A young girl with long dark hair, wearing a patterned shirt and a watch, is lighting a candle. She is in a church, and several other candles are lit on a tray in front of her. The background is dark, with some people visible in the shadows.

Commission of Churches in International Affairs (CCIA)

World Council of Churches

FAITH UNDER OCCUPATION

The Plight of Indigenous Christians in the Holy Land

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)

FAITH UNDER OCCUPATION

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) brings internationals to the West Bank to experience life under occupation. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) provide protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace. When they return home, EAs campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through an end to the occupation, respect for international law and implementation of UN resolutions.

The Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC) is a project of the Churches in Jerusalem in association with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). It is a coordination point for ecumenical action in and for Jerusalem and its churches. It reflects the long-standing international and regional concern for peace, justice and the continued presence of the Christian churches in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.



Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

www.eappi.org

Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)

World Council of Churches (WCC)

www.oikumene.org

Published by: EAPPI/JIC/WCC

Editorial team: Michel Nseir, Manuel Quintero, Pauline Nunu, Nader Muaddi & Yusef Daher

Copyright © 2012 WCC Publications. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in notices or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher.

Printer: Emerezian Est. print@emerezian.com

EAPPI extends a special thanks to Diakonia for providing their expertise on international law in contribution to this publication.

ISBN: 978-2-8254-1564-1

February 2012

Commission of Churches
in International Affairs (CCIA)
World Council of Churches

FAITH UNDER OCCUPATION

The Plight of Indigenous Christians in the Holy Land

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)

“Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed.”
[Psalm 82:3]

A SPECIAL THANKS...

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) would like to extend a special thanks to all the members of EAPPI’s Local Reference Group (LRG), and especially to His Grace Bishop Munib Younan (ELCHLJ), chair of the LRG. Bishop Younan has guided the programme and offered spiritual support ever since the local heads of Churches in Jerusalem called for its creation.

EAPPI also appreciates the dedication and hard work of all EAPPI National Coordinators, whom recruit, train, and coordinate the advocacy efforts of Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) upon returning home. With that said, EAPPI is grateful for all those who participated in the programme as EAs and continue to give hope for justice via their actions.

Moreover, EAPPI is thankful for all its Palestinian, Israeli & international partners and contacts.

CCIA Director's Introduction

The Plight of Palestinian Christians

Mathews George Chunakara, Director
Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA)

During my last visit to the Holy Land with WCC General Secretary, Dr. Olav Fykse Tviet, a group of Palestinian Christian leaders in Bethlehem told us that, "in 1948, the Christian population of the Holy Land was more than 18 percent, and today it is less than 2 percent. Once Bethlehem was more than 90% Christian; now Christians are a mere 15% there." Without hiding their anguish, they expressed their deep disappointment and said: "Palestine is the land where Jesus Christ was born, lived, died and resurrected. Today, Christians are leaving this land because we are suffering from the Israeli occupation. We are becoming virtually extinct in our own ancestral homeland".

Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad told us about "the need for the international community to encourage Palestinian Christians to stay in Palestine instead of leaving the country." He appealed that "emigration of Palestinian Christians to other countries should not be encouraged." Yet, this advice is not sufficient for Palestinian Christians who want to see action. They feel that the international community is not doing enough to relieve their plight. They do not comprehend how so many people around the world, especially in the West, do not even know that Palestinian Christians exist, as they are the first Christians. This lack of acknowledgement is a major obstacle, because it has caused many Christians around the world to not be able to relate to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, as they view it as only a Muslim-Jewish one.

The 'Moment of Truth' document, by Kairos Palestine, a group of ecumenical Palestinian Christian theologians, calls upon Christians all over the world to listen to their words of hope, faith and love from the midst of Palestinian suffering, and to share them with the world. Thus, EAPPI and JIC prepared this report to expose the grim realities of life in Palestine under Israeli military occupation, and the impact that it has on all Palestinians, as told by Palestinian Christians.

Palestinian Christians face daily violence. Their homes are often confiscated or demolished. They rarely get permits to build new houses on their own land. Jobs are scarce, medical assistance is sparse and water is routinely cut-off. While Christians from all over the world can freely visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Palestinian Christians are denied their right to freely worship, as they need a special permit to enter Arab East Jerusalem, which is almost always denied by Israel to them, although they live only a few miles away from this holy site.

Indigenous Palestinian Christians are part and parcel of the Arab Palestinian nation. They have the same history, the same culture, and the same hopes as any other Palestinian. Palestinian Christians are proud to be the 'living stones' of Christianity as they are direct descendants of the Mother Church, and they are part of Jesus' living word in their struggle for freedom.

CONTENTS

- I. Acronyms and Definitions
- II. Introduction
- III. Conceptualization of Palestinian Christians
- IV. Case Studies About the Impacts of Israel's Military Occupation of
Palestine and how Christians are Affected
- V. Conclusions & Recommendations
- VI. Appendices

I. Acronyms & Definitions

Acronyms:

- oPt – occupied Palestinian territory
- PNA – Palestinian National Authority
- GOI – Government of Israel
- PLO – Palestinian Liberation Organization
- UN – United Nations

Definitions:

- Area A: An area of the West Bank, designated under the 1993 Oslo Accords to be under Palestinian security control and Palestinian civil administration – 17% of the land in the West Bank is Area A.
- Area B: An area of the West Bank, designated under the 1993 Oslo Accords to be under Israeli security control and Palestinian civil administration – 24% of the land in the West Bank is Area B.
- Area C: An area of the West Bank, designated under the 1993 Oslo Accords to be under Israeli security control and Israeli civil administration – 59% of the land in the West Bank is Area C.
- Dunum: A unit of measurement for land. One dunum is equal to 1,000 square meters.
- Intifada: An Arabic word that means, “uprising”. In the Palestinian context, it is a name used to describe pro-longed period of popular resistance against the Israeli occupation. In this regard, there have been two Intifadas – the first from 1987 to 1993 and the second from 2000 thru 2005.

II. INTRODUCTION

Many people in the West tend to view the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as a Muslim-Jewish one, and unless they belong to either of these faiths, they often find it difficult to relate to the conflict and those who are affected by it. This report aims to expose the grim realities of life under Israeli military occupation, and the impacts that it has on all Palestinians, such as land and water confiscation, settlement expansion, access and movement issues, violence, residency rights and many other human rights violations as told by Palestinian Christians.

This report also aims to shed light on the fact that Palestinian Christians are indigenous to the Holy Land; they are not recent converts, nor are they immigrants – they are the oldest Christian population on earth, and they have been an integral part of the Palestinian cultural identity. They are not a witness to the conflict, but rather they are part of it as they have been struggling for freedom via popular resistance to the occupation for decades.

This report also seeks to disprove unfounded Israeli and Christian Zionist propaganda that Palestinian Christians are depopulating due to Muslim fundamentalism in Palestinian society, by clearly connecting their emigration and suffering directly to the occupation. Finally, this report aims to show how Christians Zionist support for Israel's military occupation of Palestine is threatening the existence of Palestinian Christians.

The case studies that form this report were written by Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) via information that they gathered first-hand while living in seven locations throughout the West Bank – Bethlehem, Hebron, Jayyous, Jerusalem, the South Hebron Hills, Tulkarm and Yanoun.

III. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

The following conceptualization of Palestinian Christians is an excerpt from Dr. Bernard Sabella's report, 'Palestinian Christians: Challenges and Hopes' (2003).

Palestinian Christians have deep roots in the land. The great majority, estimated at 400,000 worldwide or roughly 6.5 percent of all Palestinians, are of indigenous stock, whose mother tongue is Arabic and whose history takes them back, or at least some of them, to the early church. At present, the 50,000 Christians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip make up only 2.2 percent of the total population estimated in the mid-nineties at 2,238,000. Palestinian Arab Christians in Israel were estimated, for the same year, at 125,000 or 14 percent of all Arabs in Israel. Christians in Palestine and Israel make up 175,000 or 2.3 percent of the entire Arab and Jewish population of the Holy Land.

A majority of fifty-six percent of Palestinian Christians are found outside of their country. This situation of out-migration resulted from the exodus of 726,000 Palestinian refugees in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Fifty to sixty thousand Palestinian Christians, comprising 35 percent of all Christians in pre-1948 mandatory Palestine, were among the refugees. In 1996, these refugees and their descendants are spread over the entire Middle East but primarily in the sixty refugee camps dotting the topography of the West Bank (19 refugee camps); Gaza Strip (8 refugee camps); Jordan (10 refugee camps); Syria (10 refugee camps) and Lebanon (13 refugee camps).

As for Palestinian Christians, refugees and non-refugees, they are found mostly in urban areas of the Middle East but many have opted to leave to far away lands such as the USA, Europe, Central and South America, Australia and Canada. The dispersal of Palestinians since 1948 has spared no one family or group. The demographics of Palestinian Christians is as much shaped by the politics of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as it is the demographics of Palestinians in general.

Palestinian Christians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip belong to fifteen different denominations, the largest of which are the Greek Orthodox (51 percent), and the Roman Catholics (32 per cent.) Some smaller denominations, such as the Copts who are originally from Egypt, do not number more than a score of families.

The total number of Palestinian Christians is 49,702.

Palestinian Christians in a Migrant Community

At the end of the twentieth century and given the political and economic conditions prevailing under the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Christian community fits well the definition of a migrant community: “A community with high educational achievement and a relatively good standard of living but with no real prospects for economic security or advancement will most probably become a migrant community”. An emigration survey, undertaken in 1993 on 964 Palestinian households, Christian and Muslim alike, in the central area of the West Bank, upholds the relationship between high levels of education and standards of living and intention to emigrate. Among the 239 Christian households interviewed, intention to emigrate was double that exhibited by the Muslim households.

The Christian sample in the 1993 survey had slightly more years of education and better income, on average, than the rest of the population. In addition, it was clear that almost all of those intending to leave, among Christians, have immediate members of their families abroad. The bad economic and political situation were primary reasons for wanting to leave: 88 percent of those wanting to leave specified the bad economic situation while 61 percent blamed the bad political situation.

Conditions that will help stop or discourage emigration are primarily the improvement of the political situation, mentioned by 47 percent of all respondents and the improvement of the economic situation mentioned by 40 percent.

Peace and its Importance to Stop Emigration

Another indicator of the importance of the political situation is the response received on a question of whether respondents intent on emigration will still leave if peace were to take place. Forty-nine percent of those intending to leave would not, if peace were to take place. Among Muslims, 38 percent said they would not leave while among Christians the percentage of those who would not leave with peace came close to two-thirds and stood at 65 percent. This is further proof that the political situation is an important push factor and that if this situation improves, emigration among Palestinians will be drastically reduced. Based on this and other findings, it becomes clear that the political factor plays an important role in encouraging Palestinians to emigrate or to stay put in their country.



Dr. Bernard Sabella's, a Palestinian Christian, is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Bethlehem University, the Executive Secretary of the Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees, and a Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

But Why Do Christians Leave?

But why do Christians leave at a higher rate than the rest of the population? The answer is not simple as it involves interrelated factors and their mutual effects on one another. First, the socio-economic characteristics of the Christians, which make them more likely candidates for emigration. Second, the fact that emigration is not a new phenomenon for the Christians and that there has been a relatively long tradition of emigration, particularly to distant “Christian” lands. Third, Christians are more sensitive than the general population, to bad economic and political conditions, particularly if they perceive that the prospects for advancement are not forthcoming. Regardless of how one explains this sensitivity, it has to do with the Christian demographic, economic, educational and occupational profile.

