



LIVE FROM *Palestine*

TESTIMONIES
FROM THE
NONVIOLENT
RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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Huwaida with kids in Khan Younis in 2008.

Huwaida Arraf

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Interview with ISM Founder Huwaida Arraf

By NorCal ISM Newsletter Editor | April 15, 2021

The NorCal ISM newsletter editor interviewed Huwaida Arraf by phone in April. Huwaida is a founder of the International Solidarity Movement and now lives in Detroit, Michigan.

Q: You were one of the founders of ISM nearly 20 years ago. Did you think the organization would still be around after this many years?

A: Speaking only for myself here (as I don't recall talking about it as an organization), no, I did not. When we founded ISM, we were responding to the crisis on the ground—the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada and the massive level of violence that Israel was using against a largely unarmed, defenseless population. We were trying to affect the power balance and provide a resource for the Palestinian popular resistance. I did not expect ISM to still be around in 20 years, not because it

wasn't a solid or viable organization, but rather because I was convinced that Israel's occupation could not and would not last that long. I believed wholeheartedly that the power of the people—Palestinians and internationals together—was going to force Israel's oppressive regime to crumble. Obviously, that hasn't happened yet and, 20 years later, ISM continues to mobilize in support of the Palestinian freedom struggle.

Perhaps I was a bit too optimistic back then thinking liberation was just around the corner. But optimism in the face of systemic oppression, unmitigated violence and cruelty, and the odds against us is not only helpful, but probably essential. I still believe that freedom is coming—it's inevitable—but, it is going to take longer than I expected.

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Interview with Huwaida Arraf

Continued from page 1

Q: What makes ISM special and unique in your opinion.

A: ISM is somewhat unique among all the groups working in solidarity with the Palestinian people. It began somewhat ad-hoc; it was not created out of strategic planning by experienced movement builders. We were passionate activists who desperately wanted to do something to affect the situation on the ground and so we jumped right in. We learned as we went along, mostly from the Palestinians we worked with, but also from the people who answered the call to come join us in Palestine; the movement as a whole benefited tremendously and grew from the experiences, creativity and heart that these volunteers shared with us.

We decided not to have a board, a fundraising scheme or similar structures. It was consensus-based, with no hierarchical leadership. Volunteers were and still are the heart of it. What we do is bring people together, provide them with orientation and training in nonviolent action, and connect them with Palestinian organizers in communities organizing to save their land, protect their homes, and resist Israeli occupation forces and apartheid policies. The strength and continuity of ISM relies completely on volunteers and what they can give: their time, their energy, their skills, and their dedication. This kind of giving spirit is what we really want from volunteers, and the connection and collaboration reflects the kind of world that we want to live in.

The fact that ISM has had so much impact without having a traditional organizational structure is, I think, exceptional. I hope this model—collaborative, volunteer and consensus-based—will inspire others working on different causes around the world to believe that they too can make a difference by doing what they can.

Q: Has ISM and the way it connects internationals with the Palestinian non-violent resistance changed over the years?

A: ISM was very visible in the early days. Things like the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, when ISM activist defied the Israeli military by entering the church to deliver food and water to those inside, and the siege of Yasir Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah, when we got dozens of internationals into the compound, brought a lot of attention to the work we were doing.

The creation, or really the revival, of the Popular Committees in 2003–2004 as a way of resisting the building of the

Apartheid Wall led to our engaging with the non-violent resistance a little differently, and in a less visible way. Similar popular committees existed during the first Intifada, but were dismantled with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. When they began forming again, ISM began working with them, supporting and elevating their work. This less visible, but still important and effective role continues today.

Q: ISM Palestine faced enormous challenges even before the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the exclusion of internationals from the OPT. How is the organization managing to survive in this environment?

A: I'm not involved enough in the work on the ground at this time to know how they are dealing with it all. The pandemic is a global crisis and it has devastated Palestinians in the OPT, in no small part due to Israel's actions—refusal to ensure the vaccine for Palestinians as it's obligated to do under international law; closing of Palestinian COVID testing clinics; restrictions on Palestinian access to water; and its demolition

of homes leaving hundreds without shelter during this

global health crisis. Of course, Israel has also

shut its borders making it impossible to get volunteers in. But this is not the first time

that ISM has faced big challenges in bringing international volunteers to the occupied Palestinian territory.

