS, RMT and Thompsons' Solicitors and we all realised that to understand fully the situation in the Occupied Territories there is nothing better than seeing at first hand what is taking place. All the Palestinians we met, including many teachers, were so welcoming and it was often a case of those who have the least wanting to give the most. I will never forget the kindness and hospitality we were shown.

**Pete Bevis is the Secretary of Barnsley National Union of Teachers and member of the South Yorkshire National Executive Committee**

## Rachel Corrie: time for justice

**W**itnesses to the cold-blooded killing of Rachel Corrie told an Israeli court in March that the driver of the bulldozer which ran over her could see her clearly and that he reversed over her body while people were waving and screaming at him to stop.

An Israeli military police investigator said he had never visited the site of the killing, nor looked at CCTV camera footage and that some testimony had been interfered with by local commanders.

Rachel's parents, Craig and Cindy Corrie from Olympia, Washington, are bringing the civil law suit in Haifa District Court in a final attempt to hold Israel accountable for her death. They are seeking \$324,000 compensation for specific costs plus punitive damages.

Rachel was with fellow members of the International Solidarity Movement who were demonstrating against house demolitions in Rafah, Gaza, when she was run over by a Caterpillar D9R bulldozer and crushed to death on March 16, 2003.

British eye-witnesses Alice Coy and Richard Purssell were at first denied entry to Israel but were finally given permission to testify. But Ahmed Abu Nakira, the doctor who confirmed Corrie's death, was denied permission to travel from Gaza for the trial or to provide testimony over a video link.

Alice Coy, a nurse, told the court that when an Israeli soldier interviewed her about Rachel's killing, he refused to note down that she believed the bulldozers were going to destroy civilian homes. And she said she was sure the bulldozer driver could see Rachel who was wearing a fluorescent orange jacket and had climbed on top of the mound of earth thrown up by the vehicle.

Richard Purssell, a landscape gardener, said Rachel was "looking into the cab of the bulldozer. The bulldozer continues to move forward. Rachel turns to begin coming back down the slope... As she nears the bottom of the pile, something happened to cause her to fall forward. The bulldozer continues



to move forward and Rachel disappeared from view."

He and other activists started running towards her. "I heard a lot of people shouting and gesturing to the bulldozer to



# Universal jurisdiction must stay

By Jeremy Corbyn

Israel is already convinced it is above the law and should any future government decide to change the UK's highly respected and efficient Universal Jurisdiction laws, it will be confirmed in that belief. Such a change would lead to even worse behaviour on the international arena and particularly towards the Palestinians.

To date 39 MPs have signed Mark Durkan's EDM about the Israeli response to EU representations following the cloning of passports used in the assassination of Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh. The EDM calls on the government to "abandon its plans to amend the law on Universal Jurisdiction which it has previously justified on the grounds of protecting Israel's right to due diplomatic conduct and intergovernmental engagement, standards for which the Israeli government currently demonstrates a blatant disregard."

Interestingly, Douglas Carswell has tabled a motion calling for our laws to be amended — but not one more MP has signed it.

I have tabled an EDM (502) stating that "this House believes that Universal Jurisdiction for human rights abuses is essential as part of the cause of bringing to justice those who commit crimes against humanity and will oppose any legislation to restrict this power of the UK courts." With minimal lobbying it has acquired a significant 144 signatures.

The background to this issue rests on a number of conventions, but more recently it has rested on the case of General Augusto



Pinochet. The former head of state of Chile was in this country on an arms-buying spree in 1998 when an extradition warrant was sought by Spain. Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, granted the warrant and Pinochet was arrested.

He then sought diplomatic immunity but that was rejected by the British courts. The House of Lords, in its final judgment, asserted that the British courts had Universal Jurisdiction in matters of human rights law. It did so on the basis of an arrest warrant that was granted by a divisional court. That is an important step forward in international law.

My EDM does not mention any individual case, such as the arrest warrants sought in the cases of Tzipi Livni and General Almog — Israeli parliamentarians with blood on their hands following Israel's war on Gaza. It is an attempt to defend a very important principle: the right of British courts to arrest people where there is prima facie evidence that they have committed human rights abuses or violated the appropriate United

Nations statutes to which this country is also signed up.

The arguments for changing the Universal Jurisdiction law seem to be coming from lobbyists who insist that to prevent Israeli politicians from coming to this country would damage relations between Britain and Israel. They say that the rights and powers of a court to issue an arrest warrant must therefore be removed and that those powers should be placed in the hands of the Attorney-General.

The trend of legislation has been to separate, as far as possible, the authority of the courts from the interference of politicians. That is invaluable. But the Attorney-General is inevitably a politically appointed figure. Imagine that the Attorney-General had to consider whether to issue an arrest warrant in the case of Ms Livni — he or she could come under huge domestic and international pressure.

It would no longer be a decision based on the law, but on the diplomatic niceties of the situation and political pressure. So it is vital that we should retain the system whereby a warrant it issued or not purely on the basis of evidence put before a judge.

This issue is not going to go away and now that the Justice Secretary, who, to be fair to him, did a nice bit of procrastinating on the subject, has set in motion a consultation period, it remains to be seen how speedily the next government will run with it.

We cannot afford to be complacent and excellent lawyers and active politicians will continue to keep a close eye on the issue to ensure that all politicians, Israeli or otherwise, with blood on their hands are brought to trial for their crimes.

(continued from previous page)

stop," he told the court, adding that the bulldozer then "reversed back in the tracks it had made, in a straight line; Rachel is lying on the earth."

The Israeli military police investigator testified that one commander of the unit involved in the incident told the bulldozer driver that the head of the Southern Command of the Israeli military ordered him to stop talking, not to sign anything and not to cooperate with the investigation.

He said he had received a court order authorizing Rachel's autopsy under the condition that an official from the U.S. Embassy was present but made no effort to see the condition was carried out — which it wasn't. He then didn't send the final autopsy report to the court, stating that his

commander did not require him to do so and that he simply "did not pay attention" to the court order requiring it.

Once the witnesses for the plaintiffs had all been heard, Judge Oded Gershon granted the State 30 days to submit a list of witnesses and their affidavits. Proceedings will continue in September.

Israel claims Corrie's death was an accident and that no demolitions were planned for that day, but the witnesses testified that the IDF had been demolishing homes on the Philadelphi Corridor in preceding weeks and had already begun to knock down a house that day by damaging its porch.

The home Rachel Corrie was protecting, that of Dr. Samir Nasrallah, was in fact demolished later that year. According to a Human Rights Watch report, over 2,500

homes were demolished by the IDF in Gaza between 2000 and 2004. Nearly two-thirds of these were in Rafah, and more than 16,000 people, over 10 percent of its population, lost their homes.

Despite the efforts of the Israeli authorities to slander Rachel Corrie as responsible for her own death, her sacrifice and the cause she was fighting for have become widely known through the play, *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, based largely on her diary entries, which has been seen around the world, including in Israel and the West Bank. *Rachel*, a film released last year, was screened in Tel Aviv on the seventh anniversary of her death.

But there continues to be minimal media interest in the US where the Associated Press and Washington Post carried only brief accounts of the opening of the trial.

# Swearing 'loyalty' to Zionism: pressure mounts on Israel's Arabs

By Isabelle Humphries

A poll released in March revealed that half of Israeli high school students do not believe that Palestinians with Israeli citizenship should be entitled to the same rights as Jews in Israel, including the right to be elected parliamentarians. This is yet more evidence that the Israeli boast that its Palestinian population are the "only Arabs living in a democracy in the Middle East" is an empty one. Far from providing a democracy, in recent months Israel has tightened laws in what activists describe as a police state.

The poll was conducted by Maagar Mochot, an Israeli research institute. With both Jewish and Arab students interviewed, presumably the percentage of racist views among Jewish participants was even higher. Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal, one of the organisers of a symposium by Tel Aviv University's School of Education and the Citizen's Empowerment Centre at which the results were announced, told Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*: "Jewish youth have not internalised basic democratic values."

## "Jewish youth have not internalised basic democratic values"

A look at recent cases of Adalah, the largest Palestinian legal organisation inside Israel, demonstrates the extent of pressure which Palestinian citizens are under not only to refrain from voicing dissent, but actively to express their loyalty to the state which dispossesses them. On 10 December a new bill passed preliminary reading in the Knesset by a large majority which permits Jewish community town committees to impose the condition of "loyalty" to Zionism on potential new residents.

Retaining Jewish only communities is not a new practice, but enshrining in law the right of residents' committees to do so is yet one further step, described by Adalah lawyer Alaa Mahajna as "part of a dangerous trend that is gaining an increasingly strong foothold in Israel."

At the end of November, for example, the Mitzpeh Aviv community town, one of many Jewish localities built on confiscated Palestinian land in the Galilee, amended its byelaws to stipulate potential residents should vow that their "highest priorities are Zionist values and the values of the state as a Jewish and democratic state."

