



LIVE FROM Palestine

TESTIMONIES FROM THE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT FOR FREE PALESTINE WORK IN LEBANON

By Katie Leslie, October 2016



Katie Leslie, SFP

The Nahr al-Bared maternity hospital.

Editor: Jeff Pekrul

IN THIS ISSUE

Solidarity Movement for Free Palestine Work in Lebanon pages 1-2

Volunteering at Refugee Camps in Jordan page 3

Gaza Blockade is Threatening Fresh Water Resources pages 4-5

How an ISM Member Cheated Death page 6

Call for Volunteers page 8

[In late 2013, some of the Palestinian leadership of ISM in Palestine created their own nonviolent resistance organization on the same model, calling it the Solidarity Movement for Free Palestine (SFP). We at NorCal ISM decided to support both groups, which we have been doing ever since. The Israeli government came down hard on the new group, so a lot of our support in Palestine has consisted of paying fines and legal help for imprisoned leaders. But this is not the only support that we have given, as you will see below.]

In early June an international volunteer of the SFP visited the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon to show solidarity with the refugees of Palestine. The visit included touring the medical facilities built and run by the Palestinian population of the camps and learning about the vital role they have played in securing dignity for the residents during their exile, awaiting their return home to Palestine.

Home to nearly 750,000 Palestinians, victims of the 1948 Nakba ('Catastrophe' in English) and their descendants, the tragedy but steadfastness of the Palestinian people of the Lebanese refugee camps endures. Nahr al-Bared camp exemplifies this more than many. Home to over 30,000 Palestinian refugees it was the scene of one of the latest examples of the continuing Nakba Palestinian refugees face in Lebanon.

Continued on page 2

In 2007 the camp came under siege by the Lebanese Army, whose stated goal was to end its use as a base by Islamic extremists. The Palestinian population was subject to continuous weeks of bombardment until camp leaders were able to secure the safe passage of the residents out of the camp. The Lebanese Army then demolished the camp. However, many of the residents state that the extremists were in fact given safe passage to Syria before the outbreak of the Syrian war.

Upon returning to the camp the residents

With help from NorCal ISM, SFP provided funds over the summer to the Nahr al-Bared maternity hospital project.

found it completely demolished. Since then their steadfastness has been inspiring. Unlike the massacres and demolitions that occurred in the 1970s such as Tel al-Zaatar camp, the residents were able to rebuild the camp, in the face of Apartheid Israeli pressure on the UN not to rebuild. This aligns with Apartheid Israel's continuous policy to try and disenfranchise Palestinian refugees of their refugee status, and therefore their international right of return.

Since then the rebuilding of the camp has been mired in bureaucracy and delays, including withholding funding by international donors at the suspected behest of Apartheid Israel. Nevertheless, the maternity hospital is a beacon

of hope and resilience. Built by the refugees themselves, the hospital, when it is finished, will span 3 floors and provide vital antenatal and emergency maternity services for the women of the camp, a service that would have previously them to take the one and only ambulance for over an hour to the local Lebanese hospital, through several Lebanese Army checkpoints.

With help from NorCal ISM and other donations, SFP provided funds over the summer to the Nahr al-Bared maternity hospital project, and continues to support other projects in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, including the Social Development Centre at Ain el-Hilweh camp, which teaches skills to children and adults. The Centre supports the entire community, including the thousands of Syrian refugees to whom Palestinian refugees have opened their doors.

SFP welcomes your support, either directly or via NorCal ISM, toward our activities in both occupied Palestine and Lebanon. In both cases you can send your check to the same address. You can also donate on line at solidaritymovementsfp.wordpress.com. If you would like to make a donation specifically for Nahr al-Bared maternity hospital please mark your donation "Nahr al-Bared Hospital." ■

Katie Leslie is a Trade Unionist and activist from the UK that has participated in local led direct action and strikes in Palestine and across the Middle East.

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.

Volunteering at Refugee Camps in Jordan

By Katherine Latham, September 2016

Last spring, I found myself facing several hurdles, and trying to get established with volunteer projects in Amman Jordan, having been turned away at the Allenby Bridge crossing into the West Bank by the Israeli authorities. While it was a big disappointment to have my passport stamped “denied entry” plus a big red line drawn across the page designating very clearly that there was absolutely no welcome mat for me, I gradually got my bearings, found my way, and even found myself smiling time and again when I was greeted by the national mantra, “Welcome to Jordan.”

My journey last year had been backed by a solid invitation to do health care rehabilitation and trainings in Palestine. I felt much more prepared for my role in this work, than I had 25 years earlier, during the first Intifada, when I first volunteered in a Palestinian village health clinic. Over the years, my clinical skills had improved, as had my appreciation for the struggles, the ever increasing squeezing of the Palestinian people, and how the military occupation severely affected the health status of the people.

