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Vote for Palestine!





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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

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The election is coming – make Palestine the issue!



By Sara Apps

Campaigning for the General Election has already started and will not let up until polling day – 7 May. And this election, more than any other to date, offers an opportunity to force candidates honestly to state their positions on Palestine, and to influence those positions.

A number of factors have conspired to make the cause of justice for the Palestinians a legitimate election issue. There was the massive public revulsion against Israel's blitzing of the Gaza Strip in the summer, which led to a number of councils flying the Palestinian flag as a symbol of support.

There was the vote in Parliament that went 278 to 12 in support of the recognition of a Palestinian state, influenced by the more than 57,000 emails sent by supporters to their MPs using the PSC email tool. There was the resignation by Foreign Office minister Baroness Warsi over the government's attitude during the Gaza blitz, and the electrifying speech attacking Israel's illegal settlements by former Tory International Development minister, Sir Alan Duncan (see p6).

So, how do you best use the General Election campaign to push the issue of Palestine up the agenda and to force candidates from across the political spectrum to listen to and act on your views?

“Candidates should be in no doubt that Palestinian human rights matter deeply to many voters”

The first thing to do is find out your candidates' views on Palestinian human rights. Ask them directly: do they agree that Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are illegal and unacceptable? Would they vote for recognition of a Palestinian state?

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign has produced an email tool to make it as easy as possible for you to ask these questions and more, available on the website. Please encourage

your family, friends and colleagues to ask these questions too. Remind the candidates that Palestine is an important issue for many voters; the most important international debate of our time.

Once you have the answers, please forward them to info@palestinecampaign.org so we can build up a database of candidates' views. Then you need to keep piling on the pressure.

In March or April you could write a letter to your local paper, setting out the candidates' views on Palestine, to ensure that other voters in your constituency are informed. Research other media where you could publicise this too – are there local websites, blogs, online forums or radio stations?

You could find out about any events candidates are attending, such as question time meetings. Go along with others to make sure that Palestine is raised at every public opportunity. Look at the PSC website and General Election campaign emails for suggestions for questions you can ask at meetings. We won't be engaging with openly racist and extremist parties, but all other candidates across the political spectrum will be fair game.

PSC will be developing a discussion platform to allow people from the same area to discuss and plan local campaigns. This will make it much easier for you to co-ordinate with other campaigners to target as many meetings and publicity opportunities as possible.

Palestine is not a fringe issue and our aim is to make every MP and potential MP who is seeking our vote realise it. By the time the votes have been counted, all political parties and candidates should be in no doubt that Palestinian human rights matter deeply to many voters.

After the election, make sure you follow up by congratulating your new elected MP and asking for an early meeting to insist they follow through with any promises they've made. Remind them that Palestine is an issue that will stay on the agenda.

The General Election campaign is an exciting opportunity to make sure that Palestine is firmly on the political map for politicians of all colours. Let's all be part of it!

■ For all the info and help you need, go to www.palestinecampaign.org



PHOTO: JESS HURD

Major challenges for PSC

By Hugh Lanning

It was George Bernard Shaw who said: “The law is equal before all of us; but we are not all equal before the law.” How true that must sound to the Palestinians – whatever they do, their rights are not respected. The world votes to give them enhanced diplomatic status that entitles them to be party to a range of global treaties and institutions. They, legally, apply to join the International Criminal Court.

What happens? This move – “entirely counterproductive” according to the US administration – results in Israel withholding Palestine’s tax revenues. Entirely illegal collective punishment. What does the world do to defend its decisions, institutions and laws? Precisely nothing.

What does it take for Palestine to win political action from Western governments? Death and slaughter doesn’t do it, following road maps to the end of the earth, years of fruitless negotiations – Palestinians can jump through endless hoops, yet it is never enough.

It is clear that the Israeli regime increasingly wants a “no state solution” where it effectively annexes and controls a subjugated Palestinian people indefinitely. Unfortunately, too few Israelis recognise that this is a high risk solution that is unlikely ever to give them peace and the much touted security. Quite the reverse, over time – unfortunately a long time – it is more likely to result in the self-destruction of the reality they have created.

But this is little solace to the Palestinians who live under siege, occupation, imprisoned, in exile, ignored. Last year saw a huge outpouring of political support for Palestine shown in the incredible growth of the solidarity movement. New and young people joined the movement and unprecedented numbers took political action – writing, lobbying and contacting MPs, candidates and councillors.

One thing this showed is that politicians react to the potential loss of votes, support and credibility within their target constituency of voters. The general rule is that the older and richer you are, the more inclined you are to vote. But in the US, UK and Europe, it is generally the older generation that supports Israel most and support for Palestine is strongest amongst the young. A seismic shift took place over this summer, though, with

support for Palestine increasing amongst all sectors of society and amongst voters of all parties.

This creates massive opportunities for PSC to develop a campaign strategy that reflects this. Given that many of the historic core membership of PSC are unfortunately not in our youth any longer, this presents PSC with two major challenges. First, we have to step up – grow and improve – in everything we do, to meet the opportunity and expectation there is to build on the growing support for Palestine. Secondly, we have to do this in new and different ways – not ditching our traditional methods, but recognising that they will not be attractive to many who have recently become active.



“A seismic shift took place over this summer with support for Palestine increasing amongst all sectors of society”

In a time of cuts and austerity, growth is a good problem to have, but to be maintained it has to be nurtured and planned, not frittered away. It means building and organising the PSC at every level – building new and stronger branches and networks in the student and trade union movements. It means increasing support for the BDS campaign and maintaining and developing our social media capacity.

And, particularly over the next five months, it means realising our political potential. Last summer and autumn we demonstrated what we could do by way of political action. MPs were deluged with over 50,000 emails and letters and many were stunned into action and support while those prepared to voice support for Israel were marginalised. When MPs who have supported Israel for decades stand up and say they are no longer prepared to do so, you know that change is happening.

The general election campaign gives us a unique opportunity to challenge every candidate. Candidates will be asked to support two statements and indicate what steps they would take to back up those statements. PSC will then make public those responses, encouraging the public to vote for Palestine in deciding who to vote for.

The first statement urges the UK government to uphold the principles of equality, human rights and international law in all its relations with Israel. It has the means, not just through notional recognition, but by ending the blockade of Gaza through trade and sanctions. Our challenge is to give them the political will.



Recognising Palestine

By Sara Apps, PSC Campaigns and Communications Officer

We gathered with bated breath in a committee room in the House of Commons to watch via a TV link the debate on recognising Palestine as a state. There were Palestinians plus activists and supporters, none of us knowing how many MPs would show their support.

We knew that MPs had been as shocked as everyone else by Israel's brutal assault on Gaza in the summer and the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. We knew these events had caused a collapse in unqualified support for Israel, and we knew that this had been boosted by the 57,808 emails sent by PSC members and supporters to their MPs.

As a result, MPs who were sympathetic but perhaps would not have bothered going to a vote with "one-line whip" – meaning attendance is voluntary – made sure they were there. It made it the best attended back bench voluntary debate ever with almost half of all MPs present.

The motion was proposed by Labour MP Grahame Morris and amended by former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. It said: "That this House believes that the government should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel as a contribution to securing a negotiated two-state solution."

As MP after MP rose to declare why they thought the time had come for Britain to recognise Palestine, the tide of history seemed to turn in front of our eyes. The vast majority of speakers were backing a Palestinian State and highlighting their concern about human rights violations and the lack of progress to a long-term solution.

You could have heard a pin drop when long-standing supporter of Israel, Sir Richard Ottaway, declared he could not vote against the motion. "I realise now, looking back over the past 20 years, that Israel has been slowly drifting away from world public opinion. The annexation of 950 acres of the West Bank just a few months ago has outraged me more than anything else in my political life."

When the debate finished the shouts of "aye" to support the motion vastly outnumbered the cries of "nay." But then it looked like we were going to be frustrated at a crucial moment in the process.

In order for a record to be made of which way each MP votes, both sides must nominate two "tellers" to count the votes. Realising they were facing overwhelming defeat, no-one from the opposition side stepped forward to be a teller.

So MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Mike Wood – both firm supporters of Palestinian recognition – volunteered to act for the "no" side, having foreseen that this tactic might be used and been determined to outsmart it.

We could hardly believe the scale of the victory when it was finally announced by the Speaker: 278 MPs voted for the motion. And the "no" camp was in disarray; only 12 of those who opposed the motion came forward to vote.

Yes, the vote for recognition was symbolic; yes it was a baby step. But anyone watching that debate could be left in no doubt that there has been a political realignment in the UK which represents one of the biggest opportunities we've had for years.

■ Read the whole debate at www.palestinecampaign.org/parliament-update-recognition-debate



Grahame Morriss, centre, with MPs backing recognition

Recognition gathers pace

The UN General Assembly passed by an overwhelming majority a resolution recognising the Palestinian right to self-determination, including the right to an independent Palestinian State, in December.



Only seven states voted against it while 180 backed the resolution. Those against were Israel, the United States, Canada, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru and Palau.

However, later in December the UN Security Council rejected a resolution proposed by Jordan demanding an end to the Israeli occupation within three years. The US and Australia voted against the motion, while Russia, China, France, Argentina, Chad, Chile, Jordan and Luxembourg voted in favour. The UK and four other countries abstained.

Also in December the European Parliament adopted a wishy-washy resolution which read: "The European Parliament supports in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution, and believes these should go hand in hand with the development of peace talks, which should be advanced."

A total of 498 MEPs voted in favour with 88 against and 111 abstentions.

Sweden officially recognised Palestine as an independent state in October. It was the 135th member of the UN to do so, but the first Western European country. France passed a similar symbolic resolution to the British one, urging the government to recognise Palestine. Spain and Ireland have also passed similar motions.

“It is not a matter of left or right. It is a matter of justice, like slavery”

By Gill Swain

All political campaigns strive towards the famous “tipping point” when their lonely struggles garner enough support to create an unstoppable momentum. But what constitutes a tipping point?

One of the crucial elements is when politicians of all persuasions first find it morally impossible to support the other side, then find the only moral stance is to back the campaign. This shift in British politicians towards the Palestinian issue has made significant progress this year, substantially helped by two headline events involving leading Conservative figures.

In August, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, a Foreign Office minister and former chairman of the Conservative Party, resigned from the government saying that its policy on Israel’s bombardment of Gaza was “morally indefensible.”

Then the Rt Hon. Sir Alan Duncan, who was Minister for International Development in the Coalition government until he stood down in July, delivered a coruscating speech in which he completely condemned Israeli settlements as “theft” and “immoral” and said many settlers were “state-supported militia.”



political party, or sit in Parliament.

“How can we accept lawmakers in our country... when they support lawbreakers in another? They are extremists, and they should be treated as such.”

This was electrifying stuff, particularly coming from a man with a distinguished career in the highest echelons of the Conservative

Party – not hitherto known for outspoken support of justice for the Palestinians.

When we met in his wood-panelled office which lies directly below the chamber of the House of Commons, Sir Alan was exhausted, partly as a result of dealing with the fall-out from his speech. Since he delivered it in October at the Royal United Services Institute, he had received over 500 messages, 90 per cent of them backing him. That’s an extraordinary number and also highly unusual in that normally it is objectors who bother to get in touch.

“The reaction has been very instructive,” he said. “The majority of people who are apparently Jewish have been supportive and have said they feel pressured by their community never to be critical of Israel whereas, like me, they think Israel’s interests are best served by behaving properly.

“Their tone was polite and logical, while almost all of those disagreeing

with me were rude, vicious and basically horrid.”

He said that the Board of Deputies of British Jews had issued a very “rude and childish” press release condemning him which had been sharply criticised by other Jewish leaders. “I think that the majority of Jewish people in the UK think that settlements are wrong. Some of those who say they represent Jewish opinion don’t understand their own people.”

Sir Alan, who was an oil trader before being elected to Parliament in 1987, has been visiting the Middle East since 1985, attracted by its history, culture and politics.

“An extraordinary number of those who defend Israel’s conduct have never been to the West Bank, or anywhere in the Arab world,” he said.

Having been constrained from speaking out while serving as a minister, Sir Alan chose his moment to have maximum impact. “I am a mainstream, long-standing member of Parliament, and to have this uttered by a Conservative voice is in itself very significant,” he said.

With the collapse of US Secretary of State John Kerry’s attempt to find a solution and Israel’s actions in Gaza having enraged public opinion, he decided to speak. “It is not so much a question of ‘why now?’ as of, why doesn’t everyone else agree with this?”

“The speech was an attempt to lay the foundations of principle from which

(cont. on opposite page)

“Settlement endorsement is a form of extremism which we should not tolerate”

He went on to say that “settlement endorsement, meaning the denial that they are illegal and the support for their consequences, is a form of extremism which we should not tolerate.” He said it “should be put on a par with racism, sexism, homophobia and anti-Semitism” and that “no settlement endorser should be considered fit to stand for election, remain a member of a mainstream



Duncan with Gaza fishermen

The blind spot

The “bit of a blind spot” at the “very top” to which Sir Alan Duncan referred was clearly on show throughout Prime Minister David Cameron’s speech to the Conservative Friends of Israel lunch in December.

This lunch attracted 125 Tory MPs, more than a third of the parliamentary party, including 14 Cabinet ministers. In addition there were candidates, peers, party donors and others.

They heard Cameron refer to the “illegal settlements” on the West Bank, which he called “unhelpful,” but he made no mention of Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, no criticism of the proposed “Jewish State” bill which enshrines “national rights only for the Jewish people” of Israel, and expressed no sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinians.

He claimed that the Jewish community share Tory values and urged British Jews to back him in the general elections. He asserted that his Conservative Party would always support Israel and “will always defend your (Tel Aviv’s) right to defend yourself.”

He attacked Labour for what he called showing “their true colours on Israel” for backing the Parliamentary vote to recognise the state of Palestine. And he



criticised Labour’s support for boycotts saying “together we will defeat” the boycott campaign.

An indication that Cameron is increasingly out of step, not just with the majority of British public opinion but even leading Tory party opinion, came in a comment piece on the speech by the Daily Telegraph’s chief political commentator, Peter Osborne, who said Cameron would have “done Israel a favour” by making a “more balanced” speech.

“He could have used the occasion to spell out much more clearly the concern that many British people now feel about Israel’s illegal actions on the West Bank, or the Israeli atrocities that took place over the summer in Gaza.”

Osborne said Cameron “could have noted that many of his own MPs (some

of whom were at the lunch) also voted for the recognition of the Palestinian state. They did it not because they are hostile to Israel, but because they believe that Israel will only be secure once the Palestinian people, who almost everyone agrees have been the victims of a terrible injustice, are secure as well.”

“Something is changing very fast in our national mood – but Mr Cameron has been very slow to change with it”

He reported that one Conservative MP, “normally thought of as a supporter of Israel, said that he was ‘ashamed and embarrassed’ by the Prime Minister’s speech.”

Osborne commented that the vote to recognise Palestinian statehood “shows that something is changing very fast in our national mood – but Mr Cameron has been very slow to change with it.”

(cont. from previous page)

all other arguments flow because what is happening is annexation. It is land grab. If people just argue tit for tat about who did what to whom, the moral basis gets lost. But if you start from an underlying moral principle, then it puts those who think taking someone else’s land is OK into a corner.”

Amongst MPs, Sir Alan said there was now only a “small rump” of about half a dozen in each of the Labour and Conservative parties who were unquestioning supporters of Israel’s behaviour.

As for Conservative Party policy on the issue, which backs two states based on the 1967 borders, Sir Alan said: “The words are OK, but there isn’t much follow through.

“Amongst MPs there is a willingness to make it more than words. But at the very top there is a bit of a blind spot on this.”

He thought that most politicians’ unwillingness to speak out as he has done stemmed not from fears of being accused of being anti-Semitic but because making a principled stand is difficult. “They would rather go for the quiet life,” he said.

But he felt that “some things are of such moral significance, it is wrong NOT

to make a stand. I am afraid that to the rest of the world, we look one-sided on this issue. And I think that public opinion is likely to be more critical of that in the future.”