Looking at Israeli educational policy we see the same thing — a tightening of laws and regulations that in practice have always been in operation. Candidates for posts with the Israeli Education Ministry — which controls Arab as well as Hebrew curriculum in Israel's segregated school system — must express loyalty to the "values of Zionism."

Adalah notes in its letter of complaint to the Minister, Gideon Saar, and the Attorney General, Menachem Mazuz, that in recently

published advertisements for senior education staff candidates are required to comply with "the values of the Jewish community." While Palestinian citizens represent 20% of the population, only 6% of Ministry of Education staff is Arab.

In the political sphere, the case continued in March against MK Mohammed Barakeh, leader of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality. Barakeh is just the latest in a long line of Arab leaders harassed in the courtroom. In November, 2009, the Attorney General indicted Barakeh in relation to four separate incidents

that occurred at demonstrations over the last three years, including against the Wall, the war on Lebanon and the lack of accountability for the killing of 13 Palestinian citizens in October 2000.

Adalah have argued that these claims are politically motivated and based on false claims of assault by police and military who on several occasions were responsible for assaulting the MK (and many others at these demonstrations). "The indictment is not based on any evidence that would convict Barakeh," argue Adalah. "It simply criminalises his legitimate political activities and attempts to harm his reputation and status as an Arab leader."

In the coming weeks Palestinians in Israel will be recalling the Nakba at the site of destroyed villages that despite their Israeli citizenship they are unable to return to. What further harassment awaits the community in the coming months, we wait to see.

Adalah has released a short film "Targeted Citizens." See [www.adalah.org](http://www.adalah.org)



**MK Mohammed Barakeh receiving treatment in Bi'lin after being shot by the IDF**

## Chris Patten new president of MAP

Lord Patten of Barnes took over from Baroness Helena Kennedy as president of Medical Aid for Palestinians in March as the charity marks its 25th anniversary and said he was "really keen" to get involved.

After working on relationships between NGOs and government as a young civil servant in the 70s, Chris Patten served as Tory MP for Bath from 1979 until 1992 when he became Britain's last governor of Hong Kong.

From 1999 to 2004 he was European Commissioner for External Relations where he was responsible for EU development programmes in Palestine.

On his appointment he commented on Gaza: "If you give people no hope for their economic future, you inevitably breed new generations of militancy and that is profoundly stupid as well as immoral."



For details of a case study from the Naqab, see Jonathan Cook's article "Arab family denied right to rent home." Cook reports on a Jewish family who have had an Arab family living with them for three years in the Jewish only Negev settlement of Nevatim. In March the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Arab family must submit to the vetting committee to assess their suitability — the result seems a forgone conclusion. [www.jkcook.net](http://www.jkcook.net)

# In Brief

## BROWN, CAMERON, PATRONS OF THE JEWISH NATIONAL FUND

The only major UK political leader who is not a patron of the Jewish National Fund is the Liberal Democrat, Nick Clegg. The Fund was founded in 1901 as the major Zionist organisation for the colonisation of Palestine.

Hugh Jaeger from Oxford PSC wrote to Gordon Brown telling him that "since 1949 the State of Israel has taken thousands of square kilometres of land that belongs to Palestinian refugees and has used the Jewish National Fund as a means to transfer much of that land to Israeli Jewish ownership. This is both illegal and contrary to UN General Assembly Resolution 194."

He said that the JNF has obliterated the sites of former Palestinian villages with its extensive forest-planting programme. "The JNF's forestry policy is an ecological disaster. The JNF eschews the planting of native trees, has uprooted native olive trees and replaced them with alien pine and cypress species."

He got a reply from the Near East Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, acknowledging that the JNF, known in Israel as Karen Kayemet Le Israel (KKL), was involved in buying land for illegal settlements before 1992.

It went on: "Although originally a subsidiary of the KKL, JNF UK now operates independently of KKL and is registered as a charity in its own right. The contemporary JNF UK is a non-political organisation and runs separate projects to the KKL in Israel. Our best understanding is that it does not operate projects outside of 'green-line' Israel. The majority of its schemes are based in the Negev, focusing on irrigation and the environment."

Oxford PSC has written to both Brown and David Cameron several times since they became patrons of the JNF UK in 2007, asking them to resign, with no satisfactory response. After the election they plan to submit an e-petition to the 10 Downing Street website, in order to get a response from whoever is Prime Minister. Please look out for this petition, sign it and encourage others to do the same.

Here is the line-up of the Fund's honorary patrons: Professor David Bellamy, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Lady Cosgrave MP, General the Lord Guthrie, Michael Howard MP, Anthony Krais JP, Rabbi Dr Abraham Levy, Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu, Israeli ambassador to the UK Ron Prosor, Israeli president Shimon Peres, Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks, Rev Malcolm Weisman.



**JNF's Canada Park built on the destroyed villages of Imwas, Yalu, and Bayt Nuba**

## US SUPPORT OF ISRAEL ENDANGERING AMERICAN LIVES

The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, was allegedly "stunned" by a briefing he was given in January on the impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict on America's status in the Middle East, according to a report by the veteran military and foreign affairs analyst and author Mark Perry.



**Admiral Mike Mullen**

The briefing was presented by a team of senior military officers from the US Central Command (CENTCOM) who had been dispatched on a tour of the region by their commander, General David Petraeus. Perry wrote on Foreignpolicy.com, which is published by the Slate group, a division of Washingtonpost.

The officers reported that there was a growing perception among Arab leaders that the US was incapable of standing up to Israel, that Israeli intransigence was jeopardizing US standing in the region, and that special envoy George Mitchell was (as a senior Pentagon officer later bluntly described it) "too old, too slow... and too late."

Alarmed, the Obama administration reacted by pressing Israel on settlements, sending Mitchell to a number of Arab capitals and dispatching Mullen to meet the chief of the Israeli General Staff, Lt. General Gabi Ashkenazi.

It was thought Israel would get the message, so the US was stunned again as well as embarrassed when the announcement came during a visit by vice president Joe Biden in March that Netanyahu's government was building 1,600 new homes in East Jerusalem.

No-one was more outraged than Biden who, according to a report in the Israeli daily, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, had an angry private exchange with the Israeli Prime Minister, telling him: "This is starting to get dangerous for us."

*Yedioth Ahronoth* went on to report: "The vice president told his Israeli hosts that, since many people in the Muslim world perceived a connection between Israel's actions and US policy, any decision about construction that undermines Palestinian rights in East Jerusalem could have an impact on the personal safety of American troops fighting against Islamic terrorism." The message couldn't be plainer: Israel's intransigence could cost American lives.

## TOXIC ENVIRONMENT IN GAZA

Many children in Gaza have unusually high concentrations of metals in their hair indicating environmental contamination which can cause health and growth damages according to a pilot study conducted by the New Weapons Research Group. The NWRG is an independent committee of scientists and experts based in Italy which is studying the use of unconventional weapons and their mid-term effects on the population in war stricken areas.



## TOURISM CONCERN DOES NOT STRETCH TO ISRAEL/PALESTINE

A 50 page illustrated report on human rights abuses in tourism by Tourism Concern (TC) is conspicuously silent about Israel/ Palestine, although referring to some 50 different locations worldwide with major case studies on countries like Burma or issues like water, all evoking silent echoes.

TC is financially straitened in the economic downturn, but sympathetic on Palestine, and part of a European federation of tourism groups TEN which has published a Code for Palestine.

Even so a search on TC's website ([www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)) reveals nothing about Israel and only a passing reference to Palestine as against 52 separate notices on India, 8 on Costa Rica and 17 on the Maldives.

TC is about to make a weblink with Alternative Tourism Group based in Bethlehem whose website not only has the tourism (and pilgrimage) Code for Palestine agreed by a group of Israeli/ Palestine groups but features a best-seller travel guidebook Palestine & Palestinians (new edition obtainable in UK) plus a range of information resources, though few weblinks.

Maybe a competition is needed for the most outrageous Palestine tourism snippet? Israeli guides' warning that Bethlehem isn't safe? A virtual Bethlehem theme park planned by Israel Tourism? Meanwhile Tourism Concern needs members for it to be effective!

**Bernard Kilroy**

## 250 NEW AMPUTEES AFTER GAZA ASSAULT

At 15 years old, Jamila al-Habbash is learning to walk again at the half-finished Artificial Limb and Polio Centre in Gaza City after she lost both her legs in a missile strike by an unmanned Israeli drone as she played on the roof of her home: her sister and cousin were killed in the blast.