The Decline of Jerusalem’s Christians: A Sad Example of Dwindling

Jerusalem, the city where the “Mother Church” originated, provides a dramatic example of the effects of the dwindling numbers of its Christians. While Jerusalem’s Christians are blessed with probably the highest “church per capita” in the world with one church for every 177 Christians, the decline in the number of Jerusalem Christians continues. Emigration is responsible for this decline as the political conditions, especially since 1967, have pushed many Palestinians out of their country. The extent of the Christian decline is best understood by the fact that in 1944 there were 29,350 Christians living in the city; today, Jerusalem’s Christian population is only 35.5% of what it used to be 50 years ago.” There is concern by some, both Church officials and experts, that if preventative and curative steps are not undertaken, then the dwindling of Christian numbers will continue unabated eventually causing the disappearance of community life in some of Jerusalem’s churches.

IV. CASE STUDIES ABOUT THE IMPACTS OF ISRAEL'S MILITARY OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE AND HOW CHRISTIANS ARE AFFECTED

What is an Evangelical Pastor Doing in the West Bank?

Wayne Smith

Ecumenical Accompanier: January – April 2011

We return from visiting a little village in the middle of the West Bank, miles from anywhere. We were there because their little make shift school has been bulldozed by the Israeli military for the third time and all the residents have been given 24 hour eviction notices. We visit a few people using our driver/interpreter, take a few pictures and go home feeling absolutely useless. What in the world are we doing here?

We sit and visit with a representative of a council of another village and hear how Israeli settlers damaged their village's water spring. Now they have to purchase all the water for the village from an Israeli water company. We listen, we take notes and we can do nothing. What in the world are we doing here?

We live in the little Palestinian village of Yanoun, which is literally at the end of the road with a population of less than 80 people. We are slowly getting to know the people here and find them to be very gracious and hospitable, but the language barrier is significant. So we sit and drink tea and coffee and make a stilted attempt at conversation. What in the world are we doing here?

Let me try to answer that by telling you how I came to be in Yanoun. I have been an evangelical pastor for over 30 years, serving in churches of the Evangelical Covenant Church and as a pastor I have had a longstanding interest in the Holy Land. For most of my life, I viewed the establishment of the nation of Israel as a modern miracle, evidence of God's blessing. I am old enough to recall celebrating the 1967 Six Day War, rejoicing in Israel, the little David overcoming the Goliath of the hostile Arab world. But about 6 years ago something began to expand my view of the Middle East. First I read a book called 'Bethlehem Besieged' by a Palestinian pastor, Mitri Raheb, who serves a church in the Christmas Lutheran Church Bethlehem. This



Wayne Smith, an Ecumenical Accompanier from the USA monitors Israeli military activity in the Jordan Valley

book first opened my eyes to the reality of a people called Palestinians who have their own story to tell. This was followed by other authors who continued to expand my understanding of the Palestinian side of this complex story. People like Elias Chacour, a Palestinian pastor who speaks of amazing forgiveness in the face of many abuses on the part of Israel against his family, village and people; and Marc Ellis a Jewish theologian and Mark Braverman, an articulate American Jew who both passionately speak of holding the nation of Israel accountable for violations of basic human rights and justice.

I began to discover that the glorious story of the birth of the nation of Israel has a parallel story of an indigenous people who were already in the area called Palestine when the Jews from Europe began to arrive. I came to know that Israel's war of independence created 700,000 Palestinian refugees fleeing from Israel who were given no right of return to their homeland and villages; and that between 1947-1949 over 500 Palestinian villages in Israel were evacuated and destroyed. I came to realize that the glorious victory of the 1967 Six Day War resulted in Israel militarily occupying a population of over 2.5 million people in the West Bank and Gaza for now over 44 years. And that Israel has been actively encouraging forced displacement of Palestinians and Israeli settlement in this occupied territory all of which is illegal by the standards of International Humanitarian Law, UN Resolutions, and has been ruled as such by the International Court of Justice (July 2004). It has become my conviction that there is a terrible human cost involved in this military occupation both on the victims of the occupation and on the soul of the occupiers.

A few years ago, I shared these concerns with fellow Pastor Andy Larsen, who has a ministry of outreach to the Islamic community. He was aware of a Christian organization working with Israelis and Palestinians seeking non-violent means to end the occupation and realize a just peace. This organization is called the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), a program of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The opportunity to personally get involved came when I decided to semi-retire and dropped my pastoral responsibilities to part time. My wife and I applied and in December 2010 we were off to Jerusalem for a week of orientation and then we were on to our placements. I ended up in the little town of Yanoun, and my wife, Ruth was assigned to Jerusalem, where she works with various Israeli and Palestinians peace and human rights groups. My team of four in Yanoun consisted of one Norwegian, one German and one from Great Britain. We are in this little village because 8 years ago Israeli settlers forced the Palestinian villagers out at gunpoint. The good news is that Israeli human rights groups responded quickly and encouraged the villagers to come back to their homes. The promise of a full time residential presence of internationals served as an incentive to make the locals feel safe enough to return. So EAPPI took on the responsibility of providing this continuous protective presence.

So what in the world are we doing here? While often it feels as if we are useless, I know we are providing two things in this troubled situation. First we are simply here. We are involved in a ministry of presence. We are walking with Palestinians in the world they experience day in and day out. As useless as we feel, in some small way we communicate to the Palestinians that they are not forgotten or alone. God cares. Immanuel - God is with us. Secondly we communicate to our own spheres of influence and help develop a broader understanding of the complexities of the Middle East seeking to find a way to end this occupation and realize a just peace.

As I look around this peaceful little town of Yanoun and watch shepherds lead their flocks and farmers and their donkeys plow their small plots of ground as they have for centuries, I have the assurance that they would probably not be here if it was not for the fact that we are here. What in the world are we doing here? Sometimes I am not sure, but I have the abiding assurance that God knows and He is quite pleased.

Bethlehem – The Politics of Tourism

Aimee Kent & Terry Crawford Brown

Ecumenical Accompaniers: October 2010 – January 2011

At first glance one may presume that Palestine has a booming tourism sector; the vast majority of sites important to Christian pilgrims are located in the area and to the naked eye, places such as Bethlehem are brimming with tourists much of the year round. However, there are many things misleading about this first impression.

Tourism throughout Israel and Palestine, has, like so much of life and industry in the region become part of the political battlefield. Israel's famous one-eyed General, and one-time Prime Minister, Moshe Dayan reportedly said that he would license Palestinians to be fighter pilots before giving them licenses to be tour guides. And he does not seem to be the only one with that opinion, as no Palestinian tour guides were licensed between 1967 and 1995, and no Palestinian investment in tourism was even permitted for this period.

As of 1995, the situation began to improve; Bethlehem was given permission to invest in tourism. Donned the "Bethlehem 2000" project, millions of dollars were spent investing in Street sculptures and infrastructure in anticipation of a big tourist boom at the end of the millennium. This ray of light however proved to be short lived as on 2 April 2002 the people of Bethlehem awoke to the sounds of tanks entering the Old City and guns blaring beneath the whirring of over flying Apache helicopters. Tanks scraped along the walls of the Old city as they attempted to push through its narrow streets. The Lutheran Christmas Church compound along with many homes in the heart of the city were raided and damaged. A group of Palestinian men shot back with rifles against trained soldiers with automatic weaponry and armored vehicles in an attempt to protect the city. The fighting lasted just 13 hours before they were overpowered. They then retreated to Manger Square and sought sanctuary with others in the Church of the Nativity, which marked the beginning of nearly 4 months of curfews imposed on the city and a 40-day siege of those who were in the Church of the Nativity¹.

Forty days being trapped in the Church of the Nativity was not at all what those seeking refuge there – nor the monks who welcomed them – had expected, all believing that the churches sanctity and its historical significance marking Jesus' birthplace would command some respect from the Israeli military. Instead, Israeli soldiers surrounded the church, taking over Manger Square and used the International Peace Centre as

their command post. The church was riddled with bullet holes and the inside was damaged from having 200 people trapped inside for such a long period of time without clothes, food or first-aid supplies². The International Peace Centre had many artworks from their gallery destroyed or stolen, including pieces from their exhibition focusing on the nativity scene. The city in general was damaged or destroyed.

The economic ramifications as a result of the siege were harsh and long lasting, especially for the tourism sector, which is largely ran by Palestinian Christians. Tourists were afraid of travelling in the West Bank and governments around the world encouraged their citizens to keep their distance. Thus, those working in hotels, souvenir shops, travel agencies, restaurants and cafés lost their livelihoods. The lack of money flowing in from tourism then caused virtually every other sector in the Bethlehem area to crash; thus, almost everyone who worked in the private sector lost his or her source of income.

For years after the siege, the Church of the Nativity that had previously hosted thousands of tourists a day was more like a ghost town. Thankfully this reality has started to change, but now the people of Palestine are fighting another battle. Though tourists have begun to return to the area the tourism industry has in many ways become monopolized by Israel to the detriment of the Palestinian community. Of the three million visitors to Israel and Palestine during 2008, an estimated 38% came as pilgrims and only 12% came on business or to attend conferences.³ With few exceptions, most of the tourist sites of interest to Christian pilgrims visiting Israel-Palestine are located in the West Bank. Yet, 97% of tourism income goes to Israel, and only 3% to Palestine⁴.



Rami Kassis from the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) laments, “tour buses that clog and pollute the streets of Bethlehem contribute nothing to the economy. Our biggest challenge is to bring open-minded visitors to see for themselves.” Most tourists who come to the West Bank stay in Israeli hotels and do not meet Palestinians or eat Palestinian food. To attract business, the curio shops in Bethlehem usually have to pay huge kickbacks to tour operators⁵. Of the 300-400 Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim who are trained as tour guides, only 42 have permits to work within Israel, whilst current policies allow all Israeli tour guides to work throughout the West

The entrance to the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem



Worshippers flock to find parking on a Sunday morning at the Church of the Nativity

Bank6. Moreover, in October of 2010, a bill was put forth in the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) calling for all Arab tour guides from East Jerusalem to be stripped of their licenses on grounds that they do not present the Israeli viewpoint to visitors.

If all of these barriers are not enough, some of the few industries that may attract an income from tourists are being suffocated. For instance 'Last year's olive harvest produced too little oil for the local market, making it impossible to sell oil to tourists⁷ – a direct result of trees being destroyed, land being confiscated and Palestinian farmers being refused access to their land to tend their trees.

A number of creative responses have been developed in an attempt to undercut these discriminative policies. One has been the move to Internet tourism, based on the belief that 'if the tourists could not come to Palestine, then Palestine would have to reach

out to tourists⁸. These projects are a simple form of e-commerce, a way of selling souvenirs and locally produced goods to a broader market than those who come to Palestine.

Another response has been the Palestinian Initiative for Responsible Tourism (PIRT – www.pirt.ps), which is a network of organizations, associations and public bodies committed to work for responsible tourism to the Holy Land and to act as advocates for this approach to tourism. PIRT is committed to transforming the current tourism patterns in the Holy Land by encouraging pilgrims and tourists via their 'Code of Conduct for Tourism in the Holy Land' to include Palestinian cities and towns in their itineraries, in order to achieve a more equal distribution of tourism revenues for all people in region.



Palestinians believe that St. Anthony is the protector of young boys. Thus, Palestinian parents traditionally dress their infant boys as St. Anthony on May 30th hoping that he would protect their children.