During the election campaign, he said all candidates should be asked whether they agree that Israeli settlements are illegal and that there should be a Palestinian state. “Those who argued in the debate that there should be a state, but not now, are promoting a thinly disguised justification of settlement activity. Because if you are not prepared to take steps to stop settlements, you are effectively allowing them to multiply.”

Sir Alan said that what is needed now is a much stronger cross party effort to push for justice for the Palestinians. “I can’t do it all on my own,” he said, tiredly.

“It is not a matter of left or right. It is a matter of justice, like slavery. Every decent person should have a clear view and purpose on this.”

He said he will be speaking out more during the election campaign and will try to devote more time to the issue if he is re-elected. Even if his energy may flag occasionally, when he started



The illegal settlement colony of Har Homa

speaking about what upsets him about the Palestinians’ plight, there was no doubting the passion that drives him on.

“The demolitions, the destruction of olive trees, the forced movement of Bedouin... it is the ludicrous contrast between settlements with their water and power and occupants wearing combat fatigues, carrying machine guns, behaving disgustingly, and the indigenous Palestinian who live under military rule and in poverty.

“The contrast is contemptible and unjust.”

Conferences rally to Palestine

By Annie Neligan and Sarah Colborne

Israel's massacre in Gaza last summer was a major issue at conferences in the autumn and galvanised hundreds of attendees into action.

At the Labour Party Conference, Palestine fringe meetings were packed, with more than 1,000 people attending across the various events. At PSC's meeting Dr Mona El Farra talked directly from Gaza via a Skype link about the reality of living in the devastated region. Other speakers included Chi Onwurah MP and Richard Howitt MEP.

At its conference, the Trades Union Congress committed to "step up the campaign for a free Palestine." In a strongly worded statement, endorsed almost unanimously by TUC conference, it condemned the "collective punishment of the people of Gaza," called the UK government's response to Israel's attack "unacceptable" and demanded an immediate end to the arms trade with Israel.

At its September conference in Birmingham, the Green Party overwhelmingly adopted an emergency motion actively to participate in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign.

Existing Green Party policy on Israel and Palestine recognised that "all Israelis, Palestinians and their families should have and

be able to exercise full human and civil rights throughout Israel, Palestine and the occupied territories in Palestine."

Green MEPs have been working in the EU for the suspension of the trade association that is favourable to Israel until the country complies with international law. Since becoming an MP Caroline Lucas, Green MP for Brighton Pavilion, has persistently demanded that the Foreign Office turn "urging" Israel to comply into action such as imposing sanctions, in particular in relation to Gaza and the arms trade.

The conference motion hopes to galvanise all members and Party representatives to put policy into action via the BDS campaign. Green Party members expect Green councillors to oppose tenders being awarded to companies complicit in the occupation. They also anticipate that students will try to get Eden Springs water banned from their campuses and that Green Party branches will work with local PSC or BDS groups.



Green Party leader Caroline Lucas

The mask comes off

A new "Jewish nation-state" bill was passed by the Israeli cabinet in November by a 14-6 vote and sparked a passionate debate.

The legislation, which was originally drafted by right-wing MK Ze'ev Elkin (Likud), is designed to deal with the incompatibility between the state's Jewishness and democracy.

It does this by making Jewishness paramount. It defines Jewishness as the default nature of the state in any instance, legal or legislative, in which the state's Jewishness and its democratic aspirations clash.

The bill defines the State of Israel's identity as "the nation-state of the Jewish people." That not only means that the country's national holidays are Jewish religious holidays or that the flag is the Magen David; it also means that Jewish law will be the inspiration for Israel's legal system and it enshrines the automatic citizenship granted by the Law of Return.

Crucially, while the bill affirms "the personal rights of all [Israel's] citizens according to law," it reserves communal rights for Jews only. In other words, individual Arabs are equal in the eyes of the law, but their communal rights are not recognised.

"Israel is a nation-state whose vision has three essential ingredients: Jewishness, democracy and human rights,"



Israelis demonstrate against the bill, Jerusalem, 30 Nov

Hebrew University law professor Ruth Gavison wrote in a government-commissioned report on the bill. "The nation-state law is likely to upset the essential balance of safeguarding the entire vision."

Whether the bill is passed when it comes before the Knesset is "irrelevant to Palestinians everywhere," according to Waad Ghantous, a Haifa-based Palestinian activist and a member of the Al-Awda organisation, in an article for Al Jazeera.

"As usual, that debate didn't focus on the rights of Palestinian citizens

of Israel, who make up 20 percent of the population, but centred on the state's Declaration of Independence and founding ideology of Zionism.

"For the 1.7 million Palestinians who were forced to take Israeli citizenship and continue living in what became Israel after the Nakba, this bill is nothing more than Israel finally taking off its mask in front of the world... the law is merely symbolic, as there are already dozens of laws that 'discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel in all areas of life, including their rights to political participation, access to land, education, state budget resources, and criminal procedures,' as the Adalah Legal Centre has revealed."

HP off the menu

By Hugh Lanning, Chair, Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Last summer the world was horrified by the slaughter in Gaza as Israel bombarded the besieged Palestinians from land, sea and air. What most people watching the shocking scenes on their TV and computer screens would have been unaware of is the scale of US multinational Hewlett Packard's involvement in the carnage.

Hewlett Packard, branded as HP on its products, is best known for its printer cartridges, laptops and photocopiers but there is a sinister side to the corporation. It is heavily involved in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and this has brought it into the sights of Palestine Solidarity Campaign's Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions work.

In November PSC launched its "Boycott HP" campaign, releasing images via social media of life under Israeli occupation accompanied by slogans such as: "HP: the technology behind Israel's war machine."

A pledge promising to boycott all HP products until the corporation ends its complicity with the Israeli occupation went on to the PSC's website for individuals to sign.

The reason that HP is being targeted by pro-Palestinian activists in the UK, Europe and the US is because it is contracted by the Israeli government to provide the IT infrastructure to the Israeli navy, whose gunboats pounded the Gaza coast during the summer's massacre.

Those same gunboats, together with Israeli warships, are also vital in enforcing Israel's illegal siege of Gaza which has brought poverty and misery to the Palestinian population of 1.8 million. And they fire constantly at Palestinian fishermen as they try to scratch a meagre living from waters off the coast.

During October, for example, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reported 19 attacks by Israel on Palestinian fishermen, of which 18 were firing incidents and one was a shelling. One Palestinian was injured, seven fishermen were abducted by the Israeli navy, two fishing boats were confiscated and two destroyed.

Every one of those attacks, unreported by the mainstream media here, represents an Israeli violation of



the ceasefire agreement signed between Hamas and the Israeli government in August. And each one is aided by HP.

The Israeli army, which so brutally suppresses the Palestinian people, also benefits from HP technology, having been supplied with HP computers.

“HP’s technology is instrumental in controlling and restricting the free movement of Palestinians”

In addition, HP's technology is instrumental in controlling and restricting the free movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. At their major checkpoints in the West Bank, the Israelis use what is known as the BASEL system which uses scanners with hand and facial recognition to collect biometric data about every Palestinian who is forced to pass through those checkpoints.

As a result, the biometric data of nearly every Palestinian over the age of 16 is held by the Israeli authorities, feeding into Israel's system of control and repression.

This system has been developed, integrated and is maintained by HP Enterprise Services, a division of HP.

The company's involvement with the Israeli occupation conflicts with

international law and human rights agreements.

For example, Israel's siege on Gaza constitutes the collective punishment of an entire population. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention designates collective punishment as a war crime. So by contracting with the Israeli navy, HP is complicit in war crimes against Gaza.

And its development and maintenance of the BASEL system makes it complicit in the breach of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement... within the borders of each state."

Ironically, HP boasts a "Global Human Rights Policy." It states: "Respecting human rights is a core value at HP and is embedded in the way we do business."

It goes on to claim that it "upholds and respects human rights as reflected in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

HP's profiteering from the Israeli occupation and the siege on Gaza make a mockery of those claims and render the company a key target for the BDS movement.