For example, after the Israeli military killed Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall in 2003, there was a lot of introspection about whether the presence of Internationals was deterring lethal violence by Israel.

This introspection, combined with

the outbreak of the US war on Iraq

saw a dip in volunteers. Through-out the years, Israel has deported and banned entry to

countless people (including many ISM volunteers)

suspected of being "sympathetic" to the Palestinian plight; and Gaza has been near-hermetically sealed for almost 15 years. We deal with these challenges and continue to strategize ways to resist Israel's efforts to break the solidarity movement and to support the Palestinian spirit.

Q: Like many ISM volunteers, I participated in an Olive Harvest campaign. It was an amazing cultural exchange opportunity for me, and allowed me to speak about the injustices of the occupation from first-hand knowledge once I returned home. How effective have these campaigns been for deterring settler violence against Palestinian farmers in the OPT, and how beneficial have they been for Palestinians there?

A: The Olive Harvest campaigns are very important. One of the main purposes of these campaigns is to provide protective

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accompaniment to Palestinians during harvest season, which is a time that many families rely on for the sustenance. ISM has tried to work in places that are especially vulnerable to violence from Israeli settlers and/or soldiers, and to support Palestinian farmers who are denied access to their lands. However, international presence has not always been a deterrent to violence, and a few of our volunteers have been badly injured. If internationals are present, soldiers are more likely to intervene when Palestinian farmers face harassment from settlers. Of course, the soldiers themselves are often the problem. The Israeli military has tried to turn Palestinian communities against the ISM, for example, by telling the farmers that if they behave and not have any internationals around, then they can have limited access to their land. While the manipulation is obvious, some communities have chosen not to engage in resistance harvesting, in the hopes that the Israeli military will make good on their promise.

In spite of this, the overall impact cannot be underestimated. The Olive Harvest campaigns allow volunteers to connect with Palestinians in a way that is deep and tied to culture, tradition, and the land. At the same time, they allow Palestinians to share this cherished aspect of Palestinian life with internationals, and give volunteers the opportunity to collect stories to take back home. And the symbolism — joining in solidarity over the fruits of the land — is powerful.

Q: Protests against land confiscation for construction of the Apartheid Wall have been another important activity for international solidarity volunteers. With the wall construction mostly complete, what are the most important things international volunteers can still do and participate in when they travel to Palestine with ISM and other solidarity groups?

A: It is true that many of the actions ISM volunteers participated in over the years have been related to land confiscation for the Wall. But, ISM was founded before Israel began building the Wall, and Israel's settler colonial project encompasses much more than the Wall. Land confiscation continues for the building of settlements; theft of natural resources; wholesale demolition of communities; colonization and ethnic cleansing policies in East Jerusalem; military raids, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, restrictions on freedom of movement, etc. Palestinians continue to resist these atrocities, and solidarity with people who are enduring them is more important than ever. Israel's overall strategy is to take as much of the land of Palestine as possible and to have as little Palestinians on it as possible. In other words, to colonize the land and replace the native population. We must continue fighting this in a myriad of ways including standing with the people on the ground, engaging in media, education and lobbying efforts, and contributing to larger campaigns like the global boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign (BDS).

Q: The situation in Gaza is especially dire and exasperating. Brave and inspiring acts of non-violent resistance such as the Great March of Return and the Freedom Flotillas have been met with extreme violence, and so far have not been successful at ending the siege. It is also extremely difficult to get international volunteers into Gaza to support the people there. What can people in the international solidarity community do to support Gaza at this time?

