



LIVE FROM Palestine

TESTIMONIES
FROM THE
NONVIOLENT
RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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NORTH AMERICA NAKBA TOUR

By Jeff Pekarul,
April 2016



Amena and Mariam

Samir Salem

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As we go to print, the North America Nakba Tour has returned to northern California for the last few speaking engagements before Mariam Fathalla and Amena Ashkar return to Lebanon. They began here in the Bay Area in April and traveled throughout the continent by car, speaking in cities and towns across the country.

Mariam, now 86 years old, has spent the last 68 years in a crowded, makeshift refugee camp in Lebanon. She has raised three generations in the same camp, all waiting to return to their home in Palestine. She has lived through five Israeli invasions of Lebanon, as well as the 1976 Tel al-Zaatar camp massacre that killed more than 2000 of the refugees there. Amena Ashkar is the granddaughter of Nakba survivors. Amena has known no other home than her refugee camp in Lebanon, and Mariam not since she was expelled from her home in Palestine in 1948.

THE NAKBA

On May 14, 1948, as Zionist leader David Ben Gurion was proclaiming a Jewish state in Palestine, his heavily armed troops seized the ancient Palestinian Arab town of al-Zeeb and drove out most of the inhabitants. 17-year-old Mariam Fathalla was one of them. She and her young husband, Mohammed Atayah, and their families were forced to flee to Lebanon, along with most of the town. By the end of the year, the 4,000-year-old community had been leveled to the ground. More than half the Arab Palestinians in Palestine were killed or expelled and more than half of the cities, towns and villages of Palestine were made to disappear, a crime that Palestinians call al-Nakba (the Catastrophe).

THE SPEAKING TOUR

Mariam and Amena brought a different message from other Palestinians that Americans

often hear. They are not living under Israeli occupation. Israel does not allow them to visit their homes, much less live there. Amena never met an Israeli or a Jew until she came to the US, and Umm Akram not since 1948. As exiles, they have a different perspective from Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and the part of Palestine that became Israel. The Free Palestine Movement, NorCal ISM and the al-Awda Palestine Right to Return Coalition organized this tour because we think their perspective is important for Americans to hear.

We are strong in spirit and we know that justice is on our side. We believe that our exile will end if we do not give up.

INTERVIEW WITH AMENA ASHKAR

Amena took time to speak about the tour during their stop in Washington, D.C., after they had traveled through and spoken in northern and southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Mississippi, Georgia and Virginia.

Q: *Do any cities or experiences really stand out for you?*

A: Each place has something special. The African American community in Jackson,

we described life in the camps there, they told us the root cause of our struggle is the same as the one their community has faced for generations — imperialism.

Q: *What are conditions like in the camps in Lebanon?*

A: Our camp is only a third of a square mile and densely populated. In recent years, 25,000 refugees from the war in Syria moved in with us and there are now over 50,000 people sharing our small space. The infrastructure is very poor and especially during the winter when we have floods, the poorly built houses sometimes collapse. There is no school in the camp and no place for children to play either. The only place for them to play is the cemetery.

The Syrian war has made things much harder. Before the war, Palestinian workers took jobs in the shadows, at lower wages than Lebanese. We are not permitted to work in 72 different professions or to own property outside the camps. Since Syrians began arriving, they have been taking many of the jobs we formerly got, leaving less and less for us to survive on. To make matters worse, UNWRA is facing a funding crisis and cutting back on many programs, even while the need is growing much larger. Things are very difficult.

Q: *What questions do people ask you and Mariam at the Nakba Tour talks?*

A: People often ask what we would like them to do. My answer is that you here should know better than us what needs to be done. You are citizens of the great power that is bankrolling Israel. Learn about what your taxes are paying for and if you don't like it, use your influence to change your government's policies. And we ask them to please support the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland.

The other question we often hear is how we manage to have hope after so many years in exile. Our people have lived with oppression for a long time, even from before 1948. We are strong in spirit and we know that justice is on our side. We believe that our exile will end if we do not give up. I am from the third generation in the camps, and my home in Palestine means as much to me as to Mariam. We will never give up.