PSC's branches around the country have already begun their campaigning work on the Boycott HP campaign, such as promoting it from town centre stalls like in Kingston, Surrey (pictured). PSC will be launching more initiatives in the coming weeks including producing template letters to send to HP's chief executive.

The campaign's momentum is growing rapidly and HP risks becoming a toxic brand if it continues to do business with Israel's apartheid regime.

Standing by Palestinians

By Gill Knight, chair of Hastings PSC

For me it all started with a whirlwind ten-day tour of the West Bank which really brought home to me the plight of the Palestinians and the fact that, despite everything, they offered me an exceedingly warm welcome. This experience inspired me to do some volunteer work to support them and the International Women's Peace Service (IWPS) seemed the ideal organisation for me.

Now based in the village of Deir Itisya in the governate of Salfeet, the IWPS began in 2002 and provides international accompaniment to Palestinian civilians, documents and non-violently intervenes in human rights abuses and supports acts of non-violent resistance.

The olive harvest

During the olive harvest, IWPS accompanies farmers whose land is near an illegal settlement or they have been attacked by settlers. Farmers are required to ask for co-ordination from the Israeli District Co-ordinating Office (DCO), which means having to ask permission to harvest olives on their own land.

Some farmers decide to harvest without permits either because the dates they are given are not suitable or on principle. One such "refusenik" is Abu Said, 75, who has land near the settlement of Revava and also land within the settlement that was seized from him by force.

Our IWPS team was picking with Abu Said when a security guard from Revava appeared and said he could not pick there. These privatised security personnel are unanswerable to any authority and act at the will of the settlers. The guard said the land belonged to the settlement to which Abu Said said it belonged to his father and grandfather before that.

The guard started quoting the Bible and talking about who the owners were 3000 years ago. Soon a jeep appeared with four heavily armed Israeli soldiers who said he could not pick without a permit. They talked about our presence being a threat to the Jewish residents. "This time you and the next time there will be terrorists," one said. Others spoke about ISIS and Hamas.

Next on the scene was the Israeli DCO carrying a map. He said Abu Said would be issued with a permit to pick on the 26th October. He pointed to all the land Abu Said owned and said in fluent Arabic "This is your land." But he still could only pick on the 26th.

Qalandia Camp

Located near the grim Qalandia checkpoint, the refugee camp is home to about 11,000 people living in cramped conditions. The contrast with the nearby town of Ramallah with its air of affluence, high rise apartments, European style bars and shopping malls, could not be more stark.

Being in Area C and therefore completely under Israeli military and civil control, the camp cannot extend its boundaries and children have nowhere to play except in the narrow alleyways between the makeshift houses.

But the amazing resilience of the Palestinians is evident: there are about 100 shops and businesses, three UNRWA schools, a kindergarten, a rehabilitation centre and a women's co-operative where I volunteered.



Gill and friends at the olive harvest

People in the camp can be suspicious of internationals because there is a high level of resistance, being near the Wall and the checkpoint, and I could have been an informer. So I was fortunate to be taken in by Um Isleman and her extended family.

"The amazing resilience of the Palestinians is evident"

The community has suffered greatly, as seen by numerous posters of their "shahid" – martyrs – and Israeli Occupation Forces frequently raid the camp. Towards the end of my stay the fourth young man to be killed in 2014 was shot dead. All witnesses said he was merely standing on the roof watching the IOF incursion. The whole camp went into deep mourning for three days and a mourning tent was erected in the sports yard for people to pay their respects.

The camp was set up in 1948 to house displaced Palestinians from about 52 villages. Now it is home to third and fourth generations of refugees, 41% under the age of 14. Jamal, a camp committee member, told me of his concern for the youths who have no jobs and the supply of drugs that comes into the camp via the Israelis.

I will finish with a message to us campaigners from Bassem Tamimi from Nabi Saleh, a small village that holds non-violent marches every Friday in spite of two deaths, countless injuries, mass imprisonment and continuous IOF harassment. He says: "Thanks to all of you who support Palestine. For the future, to be more effective, activists should be more unified and co-ordinated." And he believes that the third intifada has to be global. A challenge for 2015!

■ For more information on IWPS check out the website www.iwps.info – and for volunteering information, <http://iwps.info/volunteer>

Ten years supporting olive farmers

By Cathi Pawson, co-founder of Zaytoun

Zaytoun is celebrating its tenth anniversary with our family of passionate supporters and customers, all of whom have made our journey as a social enterprise such an enjoyable ride. Between all our customers, from the Orkney Isles solidarity group to the big wholesalers, we have brought a fantastic £3.5 million in trade revenue to Palestinian producers since 2004.

We have been really enjoying the buzz that Palestinian foods are creating in “foodie” circles and to mark our anniversary we asked ten UK chefs, food bloggers and Palestinian cooks to contribute recipes using our products. All of them can be found on our website and are also available from our office.

Our range now includes new products such as freekeh – spring wheat that’s been a part of traditional Palestinian cuisine for centuries. We’ve really increased sales of the delicious Medjoul dates from the Jordan Valley in recent years – the date farmers are struggling with many issues from severe restrictions on water use to the flooding of international markets with settlement dates. Muslim communities have taken up the call to ensure their Ramadan date purchases are from Palestine and we welcome the growing awareness of the UK public about settlement produce.

Of the founding team of four people, three are still working with Zaytoun – testament to the vibrancy of our company which is rooted in grassroots activism in the UK and in Palestine. The team really benefited from the skills and experience brought by our director, Manal Ramadan, giving the company a stronger, more sustainable commercial footing – essential for the growth of sales which of course is what Palestinian farmers need.

Looking ahead to our next ten years, we want to expand awareness of Palestinian artisan produce to people who may never have thought of the country as having such a rich agricultural and culinary heritage. Ultimately, of course, all we do is to benefit the thousands of Palestinian farming families these sales support.

“We currently support around 2,500 families across the West Bank”

We currently support around 2,500 such families across the West Bank and we’re aiming to double that number in the next decade. Taking our customers out to Palestine at harvest time is a key part of what we do. Having the customers meet the producers results in the people who buy and sell Zaytoun products in Britain being able to speak with authority and passion about the families those sales support, about their lives under occupation and the worsening conditions for so many farmers. For so many UK visitors these trips are life-changing and many return year after year.



Olive pickers with farmers on the 2014 Zaytoun harvest trip.

Our director in Palestine, Taysir Arbasi, told us that there is a sense of despondency amongst some communities in Palestine. We know from recently returning harvesters too that farmers feel it is no longer worth picking in certain areas that have been earmarked for settlement expansion.

Those farmers repeatedly tell us that it is so important for them that their stories are told to communities overseas. Isolation is a terrible element of the occupation’s restrictions on ordinary people and it remains one of the most important reasons why we continue to push the sales of their products.

“Farmers repeatedly tell us that it is so important for them that their stories are told to communities overseas”

It is a way of communicating the vitality of Palestinian traditions and the beauty of their land which exists alongside the destruction and despair wrought by the occupation and the difficulty of fulfilling simple tasks such as tending the family grove of olive trees. Ultimately the persistence and determination of Palestinian farmers to do just that is an act of resistance.

To mark our anniversary we are aiming to sponsor 10,000 saplings through the Trees for Life programme run by our suppliers, the Palestine Fair Trade Association. These trees replace some of the many that have been burnt and bulldozed by the IDF and settlers and represent a source of hope, food and income for the farmers.

Please help us reach our target – we are nearly there! To sponsor saplings, go to www.zaytoun.org/products/catalogue/trees-for-life.

■ For recipes, go to www.zaytoun.org/get-involved/resources or email contact@zaytoun.org.

The phoenix will rise, maybe

Following Israel's massive, 50-day assault on Gaza in the summer, Palestine News asked **Mai Ahmed El Nbaheen** to write about what it was like to live there as the people try to cope with the devastation. Mai is a 20 year old student of English literature at the Islamic University of Gaza. Her family of eleven lost their house when it was destroyed by a rocket from an F16 bomber.



It's never been different, but it's always getting worse. During 51 days of war by Israel against Gaza, people in Gaza hoped that something would change and things would get better.

Despite the huge number of martyrs that reached more than 2200 and the massive destruction across all sectors – housing, the economy, agriculture, transport, etc, caused by the Israeli bombs, they still had the will to survive another day of war and pray for a better life.

