



TESTIMONIES
FROM THE
NONVIOLENT
RESISTANCE

LIVE FROM *Palestine*

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

VOLUME 15

NO. 2

DECEMBER 2017

H2, THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

Pam Letsche, November 5, 2017



Pam Letsche

Children waiting to go through a checkpoint on their way to school

Editor: Jeff Pekrul

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The first thing you notice is the smell. A tart, dung-like odor caused by raw sewage rolling down the street outside Checkpoint 56 (56), also known as Gilbert, rolls down the street towards us. A sewage pipe broke weeks ago and remains unfixed; Israeli permission required. The people, including the elderly and small children, jump over it without batting an eye.

Welcome to H2, the Israeli controlled section of Al Khalil (aka Hebron) established by the Hebron Protocol of 1997 which divided the City into two sections; H1 includes 80% of Hebron's population and is administered by Palestinians and H2 which is under Israeli control and includes the rest. This division was justified

as "security measures" after in 1994 Baruch Goldstein entered the Ibrahamini Mosque (one of Islam's most holy places) and killed 29 Palestinians and injured 125 as they prayed. Violent protest broke out. (Baruch Goldstein was beaten to death by the survivors after the shootings and today many H2 Settlers consider him a hero.)

The 1994 Hebron Protocol also established an international presence in the form of a group called TIPH (Temporary International Presence in Hebron). Although proposed to be "temporary", TIPH is still walking the streets, along with EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel), CPT (Christian Peacemaker

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Illegal Israeli settlement
in Al Khalil (Hebron)

Pam Letsche



Teams), and ISM providing presence, monitoring and documenting the abuses of the IOF (Israeli Occupation Forces), Israeli police and border patrols.

The current population of H2 is difficult to ascertain but is estimated to be between 600-800 settlers and over 30,000 Palestinians (per 2013 statistics). Many of the original residents in 1997 have abandoned their homes (they

are prohibited from selling them) due to the continued harassment and danger in the area. The current residents remain resolute in their determination to stay.

H2 borders on the city's casbah, or Old City. The traditional commercial street of Al Khalil is Shuhada Street and in 1997, the part of Shuhada Street which runs one block parallel to the Casbah was placed in H2. It included the City Center.

Working with ISM, I do morning "school patrol" which means sitting outside checkpoints or barricades watching and counting the people going in and out of the checkpoints. We count men, women, children, schoolteachers (apparently they dress better than the other adults and carry briefcases). Backpack and body searches are noted. Just part of a normal day for a child in H2.

Children scurry along with friends, heaving heavy back packs. They naturally go through the checkpoints including the ones which require them to wait for a green light, go alone through an enclosed box, place their backpacks on a table for search and if lucky, are allowed to proceed without further intrusion. If you are a teenage

The contrast between the bustling activity of Shuhada Street in H1 and the quiet, deserted part of the street I've just left could not be more stark.

Can You Come to Palestine for Three Months or More?

The ISM NorCal Team, November 2017

ISM in Palestine needs you whether you come for three weeks or three years, but it also needs a small, steady number of persons willing to stay for three months or more. This is for the sake of continuity and administration.

Palestinian coordinators can do a lot of the work, but not all. Persons with native fluency in English and/or other languages, as well as journalistic and technical skills, plus first-hand cultural knowledge of western societies are also important.

Preference is given to persons with prior experience, but you can also gain the experience after you arrive. If you are willing and available, ISM NorCal is ready to provide a stipend to cover your basic expenses while you are there. Please let us know if you are interested. ■

male, additional search and delay are common. Young boys slam the outside metal door as they leave; it's their only form of rebellion.

Working with CPT and EAPPI in order to cover as many points as possible, the daily school counts are then presented to some UN organization. Whether or not anything is actually done or accomplished with these figures remain unclear. A man I know who has been coming here for the past five years for three month stints, tells me TIPH is limited to merely writing reports about what they personally witnessed. The reports go to both a representative in the Israeli and Palestinian governments. No action is recommended. No accountability is ordered, no follow-up demanded from what I am told.

After school patrol and being denied entry back into H2 as I left my passport back in Nablus and having to walk around the northern boundary, I finally get back into

H2 on the northwest side. I walk the streets, empty but for the passing of a few Israeli cars heading to Kiryat Arba for shopping, errands or socialization (Israeli settlers are not allowed in H1). A few Israeli military vehicles, armored and armed, create a distinct feeling of being in a war zone. Allegedly there are over 1,000 IOF (Israeli Occupation Forces) soldiers providing “security” for these 800 settlers.