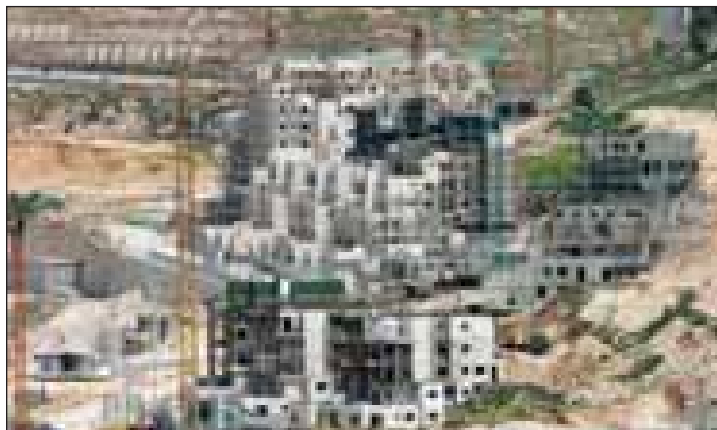


Israel's 23-day assault on Gaza killed 1400 Palestinians and injured 5,303 more. These included 250 people who lost their limbs who have been added to the 5,000 amputees already in Gaza before the onslaught.

The only rehabilitation hospital with the capacity to treat amputee patients effectively, the al-Wafaa Rehabilitation Centre in northern Gaza, was hit by artillery fire. The Centre is now struggling to cope with demand but the construction of an upper floor extension has been delayed by a lack of funds.

Israel's blockade disrupts the import of prosthetic limbs and the raw materials with which to make them. "The Red Cross helps to mediate between us and the Israelis to let materials cross which takes about three months," said Mohamed Ziada, one of five specialists at the centre. He added that foreign prosthetics specialists who had tried to come and train Gazan doctors had been denied entry.

## SETTLER POPULATION RACES AHEAD



### Settlement under construction

The West Bank settler population grew almost three times faster than that of the country as a whole in the first nine months of 2009, according to figures from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics.

However, the 4.9 per cent increase — from 290,400 to 301,200 (not including East Jerusalem) — when compared with the same time last year, shows that for the second year in a row, population growth has slowed down slightly.

Settlers living in the West Bank represented 4.1% of Israel's population of 7.4 million at the end of September 2009. The total population grew by 1.8% over the same period.

Out of the 10,800 new settlers at the end of September 2009, 50.4% were in the three largest cities — Modi'in Illit, Beitar Illit and Ma'aleh Adumim — all of which are close to the pre-1967 armistice line. The government believes that that these three settlements would remain within Israeli jurisdiction in any final-status agreement with the Palestinians.

## MEDICAL CHARITY FORMS SUPPORTERS GROUP

Professor Colin Green of the Northwick Park Institute for Medical Research in London is forming a supporters group to raise money for five large scale, five year projects that his charity is running in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The International Medical Education Trust 2000 (IMET 2000), of which Green is CEO, was formed to take advantage of advances in communications technology to promote international co-operation in teaching and research. 90% of the charity's income is donated to Palestine and the rest to Africa.

Immediate priorities include a new burns unit in Nasser Hospital in the south of Gaza; setting up telemedicine networks with Cairo University and funding a young Gazan doctor to do a PhD in the pathology department there; installing 15 computers in the Ramallah office to develop e-learning resources, and developing mental health, drug addiction and oral hygiene programmes.

The charity aims to try to raise relatively small sums in the UK then go for bigger grants in the Gulf and USA. Prof Green says: "With £150,000 a year we can do a great deal of teaching and training in Palestine. With £350,000 we could have a huge impact on the whole knowledge base in the health sector."

See [www.imet2000.org](http://www.imet2000.org), or email Prof Green at [rmhkcg@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:rmhkcg@ucl.ac.uk)

## AMBULANCES STOPPED, MEDICAL TEAMS SHOT AT

As Israeli Occupation Forces pursued their attacks against Palestine Red Crescent Society medical teams, a total of 455 violations of International Humanitarian Law were recorded in 2009 including direct shooting incidents, impeding access to the sick and wounded and verbal and physical abuse.

There were 15 shooting incidents and attacks against ambulances and their teams and a PRCS volunteer in the Gaza Strip





**Medical team in action in Gaza**

died while 10 others were injured and 22 ambulances sustained damage.

PRCS recorded 440 incidents where its ambulances were delayed or denied access, including 289 such incidents on checkpoints leading to Jerusalem and 132 incidents in the Gaza Strip during the Israeli onslaught.

## PALESTINIAN BOOKS DESTROYED

Israel plundered and destroyed tens of thousands of Palestinian books in the years after the State's establishment as part of its plan to "Judaize the country" and cut off its Arab residents from their nation and culture, according to a doctoral thesis by a Ben-Gurion University researcher.

In an interview with the researcher published on al-Jazeera's website, he claimed that Israeli authorities collected books in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Safed and other towns that were home to Arabs before the Nakba. They handed out about half the books but destroyed the rest, characterising them as a "security threat."

"This was a cultural massacre undertaken in a manner that was worse than European colonialism which safeguarded the items it stole in libraries and museums," the researcher said.

## MORE UK MONEY FOR ACADEMIC EXCHANGES WITH ISRAEL

Despite Israel's frequent denial of visas to Palestinians wishing to study here, or academics wishing to visit the OPTs, British Foreign Office Minister, Ivan Lewis, committed an extra £29,000 to the Britain Israel Research and Academic Exchange (BIRAX).

Making the announcement during the visit of Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, in February, Lewis said: "I am a strong believer in continuing to enhance university and academic links between Britain and Israel and am pleased that more people will now have the opportunity to benefit from this scheme.

"The UK's support for BIRAX is part of our determination to increase academic co-operation and it is a tangible example of our determination to oppose boycotts against Israel."

## CHRISTIAN WORSHIPPERS ATTACKED

Israeli troops fired tear gas grenades at about 100 worshippers, including elderly people and children, gathered for an open air mass in the Christian town of Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem, in February.

Some of the worshippers were holding banners demanding the halt of Israeli construction at the site of the old military base of Ush Ghrab, on the east side of the city, and the ending of settlement activity around their homes.

After the Israelis abandoned Ush Ghrab in April 2006, Palestinians transformed part of the site into a public park and were planning to build a children's hospital when, in 2008, Israeli settlers announced plans to erect a settlement called Shdema.

Doing the settlers' bidding, as ever, earlier this year the Israeli

army began to bulldoze land and put in military installations and declared the area as a closed military zone.

As part of ongoing protests, the worshippers gathered at the base but as the service began, seven military jeeps arrived and soldiers told them to disperse before attacking them with tear gas. The priest and his congregation have appealed for churches round the world to support them in their struggle.

## A CHINK IN US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL

On January 21, 54 Democrats in the House of Representatives signed a letter to President Obama asking him dramatically to ease, if not end, the siege of Gaza.

They wrote: "The people of Gaza have suffered enormously since the blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt following Hamas's coup, and particularly following Operation Cast Lead... we ask you to press for immediate relief for the citizens of Gaza as an urgent component of your broader Middle East peace efforts."

The letter concludes: "The people of Gaza, along with all the peoples of the region, must see that the United States is dedicated to addressing the legitimate security needs of the State of Israel and to ensuring that the legitimate needs of the Palestinian population are met."

Sara Roy, a senior research scholar at Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, commented: "This letter is remarkable not only because it directly challenges the policy of the Israel lobby... but also because it links Israeli security to Palestinian well-being."

## ISRAELI SETTLER LEADER QUILTS OVER GROWING EXTREMISM

A long-time leader of the main Israeli settler organisation in the occupied West Bank, the Yesha Council, resigned citing the group's failure to distance itself from extremist hardliners.



**Pinchas Wallerstein. Photo: Gil Yohanan**

In his resignation letter as secretary general, Pinchas Wallerstein, 61, condemned Yesha's failure to speak out against the "price tag" policy under which ultra right-wingers attack Palestinian villages when the government takes action against Jewish settlements.

"Our silence will turn against us," Wallerstein wrote.

He also criticised Yesha for failing categorically to reject protests by soldiers who vow not to carry out government orders to evacuate wildcat settlements.

"It is our duty to ensure that the IDF is not involved in the political activities of evacuations and demolitions, but we must not allow soldiers in uniform to carry out actions that may violate the IDF's sacredness," he wrote.

Several Israeli soldiers caused a stir last October when they staged a demonstration against the evacuation of settlements during a military swearing-in ceremony at Jerusalem's Wailing Wall.

The Israeli government has long vowed to raze settlement outposts built without authorisation but rarely carries out any actions.

## PROTEST ABOUT QUIZ GAME

A new quiz game produced in the UK states that the capital of Israel is Jerusalem. Please complain to: The Happy Puzzle Company, PO Box 586, Elsetree, Herts WD6 3XY  
Email: info@happypuzzle.co.uk or ring 0844 848 2822

## NEW ISRAELI "HERITAGE" SITES NAMED IN WEST BANK

Israel added two key West Bank holy shrines to its list of "national heritage" sites in February. Prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu said they were late additions to the 150-strong list, reflecting pressure from settlers and other nationalists to widen the heritage category to include Old Testament sites in the West Bank.



*Palestinians showing ID to get access to Ibrahimi mosque*

Both sites are highly sensitive. They are the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron, which Jews call the Cave of the Patriarchs, where the Bible says the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried along with three of their wives. Muslims revere Abraham as the father of both Islam and Judaism.