Beit Sahour – A History of Popular Non-violent Resistance

Mathilda Lindgren & Aimee Kent

Ecumenical Accompaniers: October 2010 – January 2011

Beit Sahour is a picturesque Christian town just southeast of Bethlehem, and is known for Shepherds' Field, the spot where the Angel of the Lord visited the shepherds and informed them of Jesus' birth, as described in Luke 2:8-10. The people of this town also have a rich history of popular non-violent resistance against the occupation, which is less known. We had the opportunity to interview three patrons of this town's tradition of steadfastness, Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh¹, Dr. Majed Nassar² and Mr. Nidal Abu-Zuluf³.



Dr. Majed Nassar

The people of Beit Sahour first organized into a popular, nonviolent, anti-occupation movement during the First Intifada in 1988-89. Majed said, “We discovered that if we decided one day to eat only tomatoes, that this would spread from Gaza to Jenin.” He adds with excitement, “We realized that militarily we could not defeat the occupation, but we could make it pointless and to a certain extent ridiculous. It was a way of life.”

A plethora of innovative non-violent actions in Beit Sahour did indeed challenge the occupation in the late 1980s. “I remember when we made this big march, targeting the Ush Grab military base,” Nidal tells us. “We were about 300 people with some internationals and Israeli peace activists – when we approached the military base and removed the Israeli flag and replaced it with the Palestinian flag. It was quite a move and the soldiers did not expect that!”

Aspiring to achieve self-sustenance from the occupation, people started baking their own bread, producing their own milk, sewing their own clothes and running their

1 Interview with Professor Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, 1 December 2010, Beit Sahour, by Aimee Kent and Mathilda Lindgren.

2 Interview with Dr Majed Nassar, founder of Beit Sahour Medical Clinic, 13 December 2010, Beit Sahour, by Aimee Kent and Mathilda Lindgren.

3 Interview with Nidal Abu-Zuluf, head of JAI of the East Jerusalem YMCA and the YWCA of Palestine, 13 December 2010, Beit Sahour, by Aimee Kent and Mathilda Lindgren.



A view of the Har Homa Settlement, which was illegally built by Israel on privately owned Palestinian land, mainly from Beit Sahour

own health clinics – like the one Majed initiated at that time. One day, the people of Beit Sahour gathered in front of the municipality building and threw away their ID cards en masse. Later on, in November 1989, a “Day of Prayer” was held in the Roman Catholic Church of Beit Sahour. “We invited Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders to pray and act together,” Nidal remembers, “and for the first time in history this city had a Muslim leader and a Jewish leader in the church.” Majed believes it was thanks to the Christian community as well as international media, which made Beit Sahour’s popular nonviolent resistance a relative success. “You know, people would think ‘What are those crazy Christians doing in Beit Sahour?’”⁴

The popular nonviolent activities in Beit Sahour peaked in 1989 when thousands of individuals and hundreds of businesses refused to pay taxes to the Israel, under the

4 More on Christians and nonviolence in Beit Sahour can be found in Melanie A. May (2010) *Jerusalem Testament: Palestinian Christians Speak, 1988–2008*. Cambridge: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co.



Local contacts from Beit Sahour show Ecumenical Accompaniers pictures of what life was like during the first Intifada



Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh



Nidal Abu-Zuluf

slogan: “No taxation without representation”. The Israeli army responded with a 41-day long siege of the town, declaring Beit Sahour a closed military zone and imposing a 24-hour curfew.⁵ “This curfew was used to rob the town,” Majed remembers, “They literally wiped-out over almost all businesses, houses, workshops, and pharmacies. They took everything. One time they were taking a family’s television, and before the soldiers left the home, they told family ‘Pay one shekel and we will return everything’ – the family refused. Then as the soldiers left, the mother of the family ran after the soldiers and said ‘Hey you with our TV, do not forget the remote control! You will need it!’”

When we asked Mazin – who spent his life studying and practicing nonviolent resistance in Palestine and in the USA – about why he participates and writes about popular resistance, he started by explaining how all Palestinians feel an urge to defend their homeland and then continued by saying: “You should never write about things you have not practiced. This goes back to my biology training. It has made me write about things that I experienced myself. When I came back from the USA, I thought I knew the key persons, but after I had been here for a while I began to change my perceptions and understanding. I saw how those who were more quiet and had not impressed me from a distance, were the really effective ones.” Rather than being dependent on particular leaders, Mazin found that “Successful, nonviolent movements are genuinely grassroots movements and are not dependent on one strong leader.”

In his recently published book ‘Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment’ (2010), Mazin covers more than one hundred years of Palestinian popular, nonviolent resistance. Thus, the First Intifada represents only one of several experiences of nonviolent resistance in Beit Sahour and Palestine. Mazin, Majed and Nidal all agree that popular, nonviolent resistance has changed since the First Intifada. Many of the political activists of the First Intifada have transformed their work into

⁵ See the overview on nonviolence produced by the Bethlehem-based NGO Holy Land Trust, http://www.holylandtrust.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=462&Itemid=307

NGOs. Beit Sahour is today flourishing with civil society organizations working nonviolently against the occupation.

Currently, the most prevalent challenge for the people of Beit Sahour is a crisis of space for future growth, due to the constant expansion of the Israeli settlement, Har Homa and the re-annexation of the former Ush Grab military base, both of which are on large swaths of illegally annexed land that are privately owned by the people of Beit Sahour. In an act of protest against the settlement's expansion, Nidal and a few other families chose to build their homes just 150 meters from the it.

The Israeli military evacuated the Ush Grab military base in 2006. In 2008 a movement of Israeli settlers called Women in Green claimed the land suddenly had biblical significance and sought to establish a settlement there. The people of Beit Sahour immediately formed a committee to defend Ush Ghrab. The committee filed a lawsuit in a US court against Women in Green because they used tax-deductible donations from the USA to establish and expand settlements, which is illegal according to US laws. The people of Beit Sahour then regularly began visiting the site to plant olive trees, and they even constructed a public park.⁶ Nidal said, *"Then we ended up with a military sniper tower instead. According to Israel, this was a compromise. Building the tower just means that they will stop us from building, and this is the only piece of land onto which the people of Beit Sahour can expand. There are only two soldiers operating the tower at Ush Grab, but those two can put an end to any dream – like building that baby hospital that we were supposed to build there. This is all in an effort to make us lose hope and feel that the only option is to leave this country."*

Nobody can predict the future, but Mazin humbly suggests from his many years of academic explorations that, "History is a great teacher." Majed notes that, "Not all people today know of what happened in the past and how creative we were. It is our history and we need to educate our people about it, while respecting the aspirations of the new generations." Many NGOs in Beit Sahour today do precisely this, offering courses to youth in history, politics and identity. "We try in a way to make them see the track of human dignity and human rights," says Nidal.

After 62 years of colonization activities that aimed to drive all Palestinians out of their homeland, Mazin concludes that, "Palestinians are resisting nonviolently against oppression just by being born [and continuing to live] in Palestine today."

6 For example, in March 2010 during the Palestinian Land Day, a tree planting event was arranged in the land around Ush Grab, see International Middle East Media Centre article "Hundred Mark Land Day in Beit Sahour Town, Southern West Bank" <http://www.imemc.org/article/58325>.

Beit Jala – The Right to Remain

Phil Lucas

Ecumenical Accompanier: January – April 2010

The largest population of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank is in the Bethlehem-area. We say “area”, because three Christian towns, Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour have grown into one overly urbanized, isolated, Bantustan, as only 13% of the land in the Bethlehem Governorate is designated for Palestinian use. The remainder of the governorate’s land has been illegally annexed into what Israel calls “greater Jerusalem” (west Bethlehem), an area set to develop Jewish-only settlements and to obstruct development and growth of Palestinian areas. Thus, the political realities on the ground make life increasingly difficult for all Palestinians and have especially caused Palestinian Christians from these areas to rapidly emigrate abroad in search of better lives.

Some churches have invested heavily into this area to create better opportunities for Christians in an effort to ensure that they remain. Bethlehem University and all of the best schools are Christian foundations. Yet, the establishment of such institutions has not prevented Christians from leaving. In fact, these institutions may have even indirectly assisted Palestinian Christians emigrate, as a good education gives mobility providing opportunities to study at overseas universities and marketable skills that may be sought abroad. Such a taste of freedom for such an oppressed people awakens the appetite for a better life for oneself and family, away from the daily suffering and humiliation of living under occupation.

The Bethlehem Roots Society is a local NGO that is dedicated to supporting the Bethlehem area’s diminishing Christian community. They run an after school club and a summer camp for the children of poorer Christian families, and are seeking ways to provide un-educated Christians with technical skills and experience to make them more employable. The Bethlehem Roots Society facilitated a visit for us with a needy Christian family from Beit Jala, a hilltop, Christian town just northwest of Bethlehem.

Samir and Georgette live on one of the highest points in Beit Jala and have an amazing panoramic view of Jerusalem, a city that they have not been allowed to enter for more than 10 years. Samir drives a refuse truck; Georgette does not work, and together they are struggling to raise their four children: Wadia (17), Naseef (15) and twins Natalie and Elias (9). Samir had once worked as a tailor in Jerusalem – life was quite good,

but in 2000 when Israel stopped letting Palestinians from access Jerusalem without permits, he lost his job, as he was no longer allowed to enter the city. He tried working as a tailor in Bethlehem, but people here are poorer and prefer to buy cheaper Chinese imports, which put him out of business.

The family owns some land on the edge of Beit Jala that they inherited, but it is worthless because it is adjacent to the separation barrier, which means they are not allowed to use it for building, farming, or anything else. The house they live in is rented and is their seventh home. Economic circumstances have kept them on the move for a more affordable housing, though always within their hometown. Their current apartment only has one bedroom, a kitchen, a bathroom, and a living room that also serves as the children's bedroom.



Samir, Georgette and their four children, Wadia (top left), Naseef (top right), Elias (far left), and Natalie (far right)

Most of their relatives have moved abroad and could assist them with visa applications, but they see no prospect of moving themselves as they have neither marketable skills nor money to assist with relocating. Their hope is invested in educating their children. Samir does not want his children to go to a public school because he fears that they would lose their Christian identity; thus, he sends all four of his children to Talitha Kumi, an expensive, private, German-founded Lutheran School. His eldest daughter, Wadia is the top of her class and is expected to win a scholarship next year to pursue her university studies in Germany. He hopes that his other three children

will follow in her footsteps and earn scholarships to study overseas. They know their children would have better lives abroad, and that it would be devastating to be left behind, but it is a sacrifice that they are willing to make as they want the best for their children's future.

Unfortunately, this story is only one of many, about Christians in the West Bank, who are finding it impossible to live under occupation and are using all of their resources to emigrate. Wadia, who has good command of English, vowed to us that her heart is in Palestine and that even if she goes abroad to study, she will return. She does not want her church to become just another "museum" – referring to the many churches whose congregations have fled the country in search of better lives abroad.

Nahhalin – To Resist is To Exist

Nikolai Hegertun

Ecumenical Accompanier: January – April 2011

In a time marked by systematic displacement via land confiscation, home demolitions & evictions, ‘resistance’ for most Palestinians is to stay put – not leave their land. Yet, for Palestinians, especially those living in Area C¹ in the West Bank, this seemingly simple task is turning into a desperate struggle for existence.