As I leave H2, the contrast between the bustling activity of Shuhada Street in H1 and the quiet, deserted part of the street I’ve just left could not be more stark. Inside once bustling merchants stalls have been shuttered; windows stand empty of any signs of humanity; the only sound coming from the liberally placed tattered and shiny new Israeli flags, flapping in the breezes. One can walk from block to block, soldier patrol to soldier patrol without having passed or seen another person. The soldiers of the IOF stand bored and restless; some smile, others glared. “Peace and love” one soldier insincerely says to me, their way of mocking us.

I had the opportunity to speak with several people, children and adults, both Israeli and Palestinian during my daily forays into H2. All the Palestinians said the same thing: life in H2 is “difficult”; “more than difficult”; “very difficult life for us”; “there is no future here for us here”.

When asked what is most difficult part of living in H2, 13 yr. old Marwa Abu Shamsiya, the teenage daughter of Imad Abu Shamciya, a founder of Defense of Human Rights (a Palestinian organization which documents the ongoing harassment by the IOF and Settlers in H2 where he lives with his family) said “everything” but mostly points out the difficulty in not being able to have extended family and friends visit due to the restrictions established in 2015.

(Due to attacks and alleged attacks by Palestinians in 2015, Israel initiated further limitations and restrictions to the movement of the residents and those living outside H2. It required all families living in H2 to register and given a number and only those with a number could enter. I’ve been told by some, including an Israeli soldier, special permission can be obtained to allow family members or friends to enter but must be done via an application process and often these requests are denied.

Despite such restrictions, one long time resident of H2, Islam Fakhouri, said you can



apply for permission to allow family members in advance; however, such requests can easily be denied. Islam Fakhouri, a 20-something father and husband and local tour guide in H1, says no matter the exact limitations, no family members or friends wish to enter H2 believing it too dangerous. Hence the residents are restricted to socializing with only other families in their neighborhoods.

Shuhada Street in bustling in the H1 section of Al Khalil

Pam Letsche

Settlers would pour liquids into their windows, cut and poison their olive trees, and barricaded their front door entry.

Also, it is very difficult, he tells me for a man living in H2 to marry a woman living outside H2 as families of potential partners are hesitant to allow marriages which would require their daughters to move there.

I visit Nisreen Azzeh and her lovely family living in Tel Rumeida, the hill above Shuhada Street, in H2. She is the wife of notable activist Hesham Azzeh, who died two years ago

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The Belly of the Beast

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from complications of inhaling tear gas at a demonstration in Babal Zwiya, the area in H1 outside 56. After returning home the tear gas wafted up into their home; Hesham collapsed and fell into a coma. Men carried Hesham down to 56 where they waited over 10 minutes for permission to *leave* the checkpoint. He died on

“Peace and love” one soldier insincerely says to me, their way of mocking us.

the way to the hospital. (After 2015 Palestinian residents were denied the ability to drive their cars in H2 forcing them to park outside in H1. Ambulances going to Palestinian homes must get special permission to enter resulting in delays of vital treatment. Here it contributed to Hesham’s death.)

Tall, gangly, Yunis Affeh, who looks older than his 14 years, sits and speaks with me quietly; his intelligence notable, his sadness palpable. He was 12 when his father died and is now head of the family. His English is good; looking up words

on his Smartphone when need be. We speak as we await his mother’s return from shopping. Yunis tells me his backpack is searched every time he goes in and out of a checkpoint. He had pepper spray sprayed into his face by an Israeli boy his same age. When his uncle reports it to the Israeli police, they claim Yunis had thrown a rock. He had not. He also relays stories of his 14 year old friend being beaten by 4 IOF soldiers, settlers attacking Palestinian children on their way to school and teachers being detained at checkpoints causing delays or cancellations of classes.

His mother, Nisreen, returns home out of breath, hurrying as to not have me wait too long. She had to walk from the border of H1 hefting heavy bundles, as even taxis carrying Palestinians are not allowed to enter H2.

We discuss the harassment their family has had to endure. Settlers would pour liquids into their windows, cut and poison their olive trees, barricaded their front door entry requiring the family to climb a dirt path 50 meters from the street to their house. The path also requires them to pass the apartment balcony of Baruck Marzil, an internationally known leader of the Settlers, who consistently harasses the family. After Hesham’s death, he taunted Nisreen asking “Where is Hesham, Nisreen!” “Where is your husband now?”