*Rachel's tomb hidden behind Israeli walls*

The other site is the traditional tomb of the biblical Rachel on the outskirts of Bethlehem which is now surrounded by the 12-metre high Wall which juts into Bethlehem to put the site under Israeli control and bar access to it for Palestinian Christians.

Netanyahu said the two sites showed Israel's ancient ties to the land. "Our existence here doesn't just depend on the might of the military or our economic and technological strength. It is anchored first and foremost in our national and emotional legacy," he said.

Palestinian Authority spokesman Ghassan Khatib condemned the decision. He said: "We believe that this particular violation is very dangerous because it might add to the religious nature of the conflict."

## PLANTING TREES TO CLAIM LAND

Villagers from Jinba in South Hebron planted 450 almond trees in nearby Umm Mraiga to claim the right of Palestinians to access their privately owned land.

At the end of the 90s much of this area was declared by the Israeli Army a "closed military area" to be used for training. Since then, the Palestinians of Jinba have not been able to access and cultivate their fields but in January, accompanied by internationals, they were able to plant the trees in two days.

A similar action was organised in At-Tuwani, also in Hebron, where the villagers planted 20 olive trees to replace ones damaged by settlers. This attack followed a month of Israeli settler violence and harassment aimed at preventing Palestinian farmers from ploughing their fields. In addition, in recent months, Israeli military have consistently used closed military zone orders to prevent Palestinians from working their lands.

Both actions were organised by the South Hebron Popular Committee, as part of the nonviolent resistance strategy to the Israeli occupation, and supported by Operation Dove.

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



## IDF COULD HAVE AVOIDED CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

New nuggets of hard information on the Goldstone Report don't come easily, now overshadowed by the smoke screen billowing from Zionist bloggers. However, the military advisor for the Report, Colonel Desmond Travers, spoke at a House of Lords meeting of Jews for Justice for Palestinians in March.

When asked what could have been a proportionate military response to the Hamas rockets, his reply indicated that the Israelis did not use all their smart technology against the rockets. Yes, we all knew the IDF concentrated instead on targeting the Gaza population and destroying its infrastructure. But it's hard to prove.

It looks as if the IDF had enough drones in the sky with enough smart technology to snoop in on any Hamas preparations to fire rockets. The drones and radar would also have been smart enough to respond within split seconds to any rocket site after firing. That the IDF did not do this seems to blow the propaganda that Cast Lead was the only possible response to the rockets 'raining down on Sderot.'

Instead, Israel could allow the rockets to go on being fired — useful political cover. Does Executive Summary para 61 now need a new sub-paragraph?



*UN fact finding mission to Gaza — Travers far right*

# Crackdown on internationals

By Ben White

There has been a noticeable crackdown in recent months on the international presence in the Occupied Territories as Israeli authorities have increased the obstacles in a number of ways. One of the most high profile targets has been the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) whose volunteers have been targeted for arrest and deportation in night-time raids.

In January Israeli soldiers broke into the central-Ramallah apartment of Czech activist Eva Novakova and took her away at gunpoint. She was refused access to a lawyer, questioned about her activities in Bil'in and deported. In early February, Israeli forces again entered Ramallah and snatched two foreign nationals volunteering with ISM, as well as confiscating property including cameras and a computer.

US activist Ryan Olander spent a month in detention after being arrested in December in Sheikh Jarrah. In March, it was reported that the IDF had declared Bil'in and Ni'lin villages off-limits to Israelis and internationals on Fridays until August.

Another striking development has been the deployment of immigration police unit 'Oz' in IDF-led raids, leading to criticism from the Supreme Court which said the Oz officers had "overstepped their bounds."

In December, *Ha'aretz* reported on "cooperation of questionable legality between the police and Oz" in targeting foreign activists, noting that Ryan Olander's visa was cancelled after he'd been taken to prison — legalising "his illegal arrest retroactively."

A more high profile case came when an American editor of the Palestinian news agency, Ma'an, was denied entry at Ben Gurion airport in January. Jared Malsin was accused of being a "security threat" in an incident slammed by the International Federation of Journalists as an "unacceptable" ban, handed out as "a reprisal

measure for the journalist's independent reporting."

A potentially far-reaching deterioration had unfolded over the summer of 2009, when some visitors began reporting having received a so-called "Palestinian Authority only" visa but these visas have apparently now been stopped. NGOs also faced the threat of their employees being denied work visas by the Israeli government. After an outcry, the Interior Ministry rowed back though the government announced that "an inter-ministerial committee has been established to formulate a comprehensive procedure to be introduced as soon as completed."

Other developments include a new journalist visa being mooted by Israel's government Press Office, apparently "as part of a bid to filter out political activists posing as media employees." And there have been numerous reported cases of foreign nationals being ordered off the Beit Jala-Jerusalem bus (number 21). The practice happened at the end of 2009, was apparently stopped, and has since restarted.

All of these developments represent a definite tightening of restrictions facing internationals visiting Palestine, though in some ways, Israel's approach to the issue remains inconsistent, shifting and unclear. Nevertheless, it seems like a reasonable assumption to expect the situation to get more difficult for international human rights workers, activists, business people and indeed tourists, who seek to visit Occupied Palestine.

At a hearing in March the internment without charge of Palestinian activist Wa'el Al-Faqeeh was extended until 24 April. Al-Faqeeh, 45, who was kidnapped in Nablus on 9 December, 2009, is well known for his tireless support of the non-violent struggle and organisation of numerous community-outreach projects, demonstrations and cultural or educational programmes.

In the new year he sent a message from Jelemeh prison: "I hope for a year of enlightenment in all human relations, and a renewed call for peace agreements, supported by the free people of the world. It is my hope that we can design and build a society free from all forms of discrimination and persecution."

## Eye on the web

### ● Palestine Refugee Survey

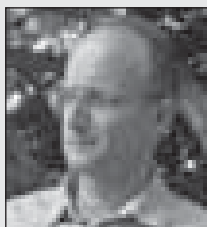
Don't miss the newly updated edition of the Badil Resource Centre's *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons*. It is arguably the best source for refugee statistics and general information for use by campaigners and researchers. Download chapter by chapter in pdf or order hard copy at [www.badil.org](http://www.badil.org).

### ● Testimony on a War Crime

In a heartbreaking video on YouTube, tearful Faraj a-Samuni describes how Israeli soldiers came to his home in Gaza City on January 4, 2009, ordered his father to step out and then murdered him in cold blood. They continued to shoot into the room despite Faraj shouting "Katan" — Hebrew for small children — injuring several people, then refused to let ambulances through. Faraj's three-year-old brother, Ahmad, bled from 6am that day until 6am the next, then died in his arms. <http://tinyurl.com/ye6rz3m>

### ● Interview with Jonathan Cook

An illuminating interview with Jonathan Cook, the British journalist based in Nazareth, was published on Middle East Online in March. He is particularly good at analysing the reasons for the bias in western reporting. <http://tinyurl.com/yd36fps>



### ● Sleepless in Gaza...and Jerusalem

A video diary made by four young Palestinian women, Muslim and Christian, two in Jerusalem and two in Gaza, is being shown on YouTube. The 90-part series, made by PINA TV, aims to show how young people manage their daily lives under occupation. <http://tinyurl.com/y88lhdn> — [www.pina.ps](http://www.pina.ps).

### ● This Cannot Go On

Medical Aid for Palestinians has made a hard-hitting short film, "The Silent War: Israel's Blockade of Gaza," narrated by Juliet Stephenson, on how Gaza is rapidly becoming "the first territory in the world to be intentionally reduced to a state of abject destitution." It features an uncompromising interview with John Ging, head of UNWRA's operations in Gaza, who states baldly: "This just cannot go on." Distribute widely! <http://tinyurl.com/yak46sm>



### ● Churches Campaign for Peace

The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) brings together churches to coordinate their initiatives for a just peace in Palestine-Israel. It has just launched a monthly newsletter, "Perspectives," with the first edition focussing on Gaza, and a website: [pief.oikoumene.org](http://pief.oikoumene.org).



# Criminalisation of protest threatened

**F**ive members of **Scottish PSC** who interrupted a concert by the Jerusalem Quartet fought a legal battle to challenge the charge that their action amounted to “racially aggravated conduct.”

The outcome was crucial in determining whether much of the solidarity activities SPSC and many others are engaged in could be categorised as criminal under Scottish law.

The five staged their protest during an Edinburgh Festival performance by the musicians — whose record label describes them as “Distinguished IDF” (Israeli Defence Forces) — in August, 2008. They were removed by private security guards and initially charged with “breach of the peace.”

The Procurator Fiscal then claimed that “new evidence” suggested the protestors had been “racially motivated.” This resulted in a new charge which accused them of making “comments about Jews, Israelis, and the State of Israel... evincing malice and ill will” because of the musicians’ “membership or presumed membership of an ethnic group.”