I had returned to Palestine several times, for brief periods, to do informal work. Now, disappointed to be cut off from the many friends in Palestine, there I was in the big, impersonal city of Amman, scrambling in my search for some alternative projects that would be a good match for my skills.

Through the miracle of the Internet, introductions from far and wide quickly came in. Soon I was lined up with 3 different projects, in Amman, Salt, and Gaza Camp. I never felt completely the foreigner; I’d come in solidarity and I experienced a strong welcome. Work was arranged, and I had some structure to my days. But it was the kindness of a refugee family that helped to give me the feeling of being at home for those few months. This family became the face of Jordan for me.

Each time I visited in Husn Camp, I found a very welcome break from the noise and anonymity of Amman.

Husn Camp is one of six “emergency” refugee camps established in Jordan in 1968 for 12,500

Palestine refugees and displaced people who left the West bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Now home to more than 20,000 registered Palestinian refugees, according to UNRWA figures, the camp also shelters some Syrian refugees that have been welcomed in.

I felt at home in Husn camp. The traditions of the families I met there mirrored the life I had known in the West Bank villages where I’d stayed countless times. I found a social, welcoming scene, family time, and opportunities for lots of visiting!

One memorable meal had 14 of us, of every generation, seated on the floor around the big tray of mansaf, Jordan’s national dish. While the head of the household slowly poured the gravy on top, I felt grateful and so honored to be included in this family meal. We acknowledged the cook,

Continued on page 7

Jordan’s Finest—
refugee kids at an
institute for the deaf.



Katherine Latham

The Gaza Blockade is Threatening Fresh Water Resources

International Solidarity Movement, Gaza-team, August 7, 2016

As every year during the summer, the water shortage in the Gaza Strip is accentuated. At the same time, the energy shortage caused by the blockade prevents engines and water pumps from pushing it from wells and tanks to houses and farming fields.

The Beach Camp is one of the more densely populated areas of Gaza and therefore one of the most affected by water scarcity. In addition, because of its location, directly on the seafloor,

In my home and in the homes of my four sons and their families we don't have a drop of water.

its aquifers are some of the most affected by the infiltration of seawater and wastewater.

We collected several testimonies of people affected by this problem in order to discuss them with the engineer Monther Shoblak, General Director of the Palestinian National Authority Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU).

The first testimony is that of Azzam Miflah El Sheikh Khalil, who says “the water comes only once every three days, and just for a few hours, which is not enough [to fill the tanks]. People

can't imagine how we are suffering because of the lack of water. In addition, there is no difference between the water from our wells and the sea water... The main problem is that when there is electricity there's no running water and when there is running water there's no electricity. The only solution we have is to buy a generator to produce electricity when

there's water, but who can buy it if there is no work?”

In the next block lives the Mokhtar Kamal Abu Riela, who stressed the same problem, “when there's water there's no electricity, and vice versa. Maybe once every four or five days we have water and electricity at the same time for a few hours. Every day we buy gasoline to run the generator the hours when there's running water, but the economic situation of the people is very precarious and not everyone can spend 20 NIS a day on gas just to have water in the tanks. We spend more on gasoline than in electricity or water itself”.

We asked the Mokhtar if he remembers when that problem began “ten years ago or so, with the blockade”.

Finally Im Majed Miqdad explained the difficulties she and her large family are faced with in their day to day life due to water scarcity “there's people who build underground tanks [as those can be filled without bombs] or who buy a generator operated with gasoline. But not everyone can afford these things. I'm one of those people who cannot pay NIS 20–30 a day in gasoline to run the generator. Today, for example, in my home and in the homes of my four sons and their families we don't have a drop of water, the four tanks are empty. We are waiting until running water and electricity will coincide in order to fill them. The situation is very hard, we have no water, we have no electricity, we have no work ... If water and electricity would coincide at least three hours a day it would be enough to fill the tanks enough to spend the day. People must understand that when there is no water you cannot use the bathroom, you cannot take a shower, you cannot clean the dishes, the house, the clothes ... And here the families have five, six, ten members ... we are not just two or three people in each house”.