The concept of Sumud (steadfastness) has gained a central position in the history and culture of the Palestinian people; it refers to the two characteristics that can be ubiquitously found among Palestinians: firstly, preserving deep roots in the homeland; and secondly, stubbornly going on with daily life and keeping hope for the future alive, despite all the adversities, discrimination, expulsion, and international negligence they face.²

The issue of land is undoubtedly the core of the Middle East conflict.³ It has been the main target of the Zionist movement for decades – to grab Palestine’s land without its inhabitants. The direct and de-facto annexation of Palestinian land started in 1948 and has been supported and reinforced by every Israeli Prime Minister ever since. Notably, its unwavering continuation to date is the main reason for the breakdown of the last US-prompted peace-negotiations.

The Nassar family is the last Christian family in Nahhalin, a town just southwest of Bethlehem. The Nassar’s own an extensive swath of land in the middle of Israel’s illegal Gush Etzion settlement bloc, an area of western Bethlehem that Israel wants to use to create a “greater Jerusalem” for Jewish-only inhabitation that would be used to skew the demographics of Jerusalem into Israel’s favor. The family has owned the land since the beginning of the twentieth century, and is one of the few Palestinian families that possess Ottoman land deeds. Most other Palestinian landowners may only have papers from British or Jordanian authorities, which for Israel is insufficient as they only acknowledge Palestinian ownership of land based on Ottoman documentation.

1 The Oslo Accords divided The West Bank into three administrative areas: Area A, where the Palestinians have both civil and military control, Area B, where the Palestinians only exerts civil control and the Israeli military is executing power, and lastly Area C where Israel have full control.

2 <http://www.aeicenter.org/>

3 Ateek 2009: 56.



A stone placed by the Nassar family at the entrance to the Tent of Nations

Israel often declares a piece of land as 'state land' and forces the Palestinians living there to prove their ownership of it. Daoud Nassar tells us, "In our case – the Israeli judges were shocked. We had an exceptionally strong case." This meant that Israel could not use the Nassars' land for settlement expansion. The Israeli judicial system, which often favors Israeli settlements – had seemingly reached its limits in this case.

Since the Nassar family's stalemate, the family has had to face the Israeli occupation's persistent means to try and drive the family off the land. Daher Nassar explains, "First they tried using the courts against us, then the military, then the settlers offered to buy the land, then the settlers began intimidating us, and then we were slapped with demolition orders. What more can they do?"

The family's case has pattered in the Israeli judicial system for twenty years now. After proving ownership, they had to document their land, and had to rent a plane to take aerial photos of their land twice. Daher assures us that this is a rather expensive affair for a Palestinian farmer. Then they had to bring forth thirty witnesses. The family gathered forty witnesses from their town and rented a bus to take them to court. Once they got there, Daher was told that the case was postponed. He was given a new date and duly brought his witnesses again. This time the court let them wait for three hours before they called in two witnesses, which they said were sufficient. Then the case was

postponed again. When the Israeli court cannot rule in favor of Palestinians like Daher, they often use their authority to keep postponing the case in order not to establish a ruling that could be used as precedent for other Palestinians.

However, the judicial process was just the first strategy from the Israeli authorities Daoud explains:

The legal approach hasn't worked, and hopefully it will not ever work. Our biggest challenge is their last strategy: simply trying to make it difficult for us to exist. This is a comprehensive approach. No water, no electricity, no services, no building permits, and demolition-orders – we are now a completely isolated island. In this way they are trying to wear us out. This is why we need to be as self-sustainable as possible.

Accordingly, for the Nassar family, sumud has become more than an idea – its their life. Both Daher and Daoud admit that the cunning and never-ending attempts to displace them have frustrated them, but they keep their hope alive. Daoud explained:

Sumud without hope is futile. In fact, hope, faith and love are what are driving us. Without faith in God, in yourself, and the non-violent resistance – in action – you cannot continue. The love enables us to act differently. I am not just sitting here. When you act in a non-violent manner, you are in charge. They might have the power, but you are in charge for your own actions. It is not a reaction; rather it is they who have to respond. When you act differently you confuse the others. Usually, the soldier knows how we will react, if he pushes me for example. If he tells me he is my enemy, I simply refuse it. You cannot resist evil with evil. When you refuse to hate, you are in charge and you are setting the premises. This is the Christian way of acting. This is the Jesus' way. You give the other a chance to think in a different way.

He offers an example from his own life:

One evening I was driving with my family from our farm. Suddenly, eight soldiers jumped in front of my car. They had been hiding in the bushes. So I stopped and came out with my hands over my head. They were shouting at me! I told them that 'I live here, I just want to go to Bethlehem.' Nevertheless, they took my ID card and told me they had to check the car. I told them, 'Look my children are sleeping! You will only scare them.' But they persisted. I then woke my children up and spoke to them – deliberately in English so that the soldiers could understand. I said 'children, you will now see Israeli soldiers, they might look dangerous, but they are actually very friendly'. Consequently, the soldiers checked our car very gently, and afterwards an officer approached me and said: 'Please apologize to your family for us.'

I simply refuse to perceive anyone as my enemy. Of course this will not always work, but if you act differently, you might bring them from their military mentality to humanity. It might open their eyes.

Daoud concludes with some hard-earned experience: "Sumud is easy to say, but hard to live, but we learn by doing it every day."



Daoud Nasser, founder of Tent of Nations

***Land Confiscation, Settlements & Home Demolitions
in the oPt & International Law:***

Land Confiscation:

UN Resolution 242 (22 November 1967) calls upon Israel to withdraw its forces from land that it claimed during the 1967 war (West Bank including East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights & Sinai Peninsula), and the inadmissibility of acquisition of land by force.

The occupying power cannot confiscate private property (article 46 Hague Regulations). Extensive destruction and appropriation of property which are not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly amounts to a war crime (Article 147 GC IV).

Settlements:

The occupying power shall not deport or transfer members of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies (article 49 IVGC). This means that settlements are prohibited. The occupying power cannot confiscate land in the occupied territory for the sole purpose of establishing settlements for its nationals.

Home Demolitions:

The occupying power is prohibited to destroy any property unless it is absolutely necessary by military operation (article 53 IVGC). Extensive destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly amounts to a war crime (Article 147 GC IV).

Objects that are essential for the survival of the population (e.g. water cisterns and sewage systems) should not be attacked, destroyed, removed or be rendered useless (Article 54 AP I).

Kairos Palestine – A Moment of Truth

Terry Crawford Browne

Ecumenical Accompanier: October 2010 – January 2011



Some of the authors of the Kairos Palestine 'Moment of Truth' document: Back (L-R): Rev. Mitri Raheb, Adnan Musallam, Nidal Abu Zulf, Fr. Jamal Khader, Yusef Daher, Rifat Kassis, Lucy Thaljih. Front (L-R): Nora Kort, Bishop Attallah Hanna (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate), Former Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Cider Deibes.

The Kairos South Africa document, which was launched in September 1985, challenged Christians both within the country and internationally to consider their religious commitments in the context of the apartheid state's heretical ideology. The apartheid government a year earlier had imposed its "tricameral constitution" to entrench the exclusion of seventy-four percent of the population from political participation in South Africa.

The purported rationale was that the political rights of blacks resided in the homelands, the so-called bantustans, and not in "white South Africa." Similar to Zionist claims of divine intervention in a "promised land," the preamble to that constitution referred in "humble submission to almighty God...who brought our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own."

Civil disobedience and unrest erupted throughout the country. A state of emergency was declared in July 1985, and by August a massive financial crisis followed when South Africa defaulted on its foreign loan repayments. The parallels between South Africa during the 1980s and Israel today are glaring.

The Kairos South Africa document had very serious implications for relationships between Church and State. It called upon Christians to cease praying for the government and, instead, to pray for its removal. It declared the apartheid state to be a tyranny that was morally and theologically illegitimate. Christians were therefore called upon to take their religious responsibilities seriously, and to disobey the State in order to obey God.⁹

The prospect loomed of a civil war in which perhaps millions of people would die, and that the country's infrastructure would be so destroyed that South Africa might never recover economically. The apartheid government was armed even with nuclear weapons, so that military confrontation would have been suicidal. Close collaboration between Israel and South Africa from the early 1950s until the late 1980s in developing nuclear weapons capabilities is now well documented.¹⁰

Despite severe censorship, media coverage of unfolding events galvanized the world community. International civil society, led especially by the Church but also by trade unions, universities and even movie stars overwhelmed the United States and European governments. These governments, with few exceptions, provided both overt and covert support to the apartheid regime, which claimed to be under attack by atheistic communists.

In particular, international banking sanctions instigated by the Church in response to the Kairos document, tipped the balance. Within four years, when 35,000 people "marched for peace" in Cape Town in September 1989, it was evident that the apartheid government had lost. Archbishop Desmond Tutu fondly recalls: "we marched in Cape Town, and the Berlin Wall fell down two months later."

Nelson Mandela was released in February 1990. The long-predicted racial bloodbath was averted, and by 1994 South Africans negotiated a relatively peaceful transition to democracy. Both Israelis and Palestinians look expectantly to that South African experience. Thus, the Kairos Palestine document released in December 2009 refers to its predecessor. It declares:

We Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because the true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed, a call to justice and equality among peoples.¹¹

The document continues:

Our word to the international community is to stop the principle of “double standards,” and to insist on the international resolutions regarding the Palestinian problem with regard to all parties. We call for...a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. We repeat again that this is not revenge but rather a serious action to reach a just and definitive peace that will put an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories, and will guarantee security and peace for all.

It concludes:

In the absence of all hope, we cry out our cry of hope. We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and death that still persist in our land. We will see here “a new land” and “a new human being,” capable of rising up in the spirit to love each other of his or her brothers or sisters.

The Kairos Palestine document has garnered support from all over the world. The Israeli government’s Operation Cast Lead against Gaza in December 2008/January 2009, the subsequent Goldstone Commission report, plus the inept handling of the Gaza flotillas have delegitimized the Zionist state.



Bishop Attallah Hanna (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate) speaks to journalists while visiting the separation barrier in Bethlehem.

The document also challenges those Christian theologians who provide theological and biblical legitimacy to infringements of Palestinian rights. The West, it notes, has sought to make amends for what Jews endured in Europe, but in trying to correct an injustice, the result was a new injustice. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign endorsed by the document is fast gathering momentum and again, is driven by civil society rather than by governments.

In this context, the Russell Tribunal on Palestine met in Barcelona in March 2010 to consider the complicity under international law of the European Union and its member states in Israeli war crimes. The Tribunal met again in London in November 2010 to consider the complicity of international corporations in profiting from such crimes, and it will meet a third time in Cape Town in October 2011 to consider the crime of Israeli apartheid as a crime against humanity.

Boycott, Divestment & Sanction (BDS) Facts:

BDS is a strategy that allows people of conscience to play an effective role in the Palestinian struggle for justice.

On 9 July 2005, a year after the International Court of Justice's historic advisory opinion on the illegality of Israel's Wall in the oPt, a clear majority of Palestinian civil society called upon their counterparts and people of conscience all over the world to launch broad boycotts, implement divestment initiatives, and to demand sanctions against Israel, until Palestinian rights are recognized in full compliance with international law by: Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands occupied in June 1967 and dismantling the Wall; Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

Also in 2005, the World Council of Churches' Central Committee released a statement that: "encourages member churches to work for peace in new ways and to give serious consideration to economic measures that are equitable, transparent and non-violent." The statement also reminded "churches with investment funds that they have an opportunity to use those funds responsibly in support of peaceful solutions to conflict. Economic pressure, appropriately and openly applied, is one such means of action."