The protestors, who were backed by Auschwitz survivor, Hajo Meyer, argued that it was contrary to freedom of expression for legitimate criticism of Israel to be labelled racist and said they had never used the word “Jews,” as was proved by a transcript of the recorded concert. At a hearing in January the Procurator was forced to strike the word from the charge but added “or nationality” after “ethnic group.”

The accused welcomed this move, since there is no such legal category as “Israeli nationality” because that would have to include the country’s Palestinian citizens. Instead there is “Jewish nationality” and “citizenship of Israel” for the rest.

The debate continued at a court hearing in March packed with 100 supporters who laughed when the PF argued that “Genocide in Gaza, End the Siege of Gaza” was a racist statement. Eventually he

accepted that the protests “may have reflected genuine and sincere beliefs, and did not reflect gratuitous bigotry,” but said that “saying it once is one thing, but repeating it is an entirely different matter.” Heard together, “any reasonable person would have concluded that there was a racist element to what was said.”

The judgement on the legal challenge was due as PN went to press. See [www.scottishpsc.org.uk](http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk) for the result. The five have incurred large legal bills and have issued an appeal for funds to which several branches have already responded generously. Make donations payable to Scottish PSC, and send to Mushier El Farra, 1, Gerard St, Heeley, S8.

Many branches also lent active support to the Gaza demonstrators harshly treated by the courts (see P4) by arranging public meetings to highlight the criminalisation of protest and donating to the legal funds.



**Auschwitz survivor Hajo Meyer with two of the five SPSC members**

## Lobbying election candidates

**M**embers throughout the country got busy demanding answers from sitting MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates in advance of the election. **Wolverhampton** branch wrote to their PPCs asking for their views on boycotting Israeli goods. **Portsmouth and South Downs** held a pre-election meeting where candidates were given four questions relating to Gaza.

A public meeting in Hammersmith with Foreign Secretary, David Milliband, and local MP Andy Slaughter, was attended by members of the **West London** PSC who were very pleased that nine out of the 30 questions asked were about Palestine, all of them pro-Palestinian and warmly applauded by the 200 strong audience. Salim reports: “At one stage the chairperson asked for questions on new subjects but Palestine still came up.

“The questions were all well phrased, well researched, clear and asked for specific things to be done by the Foreign Secretary or the Government as a whole. Milliband seemed surprised about the strength of feeling in what was one of his first meetings on his nationwide tour.”

Salim adds that the fact that not all the questions on Palestine came from people known as PSC members or supporters was “particularly heartening and suggests that slowly but surely we are making progress on moving public opinion.”

## Tales of the Gaza Convoy

**M**embers who took part in the eventful and exhausting convoy to Gaza related their experiences at meetings round the country. **Bristol** branch, together with Bristol Gaza Link, hosted a Gaza convoy “homecoming” event at Bristol Council House where Monica Jones, Siamak Alimi

and Cliff Hanley told their stories. The event was also addressed by Palestinian ambassador, Professor Manuel Hassassian, and Sameh Akram Habeeb, editor-in-chief of the *Palestine Telegraph*. Cliff Hanley produced two local radio programmes about the convoy.



**Prof Manuel Hassassian addressing the Bristol meeting**



**Brent** branch heard from participants Mary Edwards, Sam Rias and Joti Brar at a well attended meeting. Zuber Hatia addressed **Southampton** branch, along with Jackie Alsaid and Peter Venner from the convoy and Freedom Marcher Martin Ruddock who spoke eloquently of how the Gazans don't want hand-outs: they want the blockade lifted so that they can rebuild their lives.

**Portsmouth and South Downs** also heard from Zuber Hatia and they organized a public meeting in Chichester with Brian Dooley, the Amnesty observer who was present in Gaza throughout the air raids. Jenny Flintoft reports that people coming to their stall at Chichester Farmers Market show "deep sympathy and support for the Palestinian people."

Other branches held special events to mark the first anniversary of the attack on Gaza. **Cardiff** PSC was part of a Stop the War Coalition candlelit vigil where the large gathering heard greetings from Jill Evans AM who was in Gaza as part of a European delegation. Ray Davies and Wendy Lewis report that a message also came from the people of Gaza thanking the people of Wales for their generosity. "The money is important — but more than that, knowing that we are campaigning on their behalf gives them the strength to carry on," they said.

## Stories from our mothers

Fourteen Palestinian women from all over the West Bank came to Britain as part of the Stories from our Mothers project, supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation. They split into pairs and toured the country meeting British women in 30 different locations.



According to a report by **Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association** one of the highlights was the Stories from our Mothers workshop held on the 100th International Women's Day at the School of Oriental and African Studies. The visitors and others from London told stories of their own and their mothers' lives, many of which brought tears to the eyes of the audience.

The stories will be the basis for a book, "Stories from our Mothers." A film about the women's exchange visits between Britain and Palestine will also be produced in the summer as part of the project.

## Badgering supermarkets gets results

Many branches pulled out the stops to support the Global BDS Day of Action (see P26) but **Norwich** PSC had already scored a triumph at their local Waitrose store. After raising the issue many times, tirelessly led by their two BIG officers, Peter Norton and Sara Knox, they were informed by the head office that Waitrose had stopped sourcing goods from its Israeli settlement farms. However, it claimed the decision was made because of the inconsistent quality of the goods!

**Halifax** focused on the Hebden Bridge Co-op with around 60 individual letters being sent to Customer Relations plus leafleting and canvassing of the management. The **West Kent** branch staged a three hour picket of Waitrose's store in Tonbridge giving out several hundred leaflets. The young manager claimed to know nothing about the issues and went away to phone head office.

## Having fun and raising cash

An eclectic mix of musical genres, talent and delicious Palestinian food characterised a Gaza fundraising event compered by Averil Parkinson at St Paul's Church, Cambridge, hosted by Hanin Palestine Café with support from **Cambridge** PSC. There were delightful improvisations by Reem Kelani, a mixture of opera, ballads, Georgian songs, acoustic folk and guitar instrumentals by an array of accomplished musicians and Ben White rapped his



### Fun at the Cambridge Gaza fundraiser

own powerful poetry. The event raised £1,240 for Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Gaza charity, Al Beit Al Samed.

The **Sheffield** branch held a gig featuring live jazzy, bluesey, funky music from "8 Misbehavin'" to raise money for their women's scholarship fund and Gaza children's projects. **Southampton** hosted an illustrated talk by women from Abu Dis who spoke movingly of their experiences. A collection was made for them.

**Sheffield** and several other branches organised exhibitions of Rich Wiles photographs from Aida Camp (see review, p 28). **Halifax** branch have hired the Arts Festival Office in Hebden Bridge for three days over Nakba weekend to showcase his work plus books by refugee children, a film and talks.

## New branch

**Lambeth and Wandsworth** PSC held their first AGM and organised a well-attended public meeting chaired by Frank Barat from the Russell Tribunal on Palestine with speakers from the Viva Palestina convoy and an ICARD volunteer.

Branch members got to work on a new leaflet, clearly outlining the new DEFRA guidelines for Israeli/Palestinian produce, which they handed out on street stalls to mark the Global BDS Week of Action.

## Fundraising with a difference!

**Sue** Cooke of **York** PSC had an unforgettable 60th birthday in January when she hosted a medieval candlelit banquet in York's ancient Barley Hall.

Over 40 guests turned up in doublet and hose, wimple and farthingale, to celebrate with Sue and her husband and to raise money for Sue's favourite charity, Medical Aid for Palestinians.

"Instead of giving me a present, I asked them to make a donation — and I was thrilled when it added up to over £1000," she said.

Before cutting her Palestine-themed birthday cake, Sue drew a contrast with the suffering in Haiti: "Children suffer and die in Gaza every day, every year: it's been 61 years now since their tragedy first struck."

**Let us know about your ideas for putting the fun into fundraising and we will feature them in Palestine News to inspire other branches.**



**Sue Cooke (right) at her birthday banquet. Photo: Barry Male**

# Global days of action

The second annual Global BDS Days of Action, held in response to a call from Palestinian civil society, were marked by hundreds of events involving tens of thousands of protestors in cities, towns and villages round the world who targeted companies with links to Israel and their customers.

Events culminated on March 30 which coincides with Palestinian Land Day, commemorating the day in 1976 when Israeli security forces shot to death six young Palestinian citizens of Israel who were among thousands protesting expropriation of their land to build settlements.

In the UK many branches staged imaginative events, such as a "crocodile march" round **Sheffield** city centre, stopping and leafleting outside stores. **Cardiff** branch filled their collection boxes and ran out of leaflets halfway through their demo and had to print more. Other branches inundated supermarkets with letters, phone calls and emails.



PSC Campaigners in Cardiff

## Landmark European Court ruling

On 25 February, the **European Court of Justice** made the important ruling that goods made in West Bank settlements should not benefit from the favourable import taxes under the EU-Israel Association Agreement of 2000.