Given the frequent complaints of the population the first thing that the engineer Monther Shoblak wants to explain is that the failures in the water supply are due to the power cuts and therefore they can't control them. “It is impossible for us to match the running water with the electricity, as to carry water from one

Azzam El Sheikh Khalil

Photo: ISM Gaza Team



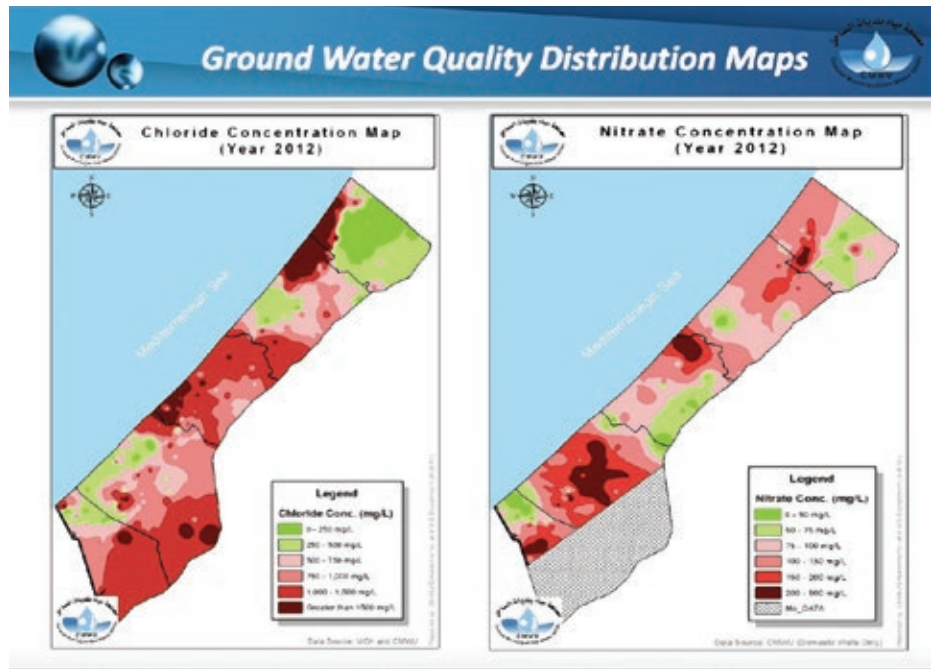
area to the other, motors and pumps are needed and those can't operate without electricity. We can't control it because we don't know which bomb will fail and when".

However, he explains, the water problem in the Gaza Strip is more serious than that. "Indeed there is an over-exploitation of the aquifer in the Gaza Strip. This is because the coastal aquifer, which runs from Sinai to Yaffa and that is the only source of water available today in the Gaza Strip, has been nurtured historically by rainwater and by the water from the mountains of Al Khalil (Hebron) and the Naqab. However, for decades our neighbors [the Zionists] have been building dams that prevent the water from following its natural course to Gaza, leaving rainwater as the sole source of the coastal aquifer. These dams are illegal, since they involve a violation of the conventional

The coastal aquifer, which runs from Sinai to Yaffa and that is the only source of water available today in the Gaza Strip

agreements on transboundary water sources. " Because of these illegal practices of the Zionist entity "the production capacity of Gaza's aquifer has dropped to 55 million cubic meters a year. While the water demand of the Strip is 200 million cubic meters a year".

This overexploitation is decreasing to an alarming point the level of the aquifer, causing seawater to seep and fill that vacuum, mixing with the fresh water and contaminating the aquifer. Additionally to this chloride contamination caused by seawater seeping into the aquifer, the water is contaminated by nitrates from leaking sewage and fertilizers. "These are more dangerous than chlorides, as they can't be detected by smell or taste".



The successive attacks on the Gaza Strip have severely affected the sewage systems and destroyed thousands of septic tanks, causing in many cases wastewater to end up in the aquifer.

In addition, due to the lack of resources of local authorities only 72% of Gaza is equipped with sewage systems, the rest depends on septic tanks that are built without supervision. "The occupation never provided the necessary services, such as mandated by international law. They didn't build enough plants for wastewater treatment in order to protect the environment. If we look at the objective data it seems that their intention was just the opposite. These plants shouldn't be built in sandy areas, to avoid leaks, and should have an exit to the sea to prevent overflow in case of emergency. However they built the main one in Beit Lahia, the sandiest area in Gaza and without exit to the sea. So when there is an overflow, which is quite common, wastewater inevitably ends up in the aquifer and contaminating farmlands in the area." ■

<https://palsolidarity.org/2016/08/the-gaza-blockade-is-causing-an-end-to-gazas-fresh-water-resources/>

Top: Im Majed Miqdad, who is often left without water supply.

Below: Mokhtar Kamal Abu Riela.

Photos: ISM Gaza Team



How an ISM Member Cheated Death

By Paul Larudee, October 17, 2016

Julie Rufo's last Facebook post (on the war in Syria) was probably minutes before she almost died on September 2, 2016.