Ecumenical Accompaniers read graffiti on the Separation Barrier

Azzun – A Tiny Minority in a Loving Community

Inger Carlsen

Ecumenical Accompanier: April – July 2010

Afaf and her brother Abu Yusef were born and raised in Azzun, a small town in the northern West Bank where they reside to this day. Of the town's 10,000 residents, they are the only two Christians left.

Afaf left to study in Cairo when she was just 18 years old, and she became a schoolteacher upon returning to her hometown. She then became the headmaster at the girls' school in Azzun at the age of 26, and held her post until she recently retired. Afaf is devout, but struggles with her faith because so many of her fellow Christians around the world misinterpret their religion and support the Israeli occupation, which makes her life as a Palestinian Christian extremely difficult.

Abu Yusef followed in his father's footsteps and worked as a farmer, but has had a difficult time making ends meet in recent years, because the Israeli government confiscated 57 dunams (57,000 sq. meters) of his family's land. Abu Yusef enjoys going to church; years ago, a priest would visit Christian families in Azzun and hold a service there for them every Sunday. However, since the number of Christians depleted down to only him and his sister, Abu Yusef now has to take a taxi every week to the city of Nablus to receive communion.

Abu Yusef recalls, "When we were growing up, there were about 50 Christians living in Azzun." They have four siblings who now live in Jordan, and one who lives in the United States of America. Neither their family members in Jordan nor in the USA are allowed to return to their hometown, because they were not present in 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank and took a census, issuing ID-cards to all those present and stripping all those who fled during the Six-day War of any residency rights. Abu Yusef feels that this is a real shame, because many of those who fled, planned to leave only temporarily until the war ended, but when it did, they were no longer considered Palestinians – they were denied their right to return.

Abu Yusef claims that if it were not for on-going Israeli policies that aim to reduce the number of Palestinians living in the West Bank, the Christian population in Azzun would have multiplied into hundreds of people rather than crumble to an inevitable extinction, citing that his brother in the USA has a wife, children and grand-children, and adding "imagine if they lived here today."

Abu Yusef said, "Before 1948 all the inhabitants of Rafidiya were Christians, now less than half of them are Christians." The northern West Bank city of Nablus and the neighboring town Rafidiya have grown into one city over the years with a total population of about 60,000 inhabitants, 600 of which are Christians.

When I asked about what pushed so many Christians to emigrate, Afaf said, "There are many reasons – insecurity, lack of freedom, loss of livelihood, and all of the other problems the occupation creates. We desire to live in peace with freedom, and youth want to know that they will have a future. May be we do not have as much patience as our Muslim brothers and sisters to put up with the occupation." She adds that they do not want anyone to leave Palestine, neither Christians nor Muslims. "It is important that Palestinians stay in Palestine; if we allow our selves - directly or indirectly – to be forced to leave, the occupying power gets what they want – our land, but we will lose more than that – our identity, our heritage, our very existence."

She has read the Kairos-document and says, "It is very good. It tells the truth. Forgiveness is an important message in Christianity." She hopes that the document would spur international action, especially by her fellow Christians worldwide, saying, "words are not enough". She hopes that the people in western countries, especially Christians would understand more about the situation in Palestine and act against any complicity or negligence that their countries may have in regards to the occupation. She said, "Palestinian Christians have historically been disappointed by the lack of understanding, and support from Christians in the West for the Israeli occupation, which is actively cleansing the Holy Land of its Christians."

A landscape view of Azzun



When I asked her what it is like to be a small Christian minority living amongst Muslims, she responded, “We do not have any problems. We are one – one people, one heritage, one history, one culture and one struggle. We are respected here. Not only respected - I feel we are beloved. In Palestine, Christians and the Muslims have no problem living together – it is not a fight between religions that underlies our difficulties – it is the Israeli Occupation.”

Palestinian Refugees & International Law:

UN Resolution 194 – Article 11: (11 December 1948) resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible;

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Conventions clearly prohibits individual or mass forcible transfers from an occupied territory to any other territory, occupied or not. Deportations (outside the oPt) and transfers (within the oPt) are listed as grave breaches.

“Everyone has the right to leave any country including his own and to return to his country”, Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Zababdeh – Life Without Water

David Mitchel

Ecumenical Accompanier: October 2009 – January 2010

Zababdeh is a small, rural, Christian town in the fertile, north West Bank, close to the city of Jenin. It has many historic artefacts and sites, including a well, which is believed to be that in which Jacob was abandoned by his jealous brothers many centuries ago. To be correct, this well is actually a water cistern – a large underground holding tank with a narrow neck that collects rainwater in the winter and stores it for use in the long, dry summers. Centuries later, these cisterns are still vital to everyday life throughout the West Bank today and Zababdeh has more than 500 of these cisterns to supplement insufficient water supplies.



Victor K. Isaied, Mayor of Zababdeh

The town currently has only a 10% unemployment rate, which is rather good for this part of the world, although the town's mayor, Victor K. Isaied acknowledges that most people here are employed by the Municipality, the PNA or have small shops. He has ambitions to generate employment and alleviate poverty by developing the local agricultural sector; however, his efforts are severely curtailed by the lack of water, saying, "we do not have enough water to drink; so, agricultural development is out of the picture. This will result in continued poverty and possibly food security issues in the near future."

In this sense, Zababdeh is no different than most West Bank towns in its struggle for water. Although, it has had a water network for most of the houses in the town since 1978, the Israeli water authority has prevented repairs or expansion of the network, and only lets water run thru the network for an average of 24-36 hours (1-1.5 days) per week. In the summer, the situation is even worse, causing the town's 3,600 residents to trailer in tanks of water by tractor at a cost of at least 30 NIS (approximately \$9.00 USD) per cubic meter of water – quite expensive when compared to most western countries, let alone a low-income community in the West Bank. Furthermore, tanked water is often from unknown origins and can contain bacteria that can result in health problems, such as diarrhoea, kidney stones, etc.



The Anglican Church of Zababdeh



The Keystone of the Rosary Nunnery in Zababdeh

After the Israeli military occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the Israel took complete control of all Palestinian sources of water in the oPt and has since directed most of it for settlements at subsidized costs, and minimal amounts have been sold back to the Palestinians at bogus rates. Since then, little or no maintenance or upgrading has been carried out on water infrastructure for Palestinians, and permission to undertake such projects are invariably refused or delayed by Israel, despite available funding. The result is inadequate water supplies, as well as a complete lack of sewage disposal facilities in large parts of the oPt, including Zababdeh.

“There is no need for any of this”, says Palestinian water expert, George Rishmawi. “The North East Aquifer, currently supplying this area, has adequate potential to increase output, but Israel continually stands in the way of development. It is a political problem, not water one. We have the finances, technical capacities and the natural resources, but are not allowed to solve this problem.”

The Palestinian people face challenge after challenge in their pursuit of a normal family life under military occupation, and water scarcity is just another one for the list.

Water, Sanitation & International Law:

“Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and therefore a basic human right.”
- Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General

On 2010, the UN Human Rights Council recognized the right to water and sanitation as human rights, as they are indispensable for the full enjoyment of the right to life, the right to health and the right to dignity.

Under international humanitarian law, an occupying power is responsible for the welfare of the civilian population and must ensure that civilians are provided with or allowed to secure the basic needs and objects indispensable for their survival including food, water, medical supplies and shelter. Under the fourth Geneva Convention, Israel must ensure Palestinians' access to drinking water, water for personal hygiene and sanitation (articles 55 and 56 IVGC).

Under international human rights and humanitarian law, the occupied people have the right to their own natural resources. Under IHL, water, as a natural resource, is protected and should be preserved. Although the occupying power may use natural resources and enjoy its fruits (Article 55, The Hague Regulations); the use and the extraction of water resource in an occupied territory may not be excessive, abusive, wasteful or neglectful. The occupying power should never damage or diminish the property itself. It may use natural resources as long as it is not detrimental to their capital and must not over exploit the resources. Furthermore, any use of water by the occupying power must be to cover the expenses of the occupation and/or for the benefit of the local population (which does not include settlers). It is prohibited to use the natural resources from an occupied territory for the enrichment of the occupying power and/or citizens and companies. Discrimination in the allocation of water resources is prohibited.



The Alter of the Church of the Visitation in Zababdeh



Father Firas Diab, Melkite Catholic Priest of Zababdeh

Jerusalem – Forced to be a Minority

Niku Hooli

Ecumenical Accompanier: January – April 2011

Israel has waged an institutional, demographic war on East Jerusalem's native Palestinian inhabitants by systematically revoking their residency rights to forcibly displace the community and cleanse the Holy City of Palestinians. Israel's aim is to decrease the percentage of Palestinian Jerusalemites in comparison to Israeli settlers, hoping that a Jewish majority in East Jerusalem would make Israel's illegal annexation of this part of the Holy City irreversible. Although, this policy affects all Palestinian Jerusalemites equally, it is extremely detrimental to the indigenous Christian community in Jerusalem, which is already a minority in Palestinian society.

Once the majority in Jerusalem, Christian Jerusalemites are increasingly becoming closer to extinction. The number of Palestinian Christians living in Jerusalem have decreased rapidly since Israel occupied East-Jerusalem in 1967. "Before there were 32,000 Palestinian Christians living here. Now the number is less than 9,000. Thousands are living in Diaspora", says Yusef Daher, the Executive Secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC) and a father of five children living in Jerusalem.

Yusef knows the difficulties of living as a Christian, Palestinian Jerusalemite in the city that Israel seeks to make its exclusive, undivided capital. One of the main problems Christians face in Jerusalem is the issue of residency rights. Ten of Yusef's 21 family members were forcibly displaced by Israel and made to live outside of their home city.

Yusef's brother has been living in the United States for four years. Now he cannot come back because Israel states that if a Palestinian Jerusalemite has been living outside the city, Jerusalem is not his/her centre of life anymore, and therefore he/she is stripped of his/her residency rights.

Yusef's sister-in-law, also a Jerusalemite who has lived in the US, has lost her Jerusalem ID and is now living in the city as an American tourist. She must now travel to Jordan every 3 months and re-enter the West Bank to renew her tourist visa. Even though her husband (Yusef's other brother) is a Jerusalemite living in Jerusalem, she cannot obtain any sort of residency permit to be with her husband, because Israel has not allowed family-unification for Palestinian families in Jerusalem for the past 11 years.

“My sister and her husband were born in Jerusalem, but because my brother-in-law’s job is in Ramallah and because they own a house there, they can no longer get their Jerusalem IDs renewed.”, Yusef continues.

Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem, like all Palestinian Jerusalemites, are also suffering from major housing issues. Palestinians are only allowed to build on 13% of Jerusalem’s land and this land is already almost fully built-up. It is also common-practice for the municipality to endlessly pro-long Palestinians’ applications for building permits – the process costs tens of thousands of dollars and almost always ends in a denial. This institutionalized practice is meant to deny Palestinian Jerusalemites housing in the city, forcing them to seek housing in either Ramallah or Bethlehem, so their residency rights can be revoked. Thus, many Palestinians fight displacement by building new homes or additions to their existing homes without permits. This often leads to evictions or house demolitions, both of which result in homelessness and internal displacement.

“22 Christian families currently face threats of demolition or eviction. In five years the number of Palestinian Christians living in Jerusalem is expected to drop down to 5,500 people”, Daher warns.

Israel treats Christian Palestinians just as badly as they treat Muslim Palestinians. In the autumn of 2010 the Alliance Church in West-Jerusalem was partially burned down due to an arson attack, after receiving numerous threats from near-by Orthodox Jewish communities.