A: Gaza is a humanitarian, human rights and moral crisis. We must continue to bring attention to the dire situation in Gaza in all kinds of ways. Although we have so far been unsuccessful in ending Israel's criminal closure, a lot of good work has been done—work that we need to continue loudly and forcefully. And, people can do this work from wherever they are. Bring Gaza (and all of Palestine) into your classroom, connect with organizations on the ground, call your elected representative, do something. I am involved in the National Lawyers Guild here in the U.S., and we are finishing up a memo to the Biden administration making the legal case for change in U.S. policies towards Israel in order to bring the U.S. into alignment with international law. The crisis in Gaza could end tomorrow if the necessary pressure was applied to Israel and we all can do something to help apply that pressure.

Q: You live in a state that has elected a Palestinian-American woman to the U.S. Congress. I'd imagine this makes you feel proud. Does it also give you a sense of optimism that Zionists' complete dominance of the conversation about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East could finally be ending?

A: Obviously, I am a big supporter of Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, and immensely proud of her accomplishments. But, the great thing is, it's not just Rashida. The number of allies in Congress is growing, and the movement to fight white supremacy and colonialist policies, which Israel is but one example of, is also growing. You see the strong bond between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Palestinian struggle for example. We need to elect more people like Rashida Tlaib who represent the interests of the people and not just corporations. I am optimistic that we can do this!

I would also like to urge your readers to support the good work of Congresswoman Betty McCollum of Minnesota. She recently introduced HR 2590—Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act. This bill aims to prevent U.S. taxpayer money from being used to commit human rights abuses. It would require the Secretary of State to annually certify that no U.S. funds have been used by Israel to support land annexation, the abuse and detainment of children or demolition of Palestinian homes and structure. Everyone should urge their representatives to cosponsor and support this important legislation. Resources on HR 2590 can be found here: https://nwttac.dci-palestine.org/resources_on_hr2590. ■

Palestinian Resistance and the Continuing Struggle

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network | May, 2021

With the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza, Palestine, one lesson is extremely clear:

war machine, armed and funded by the United States, was humiliated by the Palestinian resistance, the ceasefire does not end the ongoing Nakba of

extrajudicial killings, the denial of the right to return: the entire colonial project in Palestine.

The Palestinian resistance in Gaza entered this battle, demonstrating clearly the unity of the Palestinian people. The heroic struggle of Palestinians in Jerusalem to defend their homes and land, especially in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, and the defense of Al-Aqsa Mosque, mobilized the Palestinian people as a whole.

The Palestinian people in occupied Palestine '48, driving out the occupation forces from their communities and defending their people from fascist bands and colonial police, under-lined that fundamental unity. In the West Bank, villages, cities and refugee camps rose up to demand collective liberation for Palestine.

And everywhere in the world, from the refugee camps surrounding Palestine, throughout the Arab region, and globally, millions filled the streets in support of the Palestinian people and their resistance.

The ceasefire does not bring this struggle to a conclusion, but heralds a new phase of struggle and organizing

with a clear vision: return and liberation, justice for all of Palestine, from the river to the sea.

During the assault, at least 282 Palestinians' and Arabs' lives have been taken, particularly those of civilians, including 66 children and, indeed, entire families, in



Activists carry a banner reading "we support the resistance of the Palestinian people" during a protest calling for the liberation of Palestine and to protest the recent Israeli assault on Gaza, the ongoing colonization and ethnic cleansing of Palestine, Paris, May 22, 2021. Credit: Anne Paq/Activestills

Palestinian resistance lives, Palestinian resistance thrives, Palestinian resistance unites, and Palestinian resistance wins. The resistance, in all of its varied and creative forms, is deeply rooted in the Palestinian people inside and outside Palestine. The Palestinian resistance, with the armed struggle at its heart, is not only the core of the Palestinian liberation movement, but the front line of the defense of humanity against imperialism and colonial domination.

While the Israeli

the Palestinian people, the project of Zionist settler colonialism for more than 73 years. Palestinians are continuing to resist land confiscation, home demolitions, siege, mass incarceration,



May 23: Palestinians carry candles while standing in the rubble of the home of the Abu Hatab family during a vigil in Gaza City. Eight children and two women of the Abu Hatab family, were killed in the building in Shati refugee camp that collapsed following an Israeli strike on May 15, 2021.