Nisreen is a gentle, intelligent woman who is steadfast in her determination to remain in H2 despite its difficulties. At the conclusion of our talk she tells me “I hope all don’t forget my family and the families of all the others.”

When i return to Nablus, my home base, after five days in Al Khalil, I sleep to noon the next day. My time there was exhausting, emotional, painful and inspiring. The stress there is intense and constant. Unlike the Palestinian residents of Al Khalil, I will not have to live the experience of occupation tomorrow or the day after. I have nothing but admiration for their steadfastness in the face of so much oppression and indignity. ■

Shuhada Street is desolate in the H2 section of Al Khalil
Pam Letsche



Pam lives in Marin County. She is a retired lady looking to fight injustice if even in a small way and having adventures along the way.

Nakba Tour Lets Palestinian Refugees Tell Their Story

By Sarah Jackson, October 4, 2017

Last month at New York University's Furman Hall, Palestinian refugees Khawla Hammad and Amena El-Ashkar spoke about their experiences being driven from their homes to refugee camps in neighboring Lebanon. The discussion was the fourth in their two-month "In Our Own Words: Voices from the Nakba" national tour, which includes 14 stops along the East Coast and in parts of Canada.

Hammad has lacked citizenship in any country since Zionist para-military groups forcibly removed her from her village, el-Kabri, at just 16. El-Ashkar is a journalist and translator, although her status as a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon prohibits her from legally working there as a translator.

Besides the legal authorization to hold certain jobs in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees also lack many of the rights that Lebanon's citizens are granted. El-Ashkar did not hesitate to address this discrepancy.

"I was born as a refugee; I don't want to give birth to a refugee," she said.

Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe," refers to the displacement and ethnic cleansing that took place in Palestine when Jews began to immigrate there on the heels of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the United Kingdom's designation of Palestine as a national home for Jews, in response to mounting anti-Semitism in Europe.

Throughout the hour-long discussion, Hammad spoke of her life before the Nakba and of her family's struggle to survive in the outskirts and refugee camps of Lebanon after Zionist forces took control of el-Kabri.

"We stayed in the wilderness between the trees; we had no houses, no tents," Hammad said. "We were forced to sneak back to Palestine [to] get some food and come back to where we were."

But it was Hammad's recollection of her daughter's murder that brought tears to many of the 30 audience members.

"When my daughter opened the door, they shot 30 bullets into her chest," Hammad said. "The soldiers came into the house and started shooting randomly — everybody."

An audience member who asked to remain anonymous because of his Lebanese nationality

appreciated Hammad's strength in recounting such painful memories.

"I'm in awe of this woman who has traveled from the other side of the world to here to attempt to tell stories of what happened in 1947 and '48 and [is] continuing until today, including attempts by the state of Israel to not just dispose of Palestinians in the land, but also to wipe them out completely as refugees in other lands," he said. "Wave after wave of denial is what they have to fight to get their voice heard."

When asked about the significance of the event, audience member Thomas Cox — whose tote bag read 'I run the #Gaza5K to support Palestine refugees' — was eager to respond.

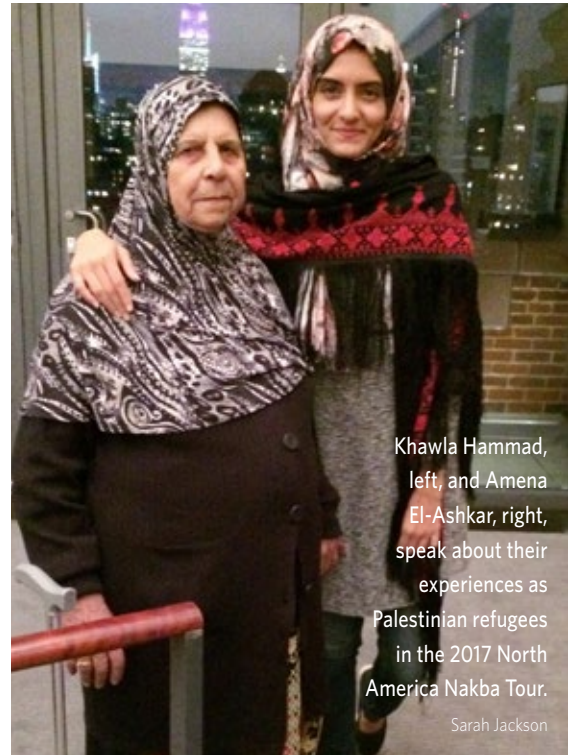
"These are stories that we just don't hear a lot about," Cox said. "This is a very important story because this really gets to the heart of the problem with the lack of implementation of the right of return."