Another difficulty is getting enough priests for the churches in Jerusalem that speak Arabic, as priests from Arab countries are often denied entry to Israel. Israel gives out permits for Christians living in the West Bank to come and worship in Jerusalem during Christmas and Easter, but only to a few people.

“Israeli officials claim they give out 10,000 permits for Holy Saturday, but in reality the number is about 3,000. Also, if a Christian holiday coincides with a Jewish one, a lot less permits are given.”, Daher explains. The local churches are trying to fight back. “We



issued an appeal, writing letters to the statesmen all over the world and are trying to present our case in the highest international court”, Daher explains.

Even though the number of Christians is decreasing, Daher does not like them to be called a minority.

“We are not a minority. We are a local, indigenous community of Jerusalem”, Daher says. “We want an open city. We are not fighting against the Jews or the Muslims, we are fighting against exclusivity”, Daher stresses.

“Jerusalem should be a free, open city for all of God’s children. Here everybody should have equal rights”.

Jerusalem & International Law:

UN Resolution 252 (21 May 1968) ‘declares invalid’ Israel’s acts to unify Jerusalem as a Jewish capital, and UN Resolution 476 (30 June 1980) ‘reiterates’ that Israel’s claims to East Jerusalem are ‘null and void’.

Moreover, the International Court of Justice Ruling on the Wall from 2004 reaffirmed that legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel as the occupying power, which have changed or declared the change of status of Jerusalem are not valid since they violate international law.

According to international law, East Jerusalem is occupied territory. Land cannot be acquired by means of annexation, as the annexation by use of force is contrary to international law (article 2(4) of the UN Charter).

A landscape view of Jerusalem



Building Palestine – Christians in Politics & Civil Society

Sherry Ann Chapman & Ruth Smith
Ecumenical Accompaniers: January – April 2011

“Palestinian Christians are referred to as the Palestinian embroidery – an interwoven and an integral part of the whole population.”

Jean Zaru

Though the number of Palestinian Christians in Israel and Palestine is small, they are an important “part of the history, society, economy, and topography of the place” according to Bernard Sabella, a local Christian voice in politics and civil society. They are the indigenous Christians and a highly educated group, dynamic in political and civil leadership.

Palestinian Christians are diverse and aware of a need for ecumenical unity even as the group celebrates its plurality and integral presence in society. Palestinian Christians identify with their nationality as much as with their Christianity. Dr. Sabella expresses no desire for “...different treatment from other Palestinians because otherwise that would be a differentiation from our own people.”

Life under the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza means economic hardship, political instability, and loss of freedom of movement for all Palestinians, Christian and Muslim. It is worth emphasizing that Palestinian Christians are emigrating due to these reasons; they are not leaving due to actions by Palestinian Muslims. Luna Nasrallah, a Palestinian Christian and supervisor of teachers in the PNA’s Ministry of Education, states that under the occupation, “We are deprived of many rights...our right to live freely, our right as human beings to be treated as human beings by Israeli soldiers.” This concern is echoed by the Sa’adeh family who in the past has lived in Nablus and Bethlehem, and currently lives in Ar Ram; they are outside of the Separation Wall yet still in the Jerusalem Governorate. Dr. Haitham Sa’adeh, an orthopedic surgeon, said, “Palestinian Christians are emigrating because there are too many difficulties with the occupation, and the economic and political situation is instable here.” Faten Sa’adeh, his wife, adds: You cannot separate

¹Palestinian Christians: Facts, Figures, and Trends 2008. DIYAR. See: http://www.annadwa.org/en/media/pdf/pal_chr_booklet.pdf



The Saadeh family

our daily life from politics. When you see what Israel is doing, you have to speak about politics. Recognizing the long-time leadership provided by Palestinian Christians, the PNA ensures that Palestinian Christians are duly represented in the Parliament. Six of 132 parliamentary seats are exclusively reserved for Palestinian Christians – giving Christians 4.5% representation even though, in 2010, only 1.25% of the population in the oPt was Christian. The higher proportion of Palestinian Christians in the Parliament has a positive effect. The Christians and church leaders have strong relationships with Western countries, which fund both the PNA and many non-governmental organizations (NGOs); thus, we are a highly valued minority, we are not a weak. It is important to stay and co-exist with Muslims. By staying, we maintain our identity.

In addition to leadership provided by religious leaders such as Bishop Munib Younan, Michael Sabbah, and Atallah Hanna, Palestinian-Christian leadership is evident across lay society (i.e. politics, business, academia, medical services, arts and law). “About 22,000 Palestinian Christians are working across the oPt. For example, Palestinian Christians are 1/3 of the faculty at BirZeit University. Palestinian Christians are in the professions, academia, activities which have been vital in developing a state”, said Dr. Sabella.

Dr. Sabella has described the Middle East Council of Churches – Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DPSR), as, “a church-based organization that has world-wide partners that are church related yet 80% of the beneficiaries are not Christians. For example, in the care of the elderly, Palestinian Christians established the first facility in Jerusalem; also one established in Bethany; and a facility for the elderly and the chronically ill in Abu Dis. These facilities are for Palestinians, regardless of whether they are Christians or Muslims.”

Looking to the future, Palestinian Christians may be drawing hope from their integral presence in Palestinian society. As Yusef Daher has said, “We won’t just vanish. We have lived here for 2,000 years. Emigration will continue to happen, yes, but also there



Yusef Daher, Executive Secretary, Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre

Jean Zaru is the Presiding Clerk of the Friends Meeting House in Ramallah and a founding member of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center.



Dr. Bernard Sabella, a Palestinian Christian, is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Bethlehem University, the Executive Secretary of the Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees, and a Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.



is a return. Some people who have returned to live in the oPt are saying that it is better to live at home rather than abroad in hard economic times.” Dr. Sabella also believes that there will continue to be a Christian presence, but sees that some of those who may be most able to contribute to society and the church are choosing to emigrate after being educated abroad.

To recall Jean Zaru’s metaphor, Palestinian Christians, as embroidery threads, actively weave themselves into their larger society. In Dr. Sabella’s words, “I am a citizen of a society under occupation and I want to contribute to the building of a society, not as a protected species.” They are not separate from, but integral to the political and civil dimensions of Palestinian society.

Divided Under Occupation – United in Holy Matrimony

Nader Muaddi
EAPPI Advocacy Officer

The right to choose your spouse and marry is one of the basic rights for all mankind and is legally founded in the UN Charter of Human Rights.

However, Palestinians have different travel restrictions, citizenships, ID cards, or legal statuses depending on whether they are residents of Jerusalem, the remainder of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Citizens of Israel, or live in the Diaspora. Thus, the occupation fragmented the Palestinian identity into at least 5 sub-groups for the sake of this article, and this is a severe problem when it comes to marriage between these sub-groups. Although, this is a problem for all Palestinians, it is proportionately a greater problem for Christian Palestinians who are a tiny minority with an accordingly small pool of spouses to choose from.

For example, Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are both under the administrative control of the PNA, and both carry 'green ID cards'; however, both territories have been completely isolated from one-another since September 2000. Furthermore, Palestinians from the West Bank cannot enter the Gaza Strip and vice versa. Moreover, neither group can enter Israel to find Palestinian brides or grooms there. Additionally, Palestinian citizens of Israel are not allowed to enter the Gaza Strip and most parts of the West Bank. Also, West Bank Palestinians cannot enter Jerusalem even though it is part of the West Bank, and Jerusalemites cannot enter the Gaza Strip. What's more, Palestinians from the Gaza Strip rarely have the opportunity to leave the territory, and internationals rarely have permission to enter it; thus, it is also cut-off from the Diaspora as well.

The only time when Palestinian Christians actually have the opportunity to inter-mingle is during the holiday season (Christmas and Easter), when those living in Diaspora come home to visit their families, Palestinians citizens of Israel are allowed to enter Bethlehem, and many Christians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip are given permits for a short-period of time to enter Israel and the West Bank, including Jerusalem (West Bank Palestinians are never given permits to enter the Gaza Strip).

However, if two people were to meet during the holiday seasons and they felt a spark, they know that they will have many challenges if they sought to marry one-another because Israel has not allowed family unification for Palestinians since 2002. Moreover,

it is most likely that they will never even be able to get engaged, as a marriage in Palestinian society is a decision that involves the bride's and groom's entire families, and the potential in-laws could not make such a decision if they are unable to meet and carry out the sequential customary rituals that lead to marriage.

Traditionally, the bride follows the groom and lives in his hometown or place of residence in the case of refugees. If a woman from the West Bank met a man from the Gaza Strip, she would not be able to go live with her husband, as she could never manage to enter the territory. If a woman from the Gaza Strip married a man from the West Bank, she would have to live there illegally, meaning that she could never leave the town that her husband lives in, because she could risk an automatic deportation back to the Gaza Strip if her ID is checked at any of the numerous checkpoints scattered across the West Bank, separating her from her husband and children. Moreover, a life-time spent solely in one-town is not a life – it would limit her opportunities for education, work, travel, meeting people, etc.; thus, no woman from the Gaza Strip would willingly assume such a life.

If a Palestinian woman from the Gaza Strip were to marry a Palestinian Citizen of Jerusalem, or a Palestinian Jerusalemite, the same scenario would apply, as she would never be given a permit to live in Israel or Jerusalem with her spouse. However, if the Jerusalemite decided to follow his/her spouse to live in the West Bank (as he or she could never enter the Gaza Strip), he or she would risk losing his or her residency in Jerusalem, and would therefore be cut-off from his or her family and friends. Yet, if a Jerusalemite married a Palestinian citizen of Israel, he or she would become a citizen of Israel; however, they would no-longer be counted as a Palestinian resident of Jerusalem, which could throw-off the statistics when it comes to final negotiations or make him / her end up on the wrong side of the border under any agreement to end the conflict, again being separated from family and friends.

Diaspora Palestinians who are either born abroad or had their ID cards revoked for living abroad while studying or working can only enter Israel and the West Bank, including Jerusalem as tourists, and are therefore granted 3-month tourist visas. If they were to come home to find a spouse, they could not reside in any of these areas because they would not be given a long-term residency visa to co-exist with their local spouses. This is a blatant double standard as an international of non-Palestinian / Arab origin would easily receive such a visa to live with his / her Jewish, Israeli spouse in any of these areas. The Diaspora-returnee would have two options – 1. Take your spouse and pull him / her overseas to live together, which could cause the local spouse to lose his / her ID card if he / she is from Jerusalem – OR – 2. The Diaspora-returnee could live an unstable life, where he / she must leave the region every three months and return again to receive a new visa upon entry; however, at any given moment he / she could be denied entry, and would be separated from his / her spouse and children.

Xavier, a Diaspora Palestinian Christian from Chile who is living in Ramallah said, “If I had a Palestinian ID and another Palestinian from the Diaspora, Israel, Jerusalem, or Gaza asked for my daughter's hand, the first thing I would ask is how he could live with



A section of the barrier that separates East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank

her. There are legitimate concerns based on real cases. We have hundreds of divided families. You might end up losing your daughter. You might end up losing your family. Nonetheless, I support people that despite Israel policy think that Israel has no right to influence our private life and marry the person they have fallen for.”

Israel is using the strict rules of marriage to fragment the Palestinian people’s national identity, and if these policies continue, the future will be bleak for the continued existence of Palestinian Christians. Finding spouses among the decreasing Christian communities is already difficult, and this will continue to become more difficult so long as people are restricted to marry from specific areas. For this reason, as for many other reasons, Jerusalem needs to remain tied to its historic sister cities, Bethlehem and Ramallah.