Mariam Fathalla and Amena Ashkar are residents of Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon.



Samir Salem

Amena and a friend at the White House

Mississippi was really a high point, though. The people there were so lovely. They knew about the Palestinian issue, but not about the refugees outside the occupied West Bank and Gaza. When

From a Stateless Palestinian Refugee to Signers of the “Leahy letter” in the US Congress

April 2016

The following letter is from 86-year-old Mariam Fathalla, a stateless Palestinian from a refugee camps in Lebanon. It is addressed to the eleven Congressional signers of the “Leahy letter,” asking secretary of State John Kerry to report on Israeli and Egyptian violations of human rights. Mariam personally took the letter on April 26, 2016, to members of the US Congress and their staffers. In at least one case, this act brought tears to the eyes of a staffer.

April 25, 2016

Hon. [name]
Congressional address
Washington, DC

Dear [title] [name],

I hope you care whether US policy supports human rights violations. I want to tell you about such violations, because they happened to me.

On May 14, 1948, the “birthday” of “Israel”, my village of al-Zeeb in northern Palestine was invaded by heavily armed Zionist troops, and all of the inhabitants were expelled. I was 18 years old. After some of my unarmed neighbors were massacred by the invaders, I and my husband and our families fled to Lebanon along with the rest of the town. By the end of the year, our 4,000-year-old community had been leveled to the ground.

[title] [name], this is a gross human rights violation known as ethnic cleansing or genocide. More than half the Arab Palestinians in Palestine were killed or expelled and more than half of the cities, towns and villages of Palestine were made to disappear, a crime that we Palestinians call al-Nakba (the Catastrophe).

I have lived for the last 68 years in a refugee camp in south Lebanon called Ein el-Helweh, waiting to return to my home in al-Zeeb, as US and international law requires. During that time Israel has invaded south Lebanon multiple times and even bombed our crowded refugee camp, killing lots of unarmed

civilians, including children. Al-Nakba did not end in 1948, and it continues today.

Some good American people invited me to come to the US to tell our story to the US and Canadian people. I have seen your beautiful country, and I have met many Palestinians who have made the US and Canada their second homes. Our situation in Lebanon is not as good. We are stateless and have few rights. But we are not seeking another country. We have a home and a country, and we want to return to it, and this is our right.

[title] [name], US support is enabling Israel to continue its violation of our rights. We want only to return to our homes in Palestine and to live there in freedom. I want to see my beloved town of al-Zeeb again and to watch my children and grandchildren continue our family there. What is the US policy about this? What can you do to help us?

Mariam Fathalla
Resident of Ein el-Helweh Refugee Camp
Sidon, Lebanon

Mariam cooking
while on tour



Samir Salem

IOF Executions in Hebron Caught on Camera

By Badee Dwaik, March 2016

Editors Note: please forgive the graphic nature of the photo in this article. This is the unfortunate reality of Palestinians living under occupation in Al-Khalil (Hebron).

Shortly after arriving in Toronto, Canada for a speaking tour, I opened my phone and watched a video sent to me by Imad Abu Shamesiya. Imad and his wife are both activists with the Human Rights Defenders group in Hebron, where I also live. The video showed

been rebuilt and expanded, but allows only one lane for entry, and one for exit. Each resident must undergo a thorough inspection while inside a 'container', while being viewed through a glass barrier with CCTV and recording devices. Each person attempting to pass the checkpoint must produce an ID card listing their place of residence and the new number. The ID card policy is being used to displace residents and make normal life impossible.

This is what I documented with my camera from the Human Rights Defenders Group and what my wife, Faiza, and I saw with our own eyes.

the murder in cold blood of a Palestinian by an IOF soldier at a checkpoint in the Tel Rumeida area of Hebron, just meters from Imad's house. I phoned him and he was very shaken and distressed by what he'd seen.