Round two

Before the war, Gaza had suffered from an oppressive siege from both the Israeli occupation and the Egyptian government. The situation got worse and people predicted a war was coming, but they never predicted that it would be this fierce. The war ended with an agreement that was supposed to end the siege and start an immediate reconstruction. The agreement turned out to be a trap for Gazans and war round two has just began.

In the cab

In Gaza if you take a shared taxi to school or work, you will meet at least three people who each have their own story. The first one has lost his house during the war and yet didn't get

any compensation. The other one has lost some of his family members, he is sad but he believes that life goes on. The strange thing about this man is that he predicts that in the next war, he will join the rest of martyrs.

As for the last man, he is silent. He believes that talking about the war is like bringing it back and if any conversation about the war starts, he asks the people around him to stop it. However, if you get really lucky you will meet the guy who spent a long time at the hospital and he will tell all the stories he lived or saw or heard during his time there. And he won't stop until he curses everyone who kept silent while the war was running or encouraged it.

Unfit for human living

The war didn't only exhaust the people of Gaza, it also damaged all the necessities of life. The health ministry says that almost 50% of the drinking water is unfit for human use because of the toxic substances that came from the Israeli bombs. Soil was also polluted and hundreds of farmers have lost their lands. Recently, strange diseases have appeared especially among the people who live next to the bombed places. The United Nations Country Team says that in 2020 Gaza will become unfit for human living.

Winter is here, yet the sorrow springs

People in Gaza heard lots of promises after the war, starting with ending the siege and going on to the reconstruction. However, almost 28,000 people are still living in the UNRWA shelters.

We heard about the donors' conference and the huge amount of money promised that was supposed to rebuild what people had lost in the war. Gazans now believe that the conference was a lie and almost everyone has betrayed their case.

At Al Remal school, one of the UNRWA shelters, I came across a woman who let me know in five seconds and from a long distance how she feels about the situation. I walked towards her but when she saw me she stood up and went in to the class which is her temporary home and closed the door. I got her message that she is done with the interviews; they just don't help her to get her house back.

This woman is one of thousands of Gazans who have lost hope in any reconstruction soon. The world was worried that winter comes and people in Gaza don't have shelters but, guess what! winter is here and it only revealed their suffering. Haya Abu Shammalah, a 20 year old student, said to me when we passed over a destroyed house: "I think the battle with memories now is worse than the war itself."

I buried my legs with the rest of my dignity

If you ask the people in Gaza what they most wished for during the war, the answer will go like this: some will say they wished

The siege goes on

Two months after the international community pledged \$5.4 billion for the reconstruction of Gaza, building has barely begun. The Israeli siege is as tight as ever and even fewer construction materials are crossing the border than before Israel's devastating mass bombing campaign in the summer.

A report by Oxfam in December said that around 100,000 people – more than half of them children – are still displaced as their homes have been destroyed. Water and sanitation plants, schools and health facilities also urgently need rebuilding.

“Such massive reconstruction will require hundreds of thousands of truckloads of essential materials as soon as possible. However, in November just 287 such truckloads entered Gaza. At this rate, reconstruction and development could take decades,” the report said.

“At this rate, reconstruction and development could take decades”

Severe flooding in November added to the misery and made the situation even more urgent. Families are living in makeshift shelters with no heating or running water and most areas are suffering power cuts of 12 hours a day.



Essential reconstruction materials are aggregates, steel bars and cement – known as the “ABCs”. In the three months since the ceasefire, the amount of ABCs entering Gaza was less than a third of the amount in the three months before the bombardment, and just over 4% of what came in before Israel began its siege in 2007.

The long term needs because of the siege are huge. The UN estimates that Gaza needs at least 89,000 new homes, 226 new schools, as well as massive repairs to other infrastructure. More than 700,000 truckloads of ABCs will be required just to meet Gaza's housing needs, leaving out all the rest.

The mechanism for materials to enter Gaza was designed by the UN special envoy Robert Serry to satisfy Israeli

government concerns that cement should not be diverted to Hamas for military purposes. During a visit in December, Serry said he was “gravely concerned” about the pace of reconstruction and the “insufficient financial assistance from donors.”

A report in the *Guardian* in December revealed that the mechanism for helping the 20,000 householders who should qualify for help in rebuilding had been hit by problems and controversy.

Under the scheme qualifying householders are issued with a coupon allowing them to buy materials from UN inspected warehouses. But the *Guardian* witnessed cement from such warehouses being resold immediately on the black market at up to four times the purchase price.

that their families would stay fine, others will say that they wished to die because they can't bear another war. But the majority will say that they wished for death over getting injured or disabled. You can't blame them for this wish. According to a report by the human rights organisation, the Euro-Mid Observer for Human Rights, Israel's assault has left over 10,800 injuries; 2201 are women while 3300 are children.

The report says that third of the injured children will have a permanent disability. Most of the injuries need medical treatment which, unfortunately, is not available in Gaza. Only a few hundred were able to travel outside Gaza to get the treatment. When I hear someone say, “It must cost you an arm and a leg,” I remember that the war did cost thousands of Gazans their arms and legs.

Israel says that the bombs are for its defence, but how can an awful destruction be used in the name of safety? Afnan el-Nakhlah, a mother with one daughter, had four operations on her hands. Afnan and her child are the only survivors of an Israeli attack on her house; she was found under the rubble. She says it's difficult for her to be a mother and to study with her disabled hand. She added that the pain is killing sometimes and she is now addicted to painkillers.

I remember once I heard one of the victims of Israel's bombardment in 2008 who lost her legs saying: “I stood for this world for too long. Now I bury my legs with the rest of my dignity. Someday they will bloom under the sun and this world will stand for me.”

A message to the world

Dear world,

Whenever you feel that you need a hug, feel free to come to Gaza. Despite the pain they hold in their minds and hearts, people will welcome you and try to make you lose your own sufferings.

You don't have to knock on their doors. They don't have doors; they were destroyed in the war. You only have to go through the cross points that the Egyptians and Israelis have made. It will take some time but don't worry, we will wait for you as we have been waiting for eight years for them to open.

Flashpoint Jerusalem

By Kamel Hawwash

On 21 December the leader of the liberal Hatnua party and supposedly the moderate face of Israeli politics, Tzipi Livni, declared at the Western Wall that “Jerusalem will stay under Israeli sovereignty for ever,” as campaigning ahead of the March 2015 Israeli elections hotted up.

Her comments are significant as there has been a steep rise in unrest and outbreaks of violence in Jerusalem. It began in June when Israeli extremists murdered 16-year-old Mohammed Abu Khdeir in a revenge attack for the killing of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. A series of attacks by both sides followed, resulting in tens of deaths and injuries, days of rioting and the level of hatred and fear between the two sides being raised to unprecedented levels.

Behind the immediate triggers for the violence lie the long term causes of tension. Besides the occupation and Israel’s relentless Judaisation of the city, one of the main causes is the attempts by some factions in Israel to impose a new reality on the site of the Alharam Alshareef (Noble Sanctuary) which Jews call Temple Mount.

This is the site of the glorious Dome of the Rock whose iconic golden roof is the defining image of Jerusalem, captured in every visitor’s photograph or “selfie.” The mosque shelters the rock from which the prophet Mohammed ascended to Heaven to meet Allah. On the same hilltop plateau is the AlAqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam, and bordering the plateau is the Western Wall (or what Jews call the Wailing Wall), the most holy religious site for Jews.

The status quo is that only Muslims are allowed to pray on the plateau, although other people are allowed to visit it, and the perceived attempt to change this has not only angered Palestinians and Muslims the world over, it nearly brought the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan to an end.

The Jordanian Ambassador to Israel was recalled to Amman on 5 November as a sign of protest. Facing the threat of losing one of its peace partners in the Middle East, Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu went to Amman to reassure King Abdullah that the status quo was not under threat. Since Netanyahu openly backs aggressive moves by Jewish settlers to take over ever more areas of Palestinian East Jerusalem, few Palestinians believe his assurances.