El-Ashkar later spoke to the mission of the tour.

"Some of the Zionist leaders used to say, 'The elderly will die, and the children will forget.' We are here to refute that," she said.

Although more than six decades separate the 84-year-old Hammad and the 23-year-old El-Ashkar, both women seek the same reparations.

"After 70 years, we want nothing but the right of return," El-Ashkar said. ■



Khawla Hammad, left, and Amena El-Ashkar, right, speak about their experiences as Palestinian refugees in the 2017 North America Nakba Tour.

Sarah Jackson

"Some of the Zionist leaders used to say, 'The elderly will die, and the children will forget.' We are here to refute that."

Sarah Jackson is a journalism major at NYU in New York City.

Bad News: ISM-NorCal is the funding pillar of ISM-Palestine

By The ISM NorCal Team, October 2017

The Northern California chapter is currently providing roughly two-thirds of the funding of ISM-Palestine. That's something to be proud of, but it means two things: first, that ISM-Palestine is getting less than half the funds it needs to be effective; second, that other ISM chapters are very weak in fundraising.

We don't really consider ourselves terribly effective in fundraising, but clearly we need to improve, and even more clearly, we need to help the other groups improve. Here are some of this year's accomplishments:

By the end of the year we will have sent more than \$7000 to ISM-Palestine and their nonviolent resistance work.

We have sent \$12,000 worth of cameras and related equipment to two Palestinian nonviolent resistance groups in Hebron, the

leaders of which have been arrested (but currently released), but continue to train the population to capture visual proof of Israeli atrocities. (And no, we can't give some of this money to ISM-Palestine instead. It was raised specifically for this purpose, and we always respect donor wishes.)

We are one of the organizations, along with al-Awda and the Free Palestine Movement, organizing the 2017 North America Nakba Tour, currently concluding its more than 25 successful events in the eastern US and Canada by the time you read this. (See report on p. 5).

We have bought and resold thousands of dollars of Palestinian products in the US, to help the Palestinian economy and raise money to send volunteers to Palestine. We welcome and need your help, as local volunteers, volunteers in Palestine, or as donors (or all three). ■



The 2017 Meeting of ISM International Chapters

By The ISM NorCal Team, October 2017

This year, the ISM met in Jordan for its first international meeting in more than a decade, and its first truly international meeting ever. (The first was held in London and was heavily British in attendance, as one would expect.)

Nine countries, including Palestine, were represented, with no more than three from any one country. In that sense, it was a true representation of the ISM international community. We agreed that it is worth doing again, possibly every two years.

Many internal matters were discussed, but perhaps the biggest benefit to us all was to get to know and create a network with the support groups in other countries. Surprisingly, it has not existed until now. We were able

to exchange experiences on recruiting, fundraising, screening and training volunteers and much more.

The result is that we all came back with to-do lists coupled with contacts in other countries that can help us improve the work of the ISM. ISM-NorCal is planning to work on our recruitment and outreach program, so that we can send more sorely needed volunteers to Palestine, and to assist chapters in other countries with development of programs that has been successful. The newsletter that you are reading, for example, is the only one published by any of the chapters.

Thank you for your support and we pledge to keep you informed about our needs and accomplishments. ■

Palbox

Palestinian, handmade embroidered bracelet



Palbox is a wonderful way to support Palestinian farmers, craftspeople and the International Solidarity Movement.

We thought you might like to take a peek inside the next Palbox and discover a handful of organic & handcrafted goodies. It's the perfect holiday gift that supports Palestinian farmers and artisans! Get one before the rush!

ships in the next box!



www.palbox.org

Donations Needed

At our last meeting, we decided to bring Abdelkarim Dalbeh, an ISM coordinator in Palestine since 2002, to the US for a speaking and recruitment tour. This is the best way to get new recruits

for the ISM. He will speak to chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine at universities throughout the country. We will also show a short film provided by three filmmakers that we sponsored to work with ISM, thanks to your past

donations. This will give ISM new life in at a time when our services are needed more than ever. Please give generously to enable this important project, hopefully in the spring of 2018. Many thanks to you all. ■

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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.



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.