Since the Intifada began in October, new IOF tactics have been used against Palestinians in Tel Rumeida that have made life even harder than it already was. The area has been turned into a virtual prison and residents now have numbers, similar to prison inmate numbers. The military checkpoint on Al-Shuhada Street has

HADEEL HASHLAMON: A BEGINNING FOR THE EXECUTIONS

A series of brutal executions began with the murder of martyr Hadeel Hashlamon. His murder was documented by a volunteer from Brazil working with Eappi program. The photos were distributed to international media agencies, and the volunteer recounted the story on his own blog. Since then, the area has witnessed more execution-style murders from Tel-Rumeida through Al-Salemeh neighborhood, to the illegal settlement known as Kiryat Arba.

Palestinians were forcibly expelled from the land upon which Kiryat Arba and other settlements in the settlement belt are built.

IMAD RECOUNTS THE EXECUTION INCIDENT

On Thursday morning at 8:30, I was having coffee with my wife Faiza as usual when I heard several bullet shots near my house in Tel-Rumeida. I left the house quickly with my video camera towards the location of shooting. The first thing I saw was an Israeli soldier on the side of the street pointing his rifle at a young man on the ground who was wearing a black jacket and black trousers. While filming I heard

Alftah Alshrief before he was executed.

Photo: Imad Abu Shamsiya



noises from other soldiers so I pointed the camera towards the noise where I saw another young man covered in his blood, with blood coming out of his face. This man was wearing a grey jacket, while the first guy in black seemed to be still alive as I was filming. In less than a minute, a large group of soldiers and settlers gathered in the location and an Israeli ambulance arrived and gave aid to an Israeli soldier without attending to either of the Palestinian men. The man in the grey jacket didn't move while the man in black was moving his arms and legs while on the ground. After a soldier was put in the ambulance, I heard the soldiers getting ready to shoot while I was still filming, and a soldier stepped towards the man wearing a black jacket, shooting him in the head directly from a very close distance even though he didn't form any threat to the soldiers or settlers as he was on the ground. The man immediately died and his head was blown up to pieces visible on the ground. This is what I documented with my camera from the Human Rights Defenders Group and what my wife Faiza and I saw with our own eyes.



THE MAP OF EXECUTIONS IS NOT RANDOM

The locations of these execution-style murders is seen to be in areas around settlers, especially in Hebron; Imad says that 13 murders in cold blood were carried out in Tel-Rumeida and Al-Shuhada street, as well as executions near Al-Ibrahimi mosque and Kiryat Arba. This is in addition to Palestinians murdered in what is known as Gush Etzion north of Hebron, and Beit Enon. This makes it clear that there is a plan to cement the settler reality and escalate strategies against the residents of the land, particularly in the heart of Hebron to link all settlements through the Jewish neighborhood, using all

policies possible of ethnic cleansing and silent displacement, making Hebron a living example of apartheid in the world today.

Watch a video of the murder. https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=x67sNvWAR_w

Badee Dwaik is a coordinator with the Human Rights Defenders activist group in occupied Al-Khalil (Hebron).

Top: Ramzi Alqsrawi after he was executed.

Below: Alftah Alshrief after he was executed.

Photos: Imad Abu Shamsiyya

PLEASE HELP US GIVE MORE EQUIPMENT!

Dear friends—Israeli crimes need documentation. Please help provide more cameras, laptops and related equipment to Human Rights Defenders in Hebron. We need \$4,000, but one of our donors is offering a matching grant, so we only need \$2,000 from the rest of you. Please be generous. We have to assume that this will not be the last request. Israeli forces have destroyed our donated equipment in the past, and will probably do so again.

March Palbox

Our solidarity community is growing and has made much positive progress over the years like the rise of the BDS campaign, an increase in campus activism and the increased visibility of Palestinian voices in the media. But we can't overlook the Palestinian economy which has been strangled and blockaded just like Palestinian lives and property. With that in mind I've worked with the Northern California chapter of the International Solidarity

Movement (NorCal ISM) to bring you Palbox!