Family Reunification & International Law:

The family unit is protected in article 46 of the Hague Regulations and article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Civilians are at all times entitled to respect for their persons, honour, family rights, religious convictions, and manners and customs.

The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children. – Article 10, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 (ratified by Israel in 1991).

Impediments of family reunification also violate the prohibition against forced transfer (article 49 IVGC as it forces protected people outside the occupied territory.)

Burqin – Isolated Yet Hopeful

Patricia Cockrell & Marcos Paiva Mendonca
Ecumenical Accompaniers: October 2009 – January 2010

St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in Burqin, just west of the northern West Bank city of Jenin, is considered by many Christians to be the third oldest church in the world. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, is said to have travelled through the Holy Land 300 years after the life of Jesus Christ identifying the places visited by him and looking especially for the sites of the miracles. Having decided that Burqin was the town where the ten lepers were healed, as described in Luke 17: 11-19, she had a church built over the well. The church was largely rebuilt, somewhat smaller, in the 9th century but still some parts of the 4th century church remain, including an unusual stone cross.

The Christian community in Burqin thrived for several centuries. They made up half the population of the town until the 8th century and despite emigration and conversions, the town was still one third Christian during the British mandate in the 1940s.

Emile, a member of the Christian community in Burqin told us that Christians in Palestine greeted the Balfour Declaration with a great deal of anxiety: they predicted that from the point of view of the holy sites, and their own survival, they had far more to fear from Zionist immigrants than from the Muslim population; in fact, they had not felt threatened by Islam which had treated them with respect, accepting Jesus as a prophet and Christians as People of the Book.

The political conflict in Israel/Palestine is often seen as one of Jews versus Muslims, so what about the Christians? Are they pockets of people left over from the Crusades, or are they immigrants from somewhere? "I often have to explain to people", said Emile, "Jesus was here. This is where he walked and performed miracles; this is where people listened to his teachings. This is the birthplace of Christianity: we are not remnants of a foreign incursion we are the direct-descendents of the first Christians."

The movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli government discourages inter-church visitation, and each community feels somewhat isolated. Employment is also a major issue – many are willing to travel or even emigrate abroad to find work. Palestinian Christians are as educated and motivated as anyone else but, because they are a minority they have fewer connections, which are often needed in finding local employment. Emile used to work in a hotel in Jerusalem but the hotel was closed



The recently renovated St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in Burqin



An icon in the recently renovated St. George's Greek Orthodox Church in Burqin

during the Intifada and now he has no permit to go to Jerusalem. He can get to other places in the West Bank, but he does not like the way the Israeli border guards discriminate either for (usually) or against (sometimes) the Christians: they will sometimes say that only the Muslims have to get off the bus and walk through the checkpoint, at other times it

is the other way around. Either way, the people on the bus are identified as belonging to one community, which is more favored than the other, and Israeli soldiers purposely do this to create friction.

Many Christian families fled from their homes in Haifa, Nazareth or Bethlehem during the conflict of 1948 and fled to Christian countries, where they were given refuge. Emigration from Palestine continued as others followed their relatives for economic or cultural reasons. So many have now left Palestine that it is not easy for the young Christians who remain to find marriage partners. There are few inter-religious marriages amongst Palestinians, as Arab tradition requires the bride to adopt the groom's faith, which would require a conversion – an extremely controversial issue for both Muslims and Christians. There were more children (all apparently belonging to one grandmother) than adults at the service we attended, so could it be that there will be a healthy community of Christians in 20 years' time? "Only, if they can find partners and jobs", said Emile.

There is also a Catholic church in Burqin. We were told that a wealthy Italian had bought two houses in the town and converted them into a church, but the congregation moved away and the church is no longer open. With a population of 6,500 people in Burqin, fewer than 100 are Christians, but still there is a full Orthodox liturgy with singing, processions, incense and communion every week.

Rafidiya – Tearing Down the Walls

Wayne Smith, Wenche Brendon & Sue Beardon
Ecumenical Accompaniers: January – April 2011

Nablus is a bustling city in the north West Bank. It has a population of around 130,000 people and is also home to a small community of 700 Christians. This community is served by four churches; the Anglican Church, the Melkite Catholic Church, the Latin Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Most of these Christians claim a heritage of the early Christian church founded here where Jesus encountered the Samaritan women at the well. Yet, it is alarming that just a decade ago this Christian community numbered 2,500 and the current number continues to decline.



*Father Ibrahim Nairouz of the
Anglican Church in Rafidia*

Father Ibrahim of the Anglican Church said, “The western media wants to suggest that there is a conflict between Muslims and Christians and that this is the reason for the Christians’ exodus, but I renounce this strongly. It is the Israeli occupation and its consequences that are the main reasons for people giving up and moving.” Sami and Rula Khalil are a Christian couple raising their three sons in Nablus. They note, “As Christians we do not feel threatened in Nablus. Even when lawlessness was at its height in Nablus no Christian was ever harmed.” “We speak the same language, we live in the same culture and we have built strong ties with the Muslims. We do not have any religious problems.”, said Father Ibrahim.

Our team observed this acceptance of the Christians by the Islamic community of Nablus when we joined a combined procession of the four churches on Christmas Eve. It was certainly wonderful to see the unity of these different churches but particularly heartwarming was the positive reception of the broader Islamic community. The city police provided an escort and specially printed up and handed out Christmas cards along the way of the procession. Leading the procession with the four priests was the

Governor of Nablus. Looking around the crowd of spectators one could see not one face that registered disapproval, but rather there were expressions of encouragement and acceptance of the minority. In the course of this 45-minute process, our ranks swelled with well-wishers becoming a few thousand people, far exceeding the actual number of Christians in the city. At one point as we walked along the edge of the procession we noticed a young Palestinian family, apparently Muslim, as the young woman wore a headscarf. They had a son of perhaps 10 years of age. As we approached we saw the young father encouraging the boy to step out and greet us, and then the little boy warmly and proudly proclaimed "Merry Christmas" in his best English. Father Yousef of the Melkite Catholic Church said, "Muslims and Christians of Nablus are united like this" and held up two fingers crossed together. "We have one problem and it is the Israeli occupation."

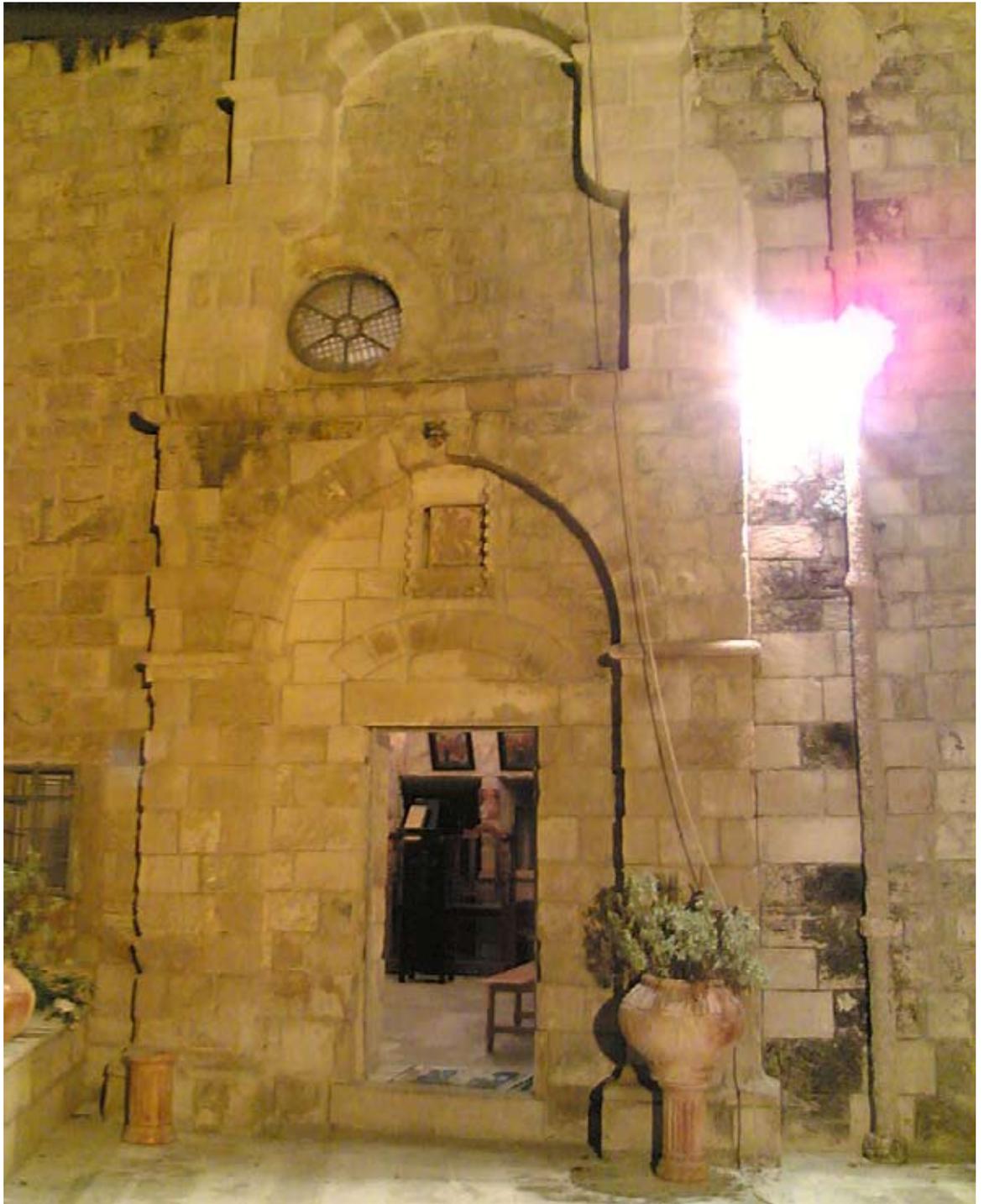
Father Yousef says, "Our community is declining due to isolation and a poor economy. There are few jobs. During the second Intifada the whole city was closed down with checkpoints at all the entrances. No way in, and no way out. Many businesses closed or moved. Many Christians, if they have a chance leave." Father Ibrahim tells the same story stating, "The numerous checkpoints around Nablus make export and trade difficult; thus, several companies had to close down or move to other towns."

The Christian leaders of this community are working very hard to encourage their flocks to stay. "We are Christians," Father Ibrahim told his flock, "and this is the holy land. We are needed here and the occupation will not last forever. I think that those who choose to leave believe that it is greener on the other side of the fence. I tell them that if they leave they must not think that they are moving to paradise, but that they should build their own paradise here".

But these leaders understand when members of their congregation feel they must leave to provide a better life for their family. In addition to economic insecurity, the occupation also brings about political, psychological and social instability, which contributes to the pressure to emigrate.

Father Yousef spoke of this pressure. "Human beings build walls. It is not God's way. The Israeli Government builds walls but people are meant to live together. How can they live together if there is a wall built between? Israel says that it is a security fence, but in fact it is an apartheid wall separating people. We are now living in a cage. We are all prisoners. Because I am a Palestinian they say I am a terrorist. If you ask for independence you are a terrorist. If you ask for human rights you are a terrorist. If you ask for justice you are a terrorist."