I first met Julie at a talk I gave on the successful boat trips to Gaza, in late 2008. She told me that she would like to help, and that, as a retired person, she couldn't offer much financially, but could make a gift of her talent as a professional bookkeeper.

That was the beginning of a friendship, as well as an invaluable resource for the small but ambitious nonprofit corporation that sponsors the International Solidarity Movement and a number of other human rights projects concerned with the Middle East and Cuba. With as many as fourteen separate bank accounts, it's quite a job, but Julie is definitely up to it. She has kept the books for major entertainers, and makes it look easy.

Weeks later, Julie described what happened that September 2nd.

Friday afternoon, 9/2/16, returned from grocery shopping, ate lunch, reading newspaper.

My face began to feel numb and funny, so I got up to look in the bathroom mirror to see if anything was drooping (was I having a stroke?). No droops, but center of my vision was clouded and outlines were white/silver/black edged jagged lightning spokes.

Not good, I thought, so went and got the medic alert necklace from bedroom and put it on. Then, still not feeling right, went to blood pressure machine on kitchen counter and took it twice: 70/40; 74: 44. That's really bad.

Now I am feeling much worse. My wrists are curling inward, as happens with lack of oxygen to the brain. Tried to press the button on my medic alert and could not make my fingers exert any pressure. Fingers felt dead. Went into bedroom where medic alert machine is with large button. I could not press that either, so I put my elbow on the button and pressed down with all my body weight until it connected and the voice said "are you all right?" To which, of course I answered no and described how I was

feeling...very badly. They promised to send help. Went back to living room counter, tried to call [son] Mike on cell, could not press buttons. Finally must have gotten something through because I heard Mike saying "I'm coming, I'm coming Mom", "We're coming". I could hear the sirens around him which I figured were my sirens.

I tried to pick up the phone, but could not. Finally got it with my forearms, put it into a pocket of my backpack, and managed to zip the pocket. I slid my arm through a strap and opened the front door and waited.

Next thing, I was swarmed by 3 EMTs, the building manager, and Michael.

The EMTs began asking me current awareness questions, then asked me to tell them what had happened. When I told them how I had taken my blood pressure and what it was, they were very grateful. One said, "thank you for doing that, it's very helpful".

Then off in the chair to the ambulance to Kaiser Oakland with Maggie on her way from Novato and Michael following in his car.

Thankfully, Julie survived after a seven-hour operation and is already driving herself again, with her doctor's approval. Back in 2008, she had warned me that her heart could go at any time, and that I should be prepared. As it turns out, she was much more prepared than I.

It wasn't even a heart attack, but an aneurism in the aorta. She is making a good recovery, and is back to needling me for the monthly financial activity information. Our accountant confirms that she's a bookkeeper extraordinaire. We knew we were lucky to have her, just not how lucky.

If it was scary for Julie, it was also for us. So yes, Julie, we've finally created the Plan B that you said we should have, so that another valued member of our community, fifty years younger, can be trained by you to take over, whenever you're ready. For now, we would like to salute you for your major contribution to our organization, as well as your comradeship, keen intellect and moral compass in the cause of justice. ■



December 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 over-look 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 and jewelry, and bath and body goods that are guaranteed to make you smile. ■



www.palbox.org

Volunteering at Refugee Camps in Jordan

Continued from page 3

herself a refugee from Haifa by way of Gaza, as the yoghurt gravy slowly absorbed. The bread was shared and the meal began.

I always had a good time in the camp! I piled into the cars like everyone else, slept sprawled out like a cat in the heat of the day, and came back to life in the evenings after the air had cooled a little. One felt the burden of the heat, and lost all ambition several hours every day, while waiting for some relief.

We greeted everyone we passed on the narrow streets. It was crowded but quiet. I poked my head out the door to see the children playing in the streets. I saw a fair bit of the camp from the car when we came and went, making the rounds to visit. Narrow streets, very close quarters, next to no green areas/gardens, houses that had grown bit by bit as families grew. Everything appeared orderly, extremely modest and cramped.

At the house, floors were swept and washed at

least 3 times a day, plus children and countless household chores attended to. For entertainment, the young women stayed very busy taking selfies while trying out different poses and fashions. The young children were remarkably quiet, until there was a problem, and then they cried out loudly. Lots of beautiful children!

When I think of Jordan, it is my friends in Husn Camp that come to mind. We shared meals and laughs and love for the children. In their company, my long dormant Arabic language skills slowly revived. This family really was my anchor and helped me interpret the life that I saw around me. They shared a much appreciated, warm and genuine "welcome." ■

Katherine resides in Northern California, and has worked in the rehabilitation field for 30 years. She has been involved in Palestine solidarity work with different groups for over 25 years.

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.