Palbox is a totally new way to support Palestinian farmers, artisans, craftspeople and Palestinian nonviolent resistance that completely bypasses all Israeli control. Palbox is a gourmet gift box delivered four times a year to your doorstep and includes: delectable, organic, fair trade Palestinian foods, amazing crafts & jewelry, and bath and body goods that are guaranteed to make you smile —www.palbox.org



www.palbox.org

Tree Planting and Protest in Beit al-Baraka

By International Solidarity Movement, al-Khalil Team, April 2016

Trees were planted and a demonstration took place today at Beit al-Baraka today to protest the extension of the illegal Gush Etzion settlement bloc.

An international presence had been requested by the organizers so two ISM volunteers headed to Beit Ummar to meet with them, and along with three Israeli activists headed to Beit

This fenced area is now a closed military zone forbidden to Palestinians.

Close to this closed area a group of around 25 local Palestinians, and the international and Israeli activists planted a number of trees on Palestinian land as a protest, attended by several Palestinian Authority officials, and some press. After the tree planting,

Palestinians fear is that the entire Gush Etzion junction will be closed to Palestinians, permanently closing the road between Hebron and Behlehem for them.

al-Baraka, 38-dunam (9.3 acre) compound located near the al-Arrub refugee camp. This is an area which used to be owned by Palestinians, but which has now been fenced off, either by settlers or by the American millionaire, Irving Moskowitz, who is rumoured to have purchased the site through a front company in 2012 in order to create an illegal Israeli settlement there. What is very clear is that this area is earmarked for illegal settlement and will form a strategic extension to the illegal Gush Etzion settlement bloc that overlooks the area. What local Palestinians fear is that the entire Gush Etzion junction will be closed to Palestinians, permanently closing the road between Hebron and Behlehem for them.

which was observed by Israeli soldiers, the demonstrators marched peacefully towards the closed area of land and the soldiers and confronted them, during which there was some arguing and scuffling with soldiers. Two men were detained for a time, but nobody was arrested.

LOCAL VILLAGERS PLANTING TREES

The creeping extension of the Gush Etzion cluster of settlements which Israelis call 'the gateway to Jerusalem' and increasing tension and violence at the junction make this entire area a frightening place for Palestinians to pass through.



Local villagers planting trees

Photo: ISM



Villagers Protesting on their Land

Photo: ISM

Donations Needed

For years, ISM—Northern California has rented only a supply closet at the Grassroots House, 2022 Blake Street in Berkeley, California, with right of access to the common area for meetings and other activities. Now, at long last, we are able to rent office space, as well. The cost of the two spaces together is a

mere \$190/mo. At the present time, however, we are coming up short.

Renting this office is a dream come true that enables us to expand our activities and capabilities, but means that we have an additional monthly expense. Will you help? We especially need you to commit to a regular monthly amount for

this fixed expense. You can instruct your bank accordingly or select the monthly donation option at our website, www.ism-norcal/contribute.html.

We also need of office furnishings, and volunteers to contribute time at the new office. Call or write us to help.

NORCAL ISM Support Group

405 Vista Heights Rd.
El Cerrito, CA 94530

www.ism-norcal.org
solidarity@ism-norcal.org
510-236-4250



For more information or to register: www.ism-norcal.org/

Call for Volunteers

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) needs nonviolent resistance volunteers to stand with Palestinians against the theft and colonization of Palestinian land. You will witness and report human rights violations, participate in nonviolent demonstrations, resist home demolitions and land confiscations, accompany children and patients to school and hospital, remove roadblocks, or just share time with Palestinians, listen to them, and help ensure that their voices are heard. When you return to your community you will be better equipped to advocate for the freedom and self-determination of the Palestinian people.

More info: solidarity@ism-norcal.org,
510-236-4250, www.ism-norcal.org or www.palsolidarity.org ■



Speakers Available

ISM volunteers who have recently returned from Palestine are available to make presentations to high school and college campuses, churches, organizations and house parties.