Credit: Mohammed Zaanoun/activestills



May 21: Palestinians wave flags in Al Aqsa compound, Jerusalem, while celebrating the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and of the armed resistance groups after the announcement of a cease-fire with Israel. Credit: Activestills

Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, occupied Palestine '48 and on the borders with Lebanon. In Gaza, banks, media buildings, chemical and plastics factories, public buildings and fundamental civilian infrastructure were subjected to systematic aerial bombings. It is critical to support the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in Gaza by breaking the siege on Gaza permanently.

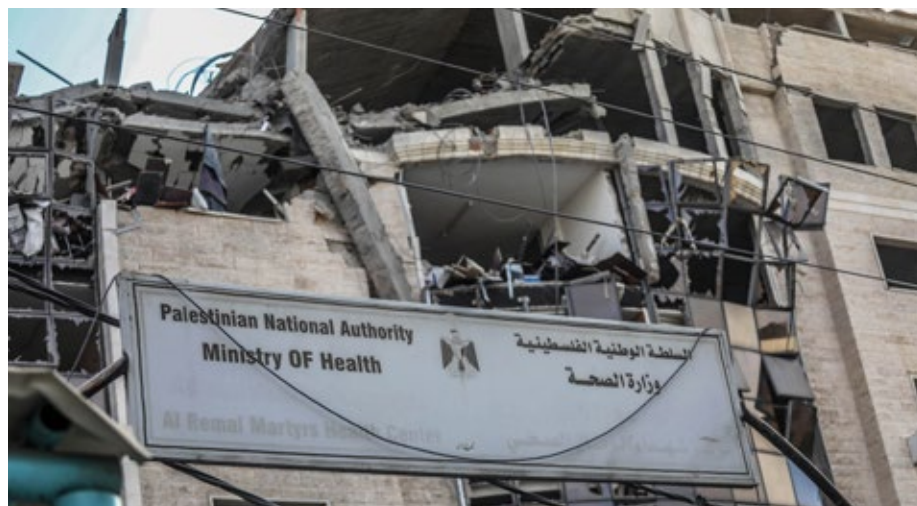
Every one of those martyrs' lives is a precious story cut short by the violence of colonial-ism. Every martyr had a name, a life, a family, a job, dreams and visions of the future and memories of the past, all stolen by Israeli weaponry, often paid for by U.S. taxpayers.

There are urgent tasks for the solidarity movement today: first and foremost, to keep up, escalate and build the struggle, make our organizing stronger and deeper, and build greater connections of solidarity with liberation movements around the world.

Our vision for solidarity must center and support Palestinian resistance by all means, including armed struggle, alongside cultural resistance, political

organizing, mass struggle, strikes, boycotts and popular action. This also means building the boycott movement, isolating Israel on an international level and pushing international governments and the United Nations to impose meaningful sanctions on Israel, from an arms embargo to cutting off the over \$3.8 billion in U.S. aid Israel receives every year.

The Palestinian people, whether inside prison bars, in exile in the refugee camps, or fighting for freedom anywhere in Palestine, present a vision for the future that is clear: one Palestine, liberated, free of Zionism, free of imperialism, free of settler colonialism—from the river to the sea. ■



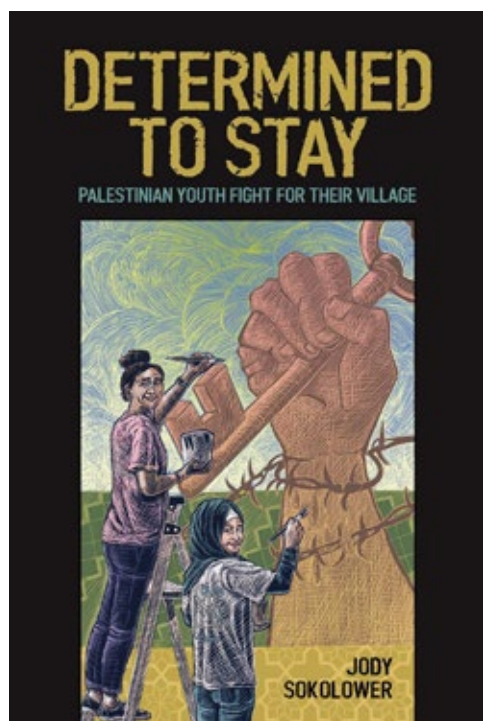
May 17: Gaza under attack, Gaza city. Damage to a building of the Ministry of Health as a result of an Israeli airstrike on Al-Rimal neighborhood. Credit: Mohammed Zaanoun/Activestills