Palestinians cleaning up debris outside the AlAqsa mosque after protests over large groups of Zionist activists visiting during the Jewish Sukkot holiday. Photo: Mahmoud Illean, Demotix

Jerusalem – Alquds – is a holy city to which billions of people around the world feel a religious attachment because of its diverse history. Temples, churches and mosques have graced its skyline for centuries. It has existed through countless wars and under different ruling entities, including most recently the Turkish Empire and a British mandate which ended with the creation of the state of Israel and the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian population in 1948.

Muslims conquered Jerusalem – then ruled by Christians – in 637 AD and Alharam Alshareef has been an exclusively Muslim prayer area ever since, except for periods during the medieval Christian crusades. Zionists argue that two successive temples had stood on the site before the mosques were built there and some believe that this gives them a right to pray at the site. A minority of extremists want the mosques replaced altogether by the construction of a “third temple.”

Since Israel took control of Jerusalem from the Jordanians following the 1967 war it has carried out extensive archaeological explorations, including digging tunnels. It is important to note that no conclusive evidence has been found to confirm the existence of either temple on the site.

In 1967 the then Israeli prime minister, Levi Eshkol, met leaders of the different religions and assured them that people of all faiths would be free to pray at their holy sites. Under the peace treaty, administrative control of Alharam Alshareef was ceded to the Jordanian Waqf (Islamic Trust). Then Defence Minister, Moshe Dayan, announced that Jews would be allowed to visit the site but not to hold religious services there.

In March 2013, Palestinian PM Mahmoud Abbas, fearing an attempt by Israel to extend its sovereignty over Alharam Alshareef, signed an agreement with Jordan for the defence of the Holy Muslim and Christian sites in Jerusalem.

Despite Israeli government assurances that the status quo is not under threat, Israel’s attempts to change it can be traced back to the deliberately provocative visit to the site in 2000 by then Likud Party leader, Ariel Sharon, accompanied by soldiers, which triggered the second intifada.

In recent years the Israeli authorities frequently bar the site to Muslim worshippers below a certain age and close it to most visitors from the West Bank and Gaza. There are also repeated



Zionist activists flood into the AlAqsa mosque courtyard, protected by Israeli security forces. Photo Mahmoud Illean, Demotix

Time for artists to defy pro-Israel censorship

By Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi

A panel discussion at Amnesty International in October about the controversy over London's Tricycle Theatre and the UK Jewish Film Festival proved to be a most heartening display of determination from many artists, especially theatre people, not to allow Palestine to become a no-go area as a result of threats and libellous attacks from Zionists.

The theatre had asked that, while Israel was pounding Gaza, the Festival it was due to host for the eighth time should not take funds from the Israeli Embassy. The Tricycle was subjected to pickets alleging discrimination against British Jews. Culture Secretary Sajid Javid – a member of Conservative Friends of Israel – publicly rebuked the theatre. Artistic Director Indhu Rubasingham faced racist abuse and calls for her dismissal.

Chaired by novelist Kamila Shamsie, a former trustee of Free Word and English PEN, and with two playwrights on the panel and an audience populated by actors, writers and other artists, evidence presented at the discussion of false charges of anti-semitism being used to threaten artists and arts organisations generated anger and a determination to fight back.

"When we defend people against charges of anti-semitism we should be angrier at the libellous accusations and keep

the main focus where it belongs – on Israel's racism and illegal actions," said playwright Caryl Churchill.

Panellist Antony Lerman, a former Director of the Institute for Jewish

Policy Research and a founding member of the Jewish Forum for Justice and Human Rights, said it was perfectly legitimate for an arts institution to decline funding.

Playwright Tanika Gupta had been one of hundreds of theatre people to sign a letter to the *Guardian* in support of the Tricycle's Rubasingham. It said: "Anyone who truly wants to stand against antisemitism needs to stand with the Tricycle Theatre and challenge those who are accusing it in a disproportionate, unjust and ill-informed way."

Bill McAllister, former Director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, said that during his tenure (1977–1990), the ICA was directly threatened with blacklisting by the Board of Deputies of British Jews for hosting the UK Palestinian Film Festival.

■ See the discussion at <http://artistsright2sayno.wordpress.com>



Kamila Shamsie (left) and Tanika Gupta



Jerusalem's Arab-Jewish school damaged by arson in November. Photo: Mahmoud Illean, Demotix

incursions – as seen by Muslims – of Zionist extremists onto the site, heavily protected by Israeli security forces.

These include such groups as large crowds as many as 400 strong, groups of Orthodox men leading scores of very small children by the hand, and groups of chanting "students." Many of these visits are organised by the well-established Temple Institute whose goals are "to rekindle the flame of the Holy Temple in the hearts of mankind through education" and "to do all in our limited power to bring about the building of the Holy Temple in our time." Its website carries images of models of Alharam Alshareef with the "third temple" in place but the Dome of the Rock and AlAqsa mosque conspicuously absent.

The Institute receives funding from the Israeli government, according to a 2013 investigation by Israeli Army Radio. It revealed that over the previous decade, the Israeli Education Ministry and the Culture and Sport Ministry had transferred between NIS 300,000 and 700,000 to the Institute.

The temperature has also been raised by visits by senior Israeli politicians, including the Deputy Speaker of the Knesset,

Moshe Feiglin, and rabbis, including Yehuda Glick, a US-born activist and former deputy director of the Temple Institute, who has repeatedly been arrested while praying, walking and filming videos on Alharam Alshareef and who recently survived being shot.

Many of these visits have been met with protests by Muslims which the Israeli Occupation Forces have responded to in a heavy handed manner, including beatings, tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets.

"Israel has treated these peaceful protestors as if they were terrorists"

In order to protect Alharam Alshareef from Israeli incursions, groups of Palestinians have taken it in turn to spend days at a time at the site and to confront the unwelcome Zionist visitors and the IOF. They are generally referred to as Almurabitoon or AlAqsa Defenders and include men and women of all ages. Israel has treated these peaceful protestors as if they were terrorists, arresting them, confiscating their ID cards and banning them from entering the site.

Various groups both in Israel and the United States are passionately committed to building the "third temple" on the site of the Dome of the Rock and AlAqsa mosques. They either do not understand the consequences of their actions or think that Israel acts with such impunity that it could replace the mosques with a temple and get away with it.

But it would be difficult for even Israel's staunchest allies to sit back and allow it to enrage over a billion Muslims, to many of whom the site is more precious than their lives.

Kamel Hawwash is originally from Jerusalem and is vice chair of the PSC

800 miles for Palestine

Caroline Poland from Sheffield completed the 800 miles of the England section of the “Right to Roam/End to End” walk for Palestine on 5 October, finishing on the top of Mam Tor in Derbyshire with 50 supporters and a giant Palestinian flag there to meet her.

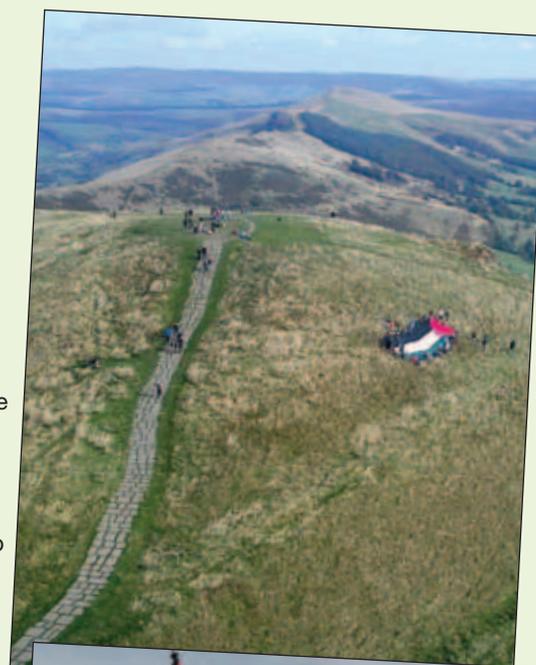
She walked it in sections, altogether covering from Land’s End to the Scottish border, and raised over £3,000 for women’s education and children’s projects in refugee camps in Gaza. On the same day children in Gaza flew kites with placards saying “fly kites not drones” bringing home to everyone the harsh reality of life in the Gaza strip.