**“The court decided that the settlements were not geographically part of Israel”**

The case came about in response to an appeal by **German** drinks firm **Brita** after it was told to pay full EU duties when importing supplies from the Israeli company **Soda-Club Ltd**, based in Mishor Adumin in the West Bank. The court decided that the settlements were not geographically part of Israel and therefore could not benefit from the Agreement. It also ruled that Israeli companies operating in the OPTs are “third parties” and cannot benefit from the terms of a separate EU-PLO trade agreement.

The Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign National Committee (BNC) says that the EU is Israel's second largest export market after the US, worth Euro 12 billion and that an estimated one-third of these exports are fully or partially manufactured in the settlements. It called on all 27 EU member

states to implement the court's findings without delay as a first step towards a full ban on all settlement goods.

## Pensions fund bars Elbit

The biggest Swedish pension fund, **Foersta AP-Fonden**, barred Israeli arms maker **Elbit Systems** from its investment portfolios in March on ethical grounds because it operates a surveillance system for the Wall.

Two **Danish** investment funds also divested from **Elbit** and **Africa Israel** which is involved in settlement construction. They are **Danske Bank**, the biggest financial group in Denmark, and **PKA Ltd**, one of the largest funds administering workers' pension funds. PKA also divested from **Magal Security and Detection Systems** which has been involved in the Wall project since 2001.

But, on a gloomier note, in January Elbit Systems won a \$15 million contract to equip **U.S. Marines** attack helicopters with its Tactical Video Data Link (TVDL) system. The US Defense Appropriations Bill for the 2010 fiscal year included a massive \$1 billion for the Israeli company **Plasan Sasa Ltd**, a manufacturer of modular armour kits for military vehicles. Meanwhile both **Turkey** and **Brazil** are in the process of buying Israeli drone aircraft.

## Celebrities under pressure

TV botanist **David Bellamy** withdrew from an appearance at the Zionist Federation's annual environment seminar in February without giving a reason but after coming under pressure from campaigners. But so far **Elton John** has ignored pleas to cancel his concert in Israel in June. According to Israeli press reports, the concert will be sponsored by **Israel Discount Bank** which finances construction in the settlements.

**“A diverse array of artists in Canada has joined the boycott movement”**

A diverse array of artists in **Montreal**, Canada, including filmmakers, musicians, dancers, poets, authors and painters joined the boycott movement. They said: “On the streets, in concert halls, in words and in song, we commit to fighting against apartheid and call upon all artists and cultural producers across the country and around the world to adopt a similar position in this global struggle.” For a full list of signatories, see [www.tadamon.ca/post/5824](http://www.tadamon.ca/post/5824)

A **Pakistani** solidarity campaign was launched in Lahore with a call to academics and artists, poets, writers, singers and filmmakers to join the BDS movement. Email address: [PakistanisForPalestine@gmail.com](mailto:PakistanisForPalestine@gmail.com)

## Rejecting the Right of Return

A group of American Jews have renounced the automatic “right” of “return” they are given under Israeli law and are calling on Jews around the world to join them. They say: “It is not right that we may ‘return’ to a state that is not ours while Palestinians are excluded and continuously dispossessed.”

Inspired by a letter from UK Jews to *The Guardian* in 2002, headlined “We Renounce Israel Rights,” the US signatories say: “We reject the notion that Israel is a ‘safe haven’ from anti-Semitism for Jews. No one is truly safe when the price of that ‘security’ is oppression, inequality, and occupation of another people.”

They put their pledge to boycott the “law of return” in the context of the BDS campaign and add: “As an act of political and ideological divestment, we repudiate the claims the State of Israel makes on us as potential citizens.” To add your name to the list, email [breakingthelawofreturn@gmail.com](mailto:breakingthelawofreturn@gmail.com).

## • campus watch

### Harnessing youthful passion

By Fiona Edwards

Israel's war on Gaza destroyed many of its schools, colleges and universities, killed hundreds of young Palestinians and injured thousands more. The devastation outraged an entire generation in the UK and prompted students and young people to engage in activity in support of justice and peace for Palestine on a scale which has not been witnessed before.

Following this huge surge in interest, Student PSC has been organising national initiatives and campaigns to harness the energy and creativity of the new generation.

A particular focus has been mobilising students to support their counterparts in Gaza by fundraising and participating in the recent Viva Palestina Convoy which succeeded in breaking the siege on 6th January 2010. An unprecedented number of students joined in by raising thousands of pounds on campuses nationwide and volunteering to go on the convoy itself.

After this success we organised a tour of campuses to report on what life is like for students in Gaza. It included excellent meetings at **SOAS**, **Bradford University**, **Kent University**, **Essex University**, **Queen Mary University**, **Sheffield University**, **Huddersfield University** and **Birmingham University**.

We are also supporting students in organising live links to students in Gaza and assisting with campaigns to twin their institution with one in Palestine, as follow up initiatives to the tour.

In January 2009 the National Union of Students (NUS) failed to condemn Israel's war on Gaza. This outrageous decision is consistent with the NUS' anti-Palestine position which it has maintained for many years. The NUS' position is, however, completely out of touch with majority student opinion.

Transforming NUS policy so that it supports the Palestinians' right to self-determination is critical. Student PSC is organising a strong presence at this year's NUS Conference (April 13-15th) where we are focussing on highlighting the appalling situation facing students in Gaza and the critical importance of ending the siege. We will also emphasise harnessing support for the right to education in Palestine and building the campaign for a ban on settlement goods and for divestment and sanctions.

The cause of Palestine solidarity is increasingly attracting new layers of support from young people in Britain who are ever more appalled by the situation facing the Palestinians today. At Student PSC we will continue to lead campaigns and organise events which aim to maximise the impact of this growing movement amongst young people.

### Israeli troops fire on students

Israeli troops opened fire on dozens of students at a protest at Â'Atara checkpoint near Bir Zeit university on March 15. The students were demonstrating against Israel's plans to build 1600 new homes in Occupied East Jerusalem and also about the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The soldiers fired tear gas and rubber-coated-metal bullets as



soon as the demonstration reached the checkpoint, which was closed at the time.

According to medics at the Ramallah Government Hospital, ten students were injured, including three with live bullets. An Israeli military spokesperson has refused to comment on whether live ammunition was used, with rubber-coated metal bullets being considered a standard tactic of riot dispersal.

### Settlement college upgraded to university

Ehud Barak, Israel's defence minister, authorized the first Israeli university in Palestinian territory when he approved the upgrading of the status of Ariel college, located in a settlement 20km inside the West Bank, close to Nablus, Jonathan Cook reported in January.

About 11,000 students, most from inside Israel, already attend the college in the colony which has a population of 18,000 settlers. The decision is expected

to entitle it to significant extra funding, allowing it to expand.

Israel plans to extend its separation wall east of Ariel, effectively annexing the settlement and separating the central and northern parts of the West Bank. The expansion of the college is likely only to reinforce this plan, leading to increased tension with the US administration of Barack Obama.

Peace groups have been particularly shocked that authorisation for the upgrade came from Mr Barak, leader of the Labour Party. Members of his centre-left faction had previously blocked attempts by right-wing parties to change the college's status.

Several Israeli academics also warned that it would add fuel to existing campaigns in Europe to boycott Israeli universities, which have been accused of complicity with the occupation.

"This is all about trying to make the settlement of Ariel 'kosher'," said Yariv Oppenheimer, head of Peace Now, an Israeli group that monitors settlement growth. "It helps to reinforce the growing consensus in Israel that Ariel should remain part of Israel permanently."

### Deported Bethlehem University student completes degree

Bethlehem University officials travelled to the Gaza Strip in January to present 21-year-old Berlanty Azzam with her business administration degree which she gained despite having been forcibly returned to Gaza just two months before the end of her four year course (see Palestine News winter 2009/10).

The papal nuncio to Israel and the Palestinian territories, Archbishop Antonio Franco, and Christian Brother Peter Bray, Bethlehem University vice chancellor, were among those who marked the occasion during a mass at Holy Family Catholic Church.

Azzam's deportation in October, 2009, and severe restrictions on other Gaza students, are part of Israel's policy of treating Gaza and the West Bank as separate entities.



## Behind the Wall: Life, Love and Struggle in Palestine

By Rich Wiles  
Potomac Books

Ali Abunimah invokes the Palestinian quality of *sumoud*, “resistance woven into the fabric of daily life,” in his introduction to Rich Wiles’ book of fine photographs and memories from his six years living in Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem. In his book, *Behind the Wall*, Wiles brings us these faces of the old, and the touching stories of the young, which exemplify *sumoud* and the Palestine which is absent in the daily media focus on the meaningless “peace process,” violence or corruption.

Victoria Brittain



## Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England

Anthony Julius  
Oxford books

Anthony Julius claims to have produced “the first comprehensive history of anti-Semitism in England” and indeed, anti-Semitism has a long and dishonourable history in Britain, from medieval witch-hunts and expulsions to the casual but pervasive prejudice and discrimination of more recent times — all of which are meticulously documented.