May 21: A Palestinian child stands amidst the ruins of a neighborhood of Beit Hanoun which was destroyed by the recent Israeli bombardements, northern Gaza Strip.

Credit: Mohammed Zaanoun/Activestills

New Young Adult Book on Silwan Resistance



DETERMINED TO STAY:

Palestinian Youth Fight for Their Village

by **Jody Sokolower**; Introduction by **Nick Estes**;

Paperback, 208 pages, 6" x 9"

Buy from **MECA** <https://tinyurl.com/uex3t7vy>

Silwan is a Palestinian village just outside the ancient walls of Jerusalem's Old City. *Determined to Stay* is the moving story of its people in the face of occupation. As Silwani youth and community members share their lives with us, their village becomes a doorway to Palestinian history and current reality. Written with young people in mind, *Determined to Stay* draws deep connections between the lives of youth in the US and Palestine—from criminalization, forced relocation and buried histories to hip-hop as resistance.

Jody Sokolower is co-coordinator of the [Teach Palestine Project](https://teachpalestine.org) (<https://teachpalestine.org>) at the Middle East Children's Alliance. Formerly managing editor of Rethinking Schools, Jody is a teacher educator who has taught middle and high school social studies and English. She was lead editor of Rethinking Sexism, Gender and Sexuality and editor of Teaching about the Wars in the Middle East.

Nick Estes is co-founder of Red Nation and author of *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*.

Determined to Stay is a must-read book for all ages that stands to fill a critical gap in US standard curricula.

— **Noura Erakat**, author of *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine*

Linking the histories of settler colonialism in Palestine and the US, Sokolower uses testimonios to humanize the complex and interconnected stories of resistance, building a platform for solidarity across continents.

— **Anita Fernández**, director, Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing

"What is life like for you?" Jody Sokolower asks the children and young people of the Palestinian village of Silwan. Her extraordinary book tells their stories, documenting the parallel histories in which Israeli efforts to destroy Palestinian lives and seize their land are met with the same generations of resistance as US efforts to eliminate the Indigenous people of this land.

—**Phyllis Bennis**, author of *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*

An urgent book about the impact of Israel's occupation on Palestinian youth.

—**Kirkus Starred Review**

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Tell Congress to End the Blockade of Gaza!



As we go to press, the Gaza Strip is enduring yet another Israeli bombing campaign and over 200 Palestinians in Gaza, including 50 children have been killed in the past few days. But Gaza was in crisis before this—it has been blockaded for the past 13 years.

We say enough of this madness! It is incumbent on those of us who live in the U.S. to do everything we can to force our government to change, because Israel's power derives from the U.S. You can phone your state's members of congress—often—as long

as the bombing continues and urge them to support Betty McCollum's bill HR 2590 that will demand more transparency from Israel. One more thing you can do is to mail them postcards to remind them of Gaza's plight.

With a new political administration in the United States, and many new members of Congress, **now is an ideal time to try to end the bombing and the blockade by any and all means possible.** We support projects like the Gaza Free-dom Flotilla, but believe there is a way that each of us,

from the safety of our homes, can do **something that will make a difference.** Legislators in Western countries that support Israel, and especially in the United States, need to hear from us that the blockade of Gaza must end immediately.

NorCal ISM has printed postcards with images of Gaza that we will provide you to address, add your own postage (\$0.36 in the U.S) and then mail to legislators.

Request cards at <https://www.ism-norcal.org/order-gaza-postcards-for-your-legislators/> ■

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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.

530-324-2509, 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.