Caroline said: “I wanted to honour the struggle people in this country have had to achieve the Right to Roam – the right to walk across the land – but also to highlight the stark contrast between our freedoms and the severe restrictions of movement for all Palestinians, in particular on the 1.8m people within the narrow 26-mile Gaza Strip.”

Caroline will continue her walk from Kirk Yetholm, the end of the Pennine Way, just across the Scottish border, to John O’Groats in Scotland in 2015.

If you want to learn more about these projects or donate, information can be found on www.SheffieldPSC.org.uk or email: enquiries@sheffieldpsc.org.uk

The flag photo was taken by paraglider pilot supporter, Ash Ghinn



Naming Gaza’s dead



Lancaster PSC held a “Naming Gaza’s Dead” vigil in August in which over 100 people held up a series of white fabric rolls, over 100m in length, carrying the names of almost 600 people who have died in Gaza in recent times.

Organisers said “As we hear the daily rise in the number of dead it is easy to lose sight of the reality behind the numbers. The purpose of writing the names of the dead in this manner is to create a graphic image that brings that reality back to us. For the group of people who undertook this task it was a sombre but galvanising experience.”



A Shadow Cabinet football team played at a 5-a-side football tournament in Milton Keynes in September which some members of Milton Keynes PSC attended wearing their Palestine football team shirts.

Sadiq Khan, Labour’s Shadow Justice Secretary and a member of Labour Friends of Palestine (centre), thanked them for their work on behalf of Palestine and wished them every success.

Women's marathon

Hayley Kemp, secretary of Plymouth PSC, ran a marathon with her friend, **Pip Davey**, across the West Bank last year to mark her 50th birthday and to raise money for Medical Aid for Palestinians. This October the pair repeated the feat and were joined by Palestinian farmer and activist, **Mona Ahmed Awda**, for the entire distance and four young women for the last five kilometres. Thus was born the first Palestinian Women's Marathon. Here Hayley writes about some of the highs and lows of an amazing adventure.



Hayley, 3rd from right, with Mona and Pip left of her, flanked by the younger runners.

Running the marathon was the highlight of our week but it came with many challenges. Last year it was a reasonably comfortable 30C and cloudy but this year it was 33C and not a cloud in the sky.

Mona has had land stolen from her to build the Israeli separation barrier and she asked to join us after hearing of our run last year. As Pip and I ran with her, Plymouth film maker Fiona Evans travelled in the support car with our invaluable driver and fixer, Muawya.

The marathon didn't get off to a great start when with less than 48 hours to go I was in hospital on a drip. I managed to run just over half the distance with the help of antibiotics and painkillers.

Along the way we had to knock on houses to use the bathroom and to allow Mona to pray. The only problem with this was trying to get away again as people insisted on making us tea. This year was

quieter than last due to Eid but people were still waving to us, stopping to talk to us and beeping in support.

Israeli soldiers inevitably stopped us regularly and a vehicle with soldiers was also sent to check us. What worked in our favour was that they were not sure what we are doing or why. It demonstrates that within Palestine you are not even free to run.

**“Within Palestine
you are not even free
to run”**

Pip and Mona did a fabulous job in keeping each other going and it was great to have the four young women joining us for the last five kilometres.

Running for sport is very rare in the West Bank, particularly for women, so respect to them all.

Starting at Jenin refugee camp, we finished at Tulkarm refugee camp where women from the peace centre and women's group were waiting for us. It was a proud moment to see Mona getting her medal. And I can never express how proud Mona's husband, Fayez, and children were of her.

During the rest of the week we found the restriction on movement was particularly bad with Israeli soldiers continually disrupting our travel. One incident at an agricultural gate through the separation barrier was particularly distressing when a soldier boasted to me that he had killed 25 children with his gun. I didn't believe him but it was sad to see him laughing and thinking this was funny.

When we tried to visit friends at Upper Shuffa we found soldiers had mounted a checkpoint at the village and wouldn't let us through. We were forced to go via another checkpoint which added 25 kilometres to our two kilometre journey. The soldier who stopped us was from the US, volunteering to do the draft. The reason for stopping us – they didn't want us travelling past an Israeli settlement.

We ended the week with a peaceful demonstration at Kufr Qaddum against the theft of land to build a settlement. Before it even began Israeli soldiers came into the village and sprayed the houses and people with skunk. I can only describe this as like having a soiled nappy in your mouth. You cannot get rid of the stench or taste.

They also fired tear gas directly at us. Our skin was burning, our eyes, noses and mouths were streaming. You feel as if your face is burning up as you choke and vomit.

Next year I will organise the marathon for November when it will be a bit cooler. We have a women's cooperative and the Tulkarm women's council interested in taking part, so even more women will be running.

It has been the most amazing adventure and a real team effort between us Brits and Palestinians and every person involved is a key player. The best part of all is the overwhelming support we have received and the money we raised for MAP – over £3000.

Please get in touch if you would like one of us to give a talk. And you can still donate at www.justgiving.com/HayleyandPhilippa

Israel's bills paid by Europe

Brussels-based journalist and political activist **David Cronin** is a long established observer and critique of the European Union's relationship with Israel and is the author of *Europe's Alliance With Israel: Aiding the Occupation* (Pluto, 2011). He has attempted to make citizen's arrests of Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, and Tony Blair. Here he gives his analysis of the current situation with regard to EU aid to Palestine.



UN "reconstruction mechanism." Israel has been given a veto on who can and cannot receive cement and other building material.

Meanwhile, the EU runs a €9 million-per-year (£7 million) "support mission" for the Palestinian Authority's police in the West Bank. A core objective of that "mission" is to boost cooperation between the Israeli and PA "security forces." Enforcement of the occupation is thereby being outsourced to the Palestinians themselves.

One sordid example of Israel's impunity is that the EU keeps on picking up the tabs for the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Since Operation Cast Lead – Israel's assault on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009 – the EU has contributed around €540 million (£428 million) to the reconstruction effort. That sum comprised more than one-third of the total €1.3 billion (£1 billion) that the Union has spent in Gaza during the past decade.

Israel attacked Gaza once again in the summer of 2014, killing more than 2,200 Palestinians. The schools and hospitals bombed by Israel had been funded by the EU. Yet despite how there is a moral imperative to hold Israel accountable for the destruction, the Union is instead contributing to the repair bill.

In one of her final engagements as the bloc's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton pledged in October 2014 that the EU would donate €450 million (£358 million) to rebuild Gaza – once again.

Foreign aid is big business. Consultants and policy wonks get paid handsomely by major donors to advise on how money ostensibly earmarked for alleviating poverty should be used.

A consortium of aid "experts" – led by the Rome-based firm Development Researchers Network – has been hired by the European Commission to evaluate its aid to Palestine. The consortium's report, published in July 2014, concluded that the EU "has not been willing or able" to address the "constraints" placed on its aid activities by the Israel.

It's not difficult to work out how the EU could start addressing those "constraints." Legal proceedings could be undertaken against Israel for bombing infrastructure financed by the European taxpayer. And economic sanctions could be introduced against Israel as a signal that its denial of Palestinian rights will no longer be tolerated. The consortium, however, did not recommend any bold action – just a few timid "reforms."

Under international law, an occupying power is obliged to meet the basic needs of the people under occupation. The EU's status as the largest donor to the West Bank and Gaza means that it is relieving Israel of its obligations.

Some of this aid is of direct help to the occupation. In 2012, the EU announced a €13 million (£10 million) "gift" of X-ray and computer equipment to Kerem Abu Shalem, the crossing for goods between Gaza and present-day Israel.

That crossing is controlled by Israel, which has placed severe restrictions on imports to and exports from Gaza. By bestowing that gift, the EU became a junior partner for a medieval siege.

Such cooperation is inherently problematic. And it looks set to be expanded. The aid promised to Gaza in October 2014 will go through a

“Enforcement of the occupation is thereby being outsourced to the Palestinians themselves”

Bolstering the private sector in Palestine has been identified as a key priority for the EU's aid activities in 2015. This is also the priority of the Middle East "quartet," led by Tony Blair, of which the EU is a part.