However, when it comes to the last 60 years or so, the book takes a quite different approach. The whole focus is then on attitudes to Israel. Any criticism of Zionism (a political ideology which claims the territory of Palestine as an exclusively Jewish state) is interpreted as a continuation of the mindless hatred or mistrust of Jews — which is what is normally understood by the term anti-Semitism.

For people campaigning to end racism and to uphold international law in the region, this is a depressingly familiar accusation. Time and again, when we point out Israel’s daily violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention or its flouting of dozens of UN Resolutions, Zionist supporters of Israel refuse to engage with the real arguments and retreat behind this poisonous slur, at the same time using it as a weapon with which to intimidate and silence the opposition. The opposition, of course, includes anti-Zionist British Jews and Israelis, who — again predictably — are subject to particularly venomous attacks by Mr Julius.

Criticising Israeli policies is undoubtedly a hard step to take for anyone brought up to believe in “Israel right or wrong.” The emotional weight of the holocaust is immense, as is the social pressure from much of the Jewish community to excuse and support whatever Israel does. The last few decades have seen a polarisation within that community; many of those who dare to find out the facts and then to speak out risk ostracism.

It is particularly sad to find a distinguished barrister, specialising in defamation cases, placing himself firmly in the camp that insists on turning a blind eye to Israel’s crimes and seeking to smear its critics.

A good antidote to the book is Yoav Shamir’s fascinating documentary on anti-Semitism, *Defamation*, shown on More4 in January. This award-winning young Israeli director reveals, through a series of very candid interviews with prominent Zionists in the US and in Israel, and with critics like Norman Finkelstein, how charges of anti-Semitism are being fabricated, both to intimidate critics and to induce paranoia in the Israeli population.

For more information about the film see [www.cinephil.co.il](http://www.cinephil.co.il).

Hilary Wise

## My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza’s Untold Story

By Ramzy Baroud  
Pluto Press

The clarity of expression and the textbook account of the complicated history of Gaza, set against a backdrop of real lives, make this book convincing reading. It pulls together many strands to define the situation in a historical, social, political, economic, geographic, legal and literary framework and to portray a rational explanation for the incensed Gaza.

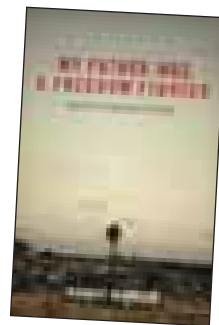
Articulate yet pithy, educational, full of humility and occasionally witty, the measured build up of the memoir is wonderful. For example, as a high school student the author recounts a confrontation with IDF soldiers around the outbreak of the First Intifada:

“My name is Ramzy, and I was the son

of Mohammed, a freedom fighter from Nuseirat, who was driven out of his village of Beit Daras, and the grandson of a peasant who died with a broken heart and was buried beside the grave of my brother, a little boy who died because there was no medicine in the refugee camp’s UN clinic.

“My mother was Zarefah, a refugee who couldn’t spell her name, whose illiteracy was compensated for by a heart overflowing with love for her children and her people, a woman who had the patience of a prophet.”

Baroud’s heart-rending tale is a loving tribute to his father, Mohammed, who was courageous and valiant, enduring seven decades of hardship: being driven out of his



village to a refugee camp, taking up arms to fight the Occupation, while trying to raise a family and finally motivating not only his children but the community in which he lived to continue the struggle.

In considering Palestinian and Israeli political figures, and in the detailed analysis of the reasons behind events, Baroud enables us to understand many things. He explores the growth of political parties and tracks their evolution, dissects probable causes of problems and offers fascinating insights.

Baroud looks both within and at the outside world as he weaves a narrative incorporating the life of a remarkable man and interprets it in a world context with fine accomplishment.

Ramzy Baroud will be on a book tour from April 15. Contact him at [info@ramzybaroud.net](mailto:info@ramzybaroud.net) or write to PO Box 196, Mountlake Terrace, WA, 98043, USA.

Maha Rahwanji



# Kill Khalid

## The Failed Mossad Assassination of Khalid Mishal and the Rise of Hamas

By Paul McGeough  
Quartet Books

The recent murder in Dubai of Hamas leader, Mahmoud Al Mabhouh, bore the hallmarks of earlier attempts by Israel, both successful and unsuccessful, to eliminate the Palestinian leadership. The same mixture of melodrama, chutzpah and contempt for world opinion are writ large in the 1997 plot to poison Khalid Mishal, currently chairman of Hamas' political bureau in Damascus.

This account is the result of years of patient research and many hours of interviews with Mishal by the award-winning Australian journalist, Paul McGeough. He tells how Mishal was targeted in a busy Amman street by a group of Mossad agents posing as Canadian tourists.

One sprayed into his ear a deadly poison concealed in a camera: it was designed to kill within 48 hours. Fortunately for Mishal, his bodyguards were alert enough to collar some of the assailants and hand them over to the Jordanian police; others in the group fled to the Israeli embassy, which was later cordoned off by the Jordanian army. With the help of the Canadian embassy the would-be assassins in custody were unmasked as Israeli agents and confessed to the plot.

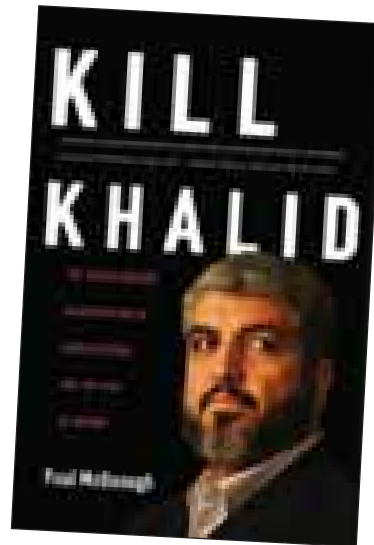
At the time King Hussein of Jordan thought he enjoyed cordial relations with Israel; he had recently signed a peace treaty with them and had fostered the Oslo Accords which were hugely to Israel's advantage. An assassination staged on Hussein's own doorstep would lead the Palestinians – and the wider world – to assume that he had at least given the green light to the operation. Enraged, Hussein rang the White House and made it clear that, unless an antidote to the poison were

immediately forthcoming, he would break off relations with Israel, withdraw from the 'peace process' and hang the Mossad agents.

Under pressure from Clinton, Prime Minister Netanyahu not only had to agree to providing the antidote, which was administered in the nick of time; he flew to Amman to apologise in person, although King Hussein refused to meet him.

The bare bones of the story read like a gripping spy thriller. But McGeough sets it in the context of the rise of Hamas as a resistance movement, explaining its early connections with the Muslim Brotherhood and its links with Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Initially the movement was tacitly supported by Israel as a way of undermining the then dominant Fatah leadership. Only later did they decide on a policy of political assassination, successfully dispatching Hamas leaders such as Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and Abdel Azziz Al Rantissi in guided missile strikes which also killed a dozen bystanders.

The author shows how the failed assassination attempt greatly enhanced Mishal's standing in the Arab world as "the martyr who survived." At a personal level, McGeough describes a man who is educated, articulate, pragmatic and ready to compromise: on several occasions he has offered Israel a truce of 20 or 30 years and negotiations towards a solution based on the pre-'67 borders. As McGeough puts it: "From the Israeli perspective, Mishal was too credible as an emerging leader of Hamas, persuasive even. He had to be taken out."



Israel has consistently responded to Hamas' overtures by quoting only the crude rhetoric of their 1988 charter and has managed to convince western governments to join in the boycott of Hamas and the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. A disparate but influential group of voices are nevertheless calling for dialogue. As Colin Powell, Bush's former Secretary of State, said in 2007: "Hamas has to be engaged. They won the election we insisted upon having."

However, western reactions to the Mabhouh assassination, which have completely ignored the legal and moral implications of extra-judicial killings, mean that the Israelis can continue to mount such operations with impunity; Khalid Mishal may yet succumb to the sniper's bullet, the car bomb or the guided missile.

Although well reviewed in the US and in Australia where it was first published, the book's reception in the UK has been curiously muted, given this is an outstanding example of investigative journalism, written with lucidity and verve. Very few reviews have been published and some bookshops have even been reluctant to stock it. The chairman of Quartet Books, Naim Attallah, says there has been a tacit decision by the literary establishment simply to "dismiss Hamas within the box of 'terrorist organisation,'" i.e. to toe the government line.

So let us use the honoured method of "word-of-mouth" promotion: if you only read one book this year on the issue of Palestine, let it be this.

Hilary Wise

## The Last Chance: Eight songs on Israel/Palestine

Written and Sung by Leon Rosselson, Reem Kelani and Janet Russell

Coming from a Jewish Communist family who welcomed the founding of Israel, Leon Rosselson was a teenage member of the Socialist Zionist youth movement and spent a year in Israel in the late 50s where the word "Palestine" was never mentioned.

He argued both sides over the years but a visit to the West Bank in 2005

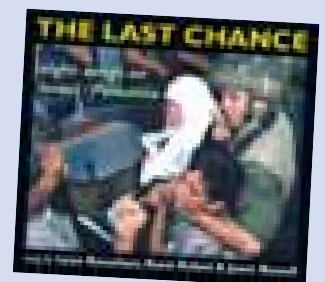
opened his eyes fully to reality and he has now put his 40 years of folk singing and song-writing experience into expressing Palestinian heartbreak.

One track tells the story of a Jewish carpenter who became a wartime partisan and was executed by the Germans. Rosselson turns it into an anthem for all those cast out by history.

Another is a plangent lament for an ancient olive tree stolen by settlers, beautifully sung by Janet Russell. Reem Kelani's haunting track is a setting to music of a poem by Mahmoud Salim al-Hout.

Performed in traditional folk style, this is

not music to cheer you up but to challenge and move you. Send a cheque for £12 made out to Fuse Records, 28 Park Chase, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 8EH.  
■ All profits to Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP).



## This Time We Went Too Far

By Norman Finkelstein

www.orbooks.com

The title of this book about Israel's 22-day murderous bombardment of Gaza is a quote from an article by the Israeli journalist, Gideon Levy, who examined his country's justifications and found none of them held water.

With precise, clear-eyed analysis, shot through with cold anger, Norman Finkelstein builds up the evidence to support the argument that "this was not a war. It was a massacre." He quotes one Israeli soldier describing the assault as like playing a Playstation game —

"everything was done by remote control." Another soldier said it was "like a child with a magnifying glass, burning ants."

Finkelstein, the American son of concentration camp survivors and one of Israel's most prolific critics, forensically examines three things: why the Israelis launched the assault, what actually happened, and what could be the long term outcome.

He says that Israel's enormously disproportionate response to Gaza militants' rocket fire had two motives: to restore its "deterrence capacity" following the setback it suffered in Lebanon in 2006 and to counter the threat posed by a new Palestinian "peace offensive" which offered a genuine opportunity to resolve the conflict.

In the second part he juxtaposes Israel's version of events with detailed reports from numerous respected human rights organisations. For instance, Amnesty International documented one Israeli house nearly destroyed against 6000 Palestinian homes pulverised.

Finkelstein concludes by insisting that there is now a real possibility of resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict because a solution, in terms of two states and the right of return or compensation for the refugees, is supported by just about everyone except Israel and the US.



This concise, hard-hitting book is an eloquent call to the international community to form a mass political movement which will provide the political will to force the solution on the intransigent parties.

Available exclusively online from [www.orbooks.com](http://www.orbooks.com)

Gill Swain

## Gaza Beneath the Bombs

By Sharyn Lock with Sarah Irving

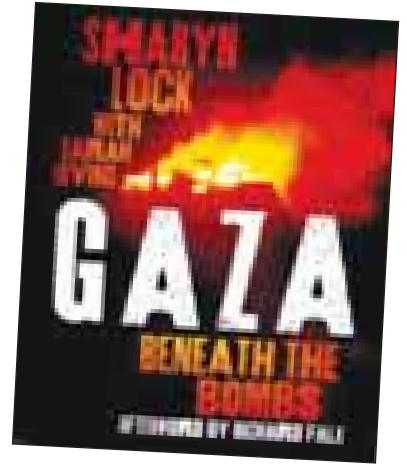
Pluto Press

Sharyn Lock first visited Palestine, with the International Solidarity Movement, in 2002.

Having heard about the then newly formed ISM from a friend, she thought, "...created by Israelis and Palestinians to invite internationals to support Palestinians in nonviolent struggle against Israeli occupation. It sounded creative, flexible and accessible, and I decided to go and learn what I could."

She later joined the Free Gaza Movement and arrived in the Strip by boat in time to volunteer help with the over-worked ambulance brigade as it fought to cope with the Israeli assault at the end of 2008. This book is built out of the blog she managed to maintain while dealing with the sheer horror of the bombing, mining, bulldozing and sniping orgy that followed; in danger of losing her own life, of course, as bullets zipped past her face. It reads like life in The Inferno. Page after page lists the gore, the tragedy, the despair. And the (understandably) dark humour. For all its unrelenting horror it's thoroughly gripping, and I for one found it difficult to put it down until the finish.

More than a mere transcript of a blog, this well-written, lively account also contains a very useful index. One for the reference bookshelf after your first read-through. If you think you know what happened in Gaza, try this and think again.



Cliff Hanley

## For Hammam: A Handbook for Young People on Human Rights in Palestine

Edited by Nandita Dowson and Abdul Wahab Sabbah

Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association

In the Youth Ambassadors for Human Rights project in June, 2009, young people from Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, came to stay with their contemporaries in Camden, London, to learn about each other's societies and human rights and to think about the best ways to tell other young people about these issues.

The visit, organised by the Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association and the Dar Assadaqa Community Centre in Abu Dis, was a great success and from it has come this handbook, written in English and Arabic, which is intended to carry forward the work of the project.

At the heart of the handbook are the rights the young people think there should be in a charter of children's rights for Palestine. The list is headed by the "right to an identity" and the "right to leave your country and return to it" — both of which barely need to be stated for British children.

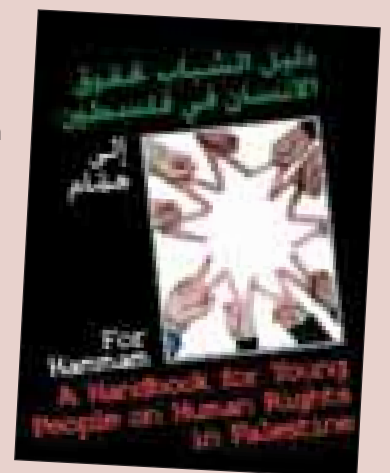
In the following pages these and the other rights are examined in the context of Palestine with individual stories of how they are violated in their everyday life written by young people and illustrated with photographs of children being manhandled by

soldiers, living on the street after their homes were demolished, and so on.

It is a simple and highly effective way of putting flesh on the bones of the words "human rights." Backed up by some historical background, activities and questions, the handbook would be extremely useful for teachers or youth leaders to bring the reality of the impact of the occupation to life.

It is dedicated "For Hammam" because while the project was being planned, one of those involved, 18-year-old Hammam Mohsen, was shot in the back of the head with three rubber bullets by an IDF soldier while he was demonstrating against Israel's attack on Gaza in December, 2008. He survived, but is half-paralysed down his right side.

For details on how to order a copy of the handbook, see the advert on P31.



### International human rights volunteers needed in Palestine

The International Women's Peace Service is a team of female human-rights volunteers who provide accompaniment to Palestinian civilians, document and non-violently intervene in human-rights abuses and support acts of non-violent resistance to end the Israeli military occupation.

IWPS is inviting applications from women who would like to serve a minimum of one three-month term in Palestine.

Short-term volunteers are also welcome to apply for minimum periods of three weeks.

For more information and/or an application pack please contact us at [applyiwps@gmail.com](mailto:applyiwps@gmail.com)



Produced with and for young people: CADFA's new bilingual Arabic-English handbook on human rights in Palestine.

Edited by Nandita Dowson and Abdul Wahab Sabbah.  
ISBN:  
978-0-9556136-2-3

£10 from bookshops, Amazon or Camden Abu Dis Friendship Association: PO Box 34265, London NW5 2WD



### Palestinian Fair Trade olive oil

Olive oil produced in Jenin Province is now available through Sainsbury's, Co-op stores and wholefood retailers.

The oil is cold-pressed and bottled at source and certified by the Palestinian Fair Trade Association (PFTA)

For your local stockist, for recipes, or for information on organising an olive oil tasting, see [www.equalexchange.co.uk](http://www.equalexchange.co.uk)



**Organic Rumi Oil**, harvested from trees over 500 years old and unique to Palestine.



**Organic Nabali Oil**, an initial buttery taste with a pleasant peppery kick.



**Organic and Conventional Blend Oil**, has a smell of freshly cut grass and a light citrus nose.

### E-Book on Jewish National Fund

An e-book on the Jewish National Fund's role in the colonisation of Palestine is available to download from the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Introduction by Ilan Pappé, contributions from Abe Hayeem, Uri Davis, Susannah Tarbush, Sonia Karkar, Ben White, Raheli Mizrahi. Edited by Mortaza Sahibzada.

This little book reveals how a British charity works openly for the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs and the establishment of fully segregated Jewish-only communities.

Download JNF: Colonising Palestine since 1901 from [www.scottishpsc.org.uk](http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk)



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# Nakba Commemoration 2010

**Saturday 15 May —  
National Day of  
Local Actions**

The British government must  
support international law

**Free Palestine!**

Contact PSC for details of the  
protest in your area

**We demand the government:**

- End Israel's violations of international law
- Support bringing Israeli war criminals to justice
- End the siege on Gaza
- Ban settlement goods
- Suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement
- End the arms trade with Israel

In London the protest will be from 12–2pm  
opposite 10 Downing Street (nearest tube Westminster)