In March, 2014, Blair's office in Jerusalem published a blueprint for the corporate capture of Palestine. Titled *The Initiative for a Palestinian Economy*, it advocated that major firms be lured to the West Bank and Gaza by developing



Israeli bulldozer destroying EU supported structure in the West Bank village of Susya

Jenin Freedom Theatre visit

By Zoe Lafferty

In the spring of 2015 the Jenin Freedom Theatre will premiere a new production called *The Siege* across the West Bank and then embark on its first ever tour of Britain and Ireland. As part of this programme we will be undertaking talks, debates, film screenings, art exhibitions and workshops.

The Siege is inspired by the real stories of a group of fighters who at the height of the second Intifada took refuge in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, an event that with time has taken on almost mythical proportions.

The Freedom Theatre was built in the heart of the Palestinian resistance in Jenin Refugee Camp in 2006. The aim was to create a political and artistic movement of theatre and filmmakers who could fight oppression through art and use cultural resistance as a tool for change.

Due to the provocative nature of its work the theatre has had its building attacked, received numerous death threats, had its members interrogated and imprisoned and, in 2011, the theatre's artistic director, Juliano Mer Khamis, was murdered.

We aim to create work of the highest professional level that becomes a leading force in the revival of Palestinian culture. We support and offer the very basic element of life: freedom to speak.

The Siege

May 2002, Bethlehem. A group of armed men seek sanctuary in one of the world's holiest sites as the Israeli army closes in with

helicopters, tanks and snipers. Along with the fighters are some 200 priests, nuns and civilians.

The siege of the Church of the Nativity by Israeli troops lasts for 39 days, paralysing the centre of Bethlehem and keeping tens of thousands under curfew. Inside the church the besieged are hungry and weakening. The smell of unwashed bodies and broken lavatories is mixed with the stench from the suppurating wounds of the injured. Two dead bodies are decomposing in a cave below the church.

While the world is watching, the fighters are faced with the question of whether to struggle to the end or to surrender. No matter what they choose, they will have to leave their families and their homeland forever.

The production raises important questions about strategies of resistance against military might and gives a unique insight into the Palestinian armed resistance and the struggle for freedom.

■ For more information please visit: www.thefreedomtheatre.org
Or to get involved in making this happen please contact: zoe@thefreedomtheatre.org



John Kerry and Catherine Ashton at the Cairo aid conference

“special economic zones” and offering “financial incentives.”

“Special economic zones” are a fancy term for sweat-shops. “Financial incentives” mean exempting major companies from most, if not all, taxes.

Blair's blueprint was drawn up in consultation with about 100 Israeli and Palestinian business “leaders.” Munib Masri, a billionaire from Nablus, is among those entrepreneurs enjoying cordial relations with Blair.

While ordinary Palestinians and their supporters worldwide are boycotting Israel, Masri has formed alliances with Israelis who benefit directly from the occupation. They include Rami Levy, who

runs supermarkets in Jewish-only settlements in the West Bank, and Yossi Vardi, a technology guru who has relied largely on software engineers trained by the Israeli military.

There is something quite sinister going on here. Blair and the European Union are being guided by a wealthy Palestinian elite happy to cuddle up to the oppressor.

The EU has long

been eager to promote cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians. EU-sponsored discussions about joint energy projects overlook Israel's record of exploiting the Palestinians' natural resources in a manner that violates international law.

I'm not arguing that the EU should stop all aid to the Palestinians. Funding cuts for healthcare and education would cause a marked increase in suffering among a people who have already suffered too much.

Rather, I'm calling for a modicum of honesty. The EU's representatives should quit portraying their aid efforts as noble and generous. They should admit that

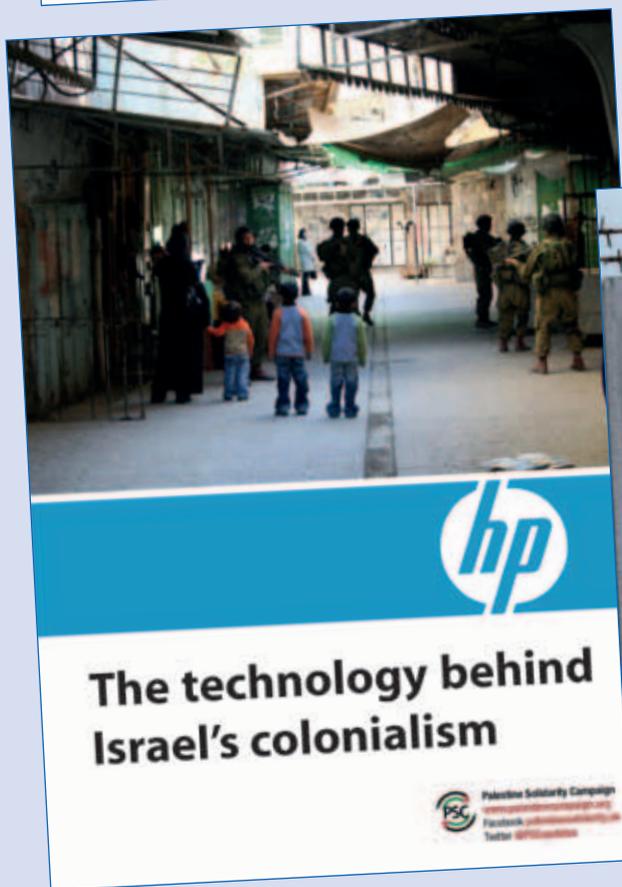
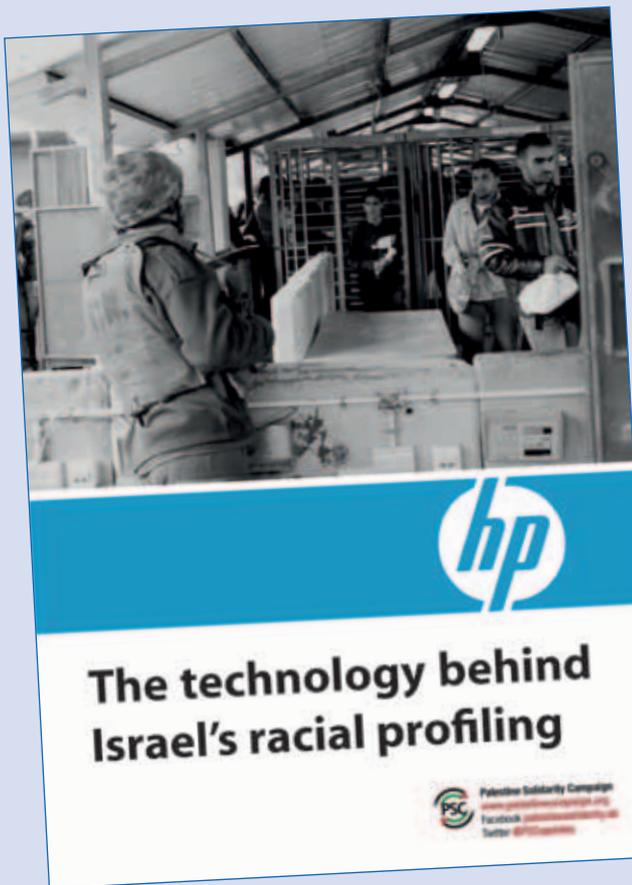
European taxpayers are paying bills that Israel is legally obliged to pay. And they should sue Israel for destroying EU-funded infrastructure.

“Aid is turning Palestine into a laboratory for a perverse experiment that marries capitalism and militarism”

Much of the EU's aid is clearly indefensible, however. Far from bringing the Palestinians closer to freedom, the Union is requiring the oppressor and the oppressed to pretend they are the best of buddies. Even worse, such aid is turning Palestine into a laboratory for a perverse experiment that marries capitalism and militarism.

By pandering to an elite that is already doing nicely from the status quo, the experiment serves to entrench injustice.

■ David Cronin's latest book is *Corporate Europe: How Big Business Sets Policies on Food, Climate and War* (Pluto, 2013)



Photos – top left: Kashfi Halford (25 April 2006), top right: Zorihah (16 January 2009), bottom left: Jill Granberg (26 November 2009)