Father Yousef told the following story to illustrate how life is in Occupied Palestine. "Let me tell you personally how it is. This last year my brother died, he lived in Nazareth (inside Israel) so this Christmas we wanted to go and visit my sister-in-law and his whole family. So my whole family made preparations to go. This would be the first Christmas for my sister-in-law and the family without my brother and we wanted to be with them. So we asked what do we need to make this trip and we got all the papers



The Greek Orthodox Church in Rafidia

and permits. Then we went to the checkpoint, me and my wife and my family, my son and his wife and their 8-month-old boy. The soldiers said that we could all pass except for my grandson, as he does not have a permit. No one told us that we needed security clearance for an infant. How can we pass and leave him at the checkpoint? I became very angry and I said, “Why is this 8 month old boy a threat to the mighty state of Israel?” but they just said “Sorry, he does not have papers and he cannot pass.”



Sami and Rula Khalil are a Christian couple raising their three sons in Nablus

I said “I am an old man and I am going to go visit my dead brother’s wife so you just shoot me if you want!” Well I did not go and they did not shoot. We all came home together and my sister-and-law and my nephews and nieces celebrated Christmas by themselves. This is how it is.”

How does a man of faith keep going and keep shepherding his people in the midst of these difficulties. Father Yousef said this, “I continue only by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every day I have to tear down the walls that build up in my heart. That day at the check point I had a big wall to tear down.”

The Separation Barrier & International Law:

International Court of Justice (ICJ) Ruling: (9 July 2004) issued an ‘Advisory Opinion’ stated that the wall built on West Bank land including East Jerusalem, is illegal. The Advisory opinion called for construction of it to be stopped immediately, due to its route which runs deep into the West Bank and East-Jerusalem. The Court related to the construction of the barrier as a policy as a policy that contributes to displacement, impeded the Palestinian right to self-determination and is “tantamount to annexation”, which is forbidden under international law.

Adding that the West Bank wall violates Palestinians’ right to freedom of movement as well as other human rights (rights to health, education, work, etc.), the court concluded that: “Israel is under an obligation to immediately terminate its breaches of international law; to cease the works of construction of the wall being built in the oPt including in and around East Jerusalem; to dismantle the structure placed; and to make reparation for all damages caused by the wall.”



A landscape view of Rafidia



A view of the Churches of Rafidia

Ramallah – The Pastor at the Checkpoint

Oliver Wnuck

Ecumenical Accompanier: July – October 2010

“There is a reason why God created me as a Palestinian Christian. I had opportunities to go abroad but I will stay in this country to fight the evil with good, with love, with education, with forgiveness and reconciliation. My purpose is here not abroad.” – Ashraf



Ashraf Tannous, Vicar - ELCHLJ

Last week I met Ashraf, a 24-year-old, Palestinian Pastor at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem. Entering through the door into the quiet inner courtyard of the Church of the Redeemer, we left the shopkeepers, the tourists and the busy life of the Old City behind us. Ashraf served me Arabian coffee than he started to tell me about the situation of Palestinians and Palestinian Christians in general, and his own story in particular.

Ashraf said, “I know the occupation from my mothers womb. The occupation is everywhere. Unfortunately we got used to it.” Growing up in Ramallah as a child of refugee Palestinian Christians who escaped persecution by the Israeli Military in 1948, Ashraf naturally developed an identity that incorporates life under occupation, the belonging to the Palestinian people and his deep-rooted Christian faith. Ashraf sees his minority community as being a very active one, “being the salt of the society” by providing hospitals, schools and other facilities, as well as a worldwide voice to speak up against human rights violations.

Ashraf lives in Ramallah, but works in Jerusalem; therefore, he is especially affected by the checkpoint system and movement regulations imposed on Palestinians working in Israel or even just travelling through the West Bank. Each morning he has to cross the Qalandia Checkpoint, the main checkpoint in the north of Jerusalem. And it takes him “between one minute and three hours”, as it is not predictable. The situation at the checkpoint is especially difficult in the early morning hours when thousands of Palestinian workers are in a rush to get through the checkpoint so they can get to work on time and keep their jobs. Moreover, people regularly face humiliating situations at checkpoints. Not only when they have to wait for hours before crossing because lines



An Ecumenical Accompanier monitoring workers in transit to Jerusalem via the Qalandia Checkpoint

are closed or too many people are waiting. They also have to deal with intimidating interrogations, screenings, screaming soldiers and offensive language.

Having to cross the checkpoint, getting screened, this “becomes part of your identity”, Ashraf says. It is a constant struggle, but at the same time he can feel a purpose in taking up this struggle. “When I am at the checkpoint, I can feel God working within me. It gives me power to endure. God is in me, helping me, calming me, giving me patience. He prevents me from hatred and then helps me to do what is my work.”

Instead of getting angry and developing hatred Ashraf strives to resist by peaceful means. Instead of violence “I use a much more powerful weapon: education and information.” Aiming to fight the evil in the tradition of Christian non-violent resistance, Ashraf finds it important to raise the level of education in the oPt, to inform people worldwide about the situation, and to bring people from abroad to see for themselves.

Ashraf had an opportunity to work abroad, but he refused to leave the country, saying “money is not what is important to me ... my purpose is to be here with my people and not abroad.” As Ashraf sees it, there is a special call for the Christian Churches in Palestine and abroad to support the Palestinian people’s struggle for freedom and justice, especially focusing on youth who are facing restrictions and oppression. “The

young people are bored and have few opportunities ... the church should help them to find hope and overcome the injustices that surround them.”

To support young Palestinians, Ashraf engages in youth exchange programs, mainly between Europe and the oPt. These programs aim to educate and inform people about the situation. As Ashraf puts it, there is also a special responsibility for the Churches to speak up with their “global voice” and he calls on Christians to get engaged, to learn about the situation on the ground, and to show solidarity. “Come, visit us, and see for yourself. Visit the West Bank, not only Israel. Live for a few days like a Palestinian and share our suffering. Follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and stand with the oppressed.”

Access, Movement & International Law:

The right to freedom of movement provides that people are entitled to move freely within the borders of the state, to leave any country and to return to their country.

- Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Movement is a prerequisite for accessing basic needs such as healthcare, education and government institutions; work places; maintaining social, cultural and family connections etc. Restrictions imposed by the Israeli government impact most aspects of Palestinian life and violate many of their basic rights and benefits under international law, such as the right to access medical services (art. 16 GCIV and art. 56 GCIV), religious institutions (art. 27 GCIV; art 46 Hague regs), family members (art. 26 and 27 GC IV; art. 46 Hague regs) and educational institutions (art.50 GCIV).

The Christian Suburbs of Ramallah

Alicia Moreno, Eli Djupvik & Maria Delgado
Ecumenical Accompaniers: April – July 2011

Historically, Ramallah has been a Christian city, until 1948, when the Nakba (catastrophe) happened, and refugees were forced to flee persecution from Jewish militias to the city from Jaffa, Haifa, and other places in what became Israel. The people of Ramallah provided shelter for their refugee brethren and the city has been a harmonious Christian-Muslim city ever since. The city currently has an 80% Muslim majority, but a presidential decree by the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat established that Ramallah as well as eight other Christian cities and towns across the West Bank must have Christian Mayors regardless of whether or not Christians have become minorities in these areas, so as to preserve these communities' Christian heritage and character.

The current Mayor of the city of Ramallah is a Christian woman, Ms. Jannette Michael. We had a chance to meet with her and she said that Muslim-Christian relations are not worth discussing, because there are no problems in this regard; she said it would be like talking about French-French relations, and instead focused on the state-building project to create Palestine. She said that the sole problem here is the occupation, which prevents Palestinians from building infrastructure projects on their own land so the land can be reserved for settlement expansion. Moreover, she complained about Israel's policy of stealing Palestinian water and selling it back to them at ridiculously high prices. She said that both Muslim and Christian Palestinians are united in their struggle for freedom and cited some daring moves that the PNA is taking, such as building projects (i.e. a garbage dump, sewage treatment plant, and cemetery) in areas that Israel seeks to use for settlement expansion without any Israeli permits.

Ramallah's Christian character was also reinforced in 1948 by its heavy population of Christian refugees, which replaced the majority of Ramallah's original Christian inhabitants who emigrated abroad and its Christian suburbs – there are five Christian towns that surround Ramallah from every direction (Birzeit, Taybeh, Abud, Jifna and Ain Arik) – we had the pleasure of visiting two of these towns – Birzeit and Taybeh.

In Birzeit, we met Father Manuel Mussallam, of the Latin Patriarchate, who is also the President of the Christian World Department of Fateh's International Relations Commission, and a member of the PLO's Islamic-Christian Commission in Support of Jerusalem and Holy Sites. Father Manuel worked as a priest in Gaza for more than

30 years, and therefore he holds a Gaza Strip ID card and now needs a “permit” to live in his hometown, Birzeit. This means that at any time, Israel can cancel his “residency permit” in Birzeit and send him back to the Gaza Strip. He talked about the constant instability, the threats and the hardships that the occupation poses on the lives of Christians in Palestine:

Christians in Palestine are facing the same problems that Muslims face. We were expelled together by the Zionists in 1948, and became refugees together. We continue to suffer together and hope and dream about a common future together. Though we are a religious minority, we are not an ethnic minority, we are one people: we are both Palestinians and we are both Arabs; we share one language, one history, one land, and will live together forever. Thus, we are sharing the same destiny and the same struggle. We are not a third party to a conflict between Israel and Islam. We are together with Muslims as one national bloc, and Israelis are another bloc, which deprive us of our most basic human rights. Because of this undivisible love for one-another, Christians in Palestine have more stability than Christians in any other Arab country, and we have survived under 63 years of conflict because of our unity.

In Taybeh, we first met with Father Ra'ed Abu Sahlieh, the priest of the Latin Catholic parish in Taybeh. He first highlighted how many people in Taybeh – like in all the West Bank, lost vast swaths of their land to three illegal Israeli settlements (Rimmonim, Ofra & Khokhav HaShahar). Out of 27,000 dunams of land that is privately owned by these Palestinian Christians, currently they are only able to farm and live on 3,000 dunams; the rest of the town has been declared “Area C” – meaning it is under Israeli administrative and security control, and consequently if the people of Taybeh build in this area, they will surely receive demolition orders. The purpose of this policy is to squeeze the community into a Bantustan and to reserve the surrounding hills for future expansion of Jewish-only settlements. The rural community was once heavily dependent upon agriculture as a means of livelihood, but the villagers are now unable to farm the vast majority of their home town; thus, many were left with no other option but to emigrate abroad to secure income to support their families.

The population of Taybeh numbered 3,400 in the early 1960s, and now it is about 1,300. In Taybeh, the Catholic parish has created 15 small businesses (i.e. olive oil press, olive wood handicraft shop, soap factory, incense factory, ceramics factory, health center, nursing home, guest house, kindergarten, school, etc.) that give work to 86 families, in an attempt to deter or reduce emigration. Father Ra'ed also mentioned, “The situation of Christians in Palestine is better than in other Middle Eastern countries. This is because Muslims understand that this land is meant to be shared by all the faiths equally. Thus, Christians (like all Palestinians) leave not because of religious persecution. They leave because of the political and economic instability created by the occupation. People just want a normal life; they want jobs, education, and freedom.”

The people of Taybeh participated actively in the first Intifada. Raja, the President of the Taybeh Women's Association said, “Whether you wanted it or not, you ended up in the resistance. I participated because I am part of it; as a woman, as a Christian, as a



Ecumenical Accompaniers pose with Father Ra'ed Abu Sahlieh, the priest of the Latin Church in Taybeh



Ecumenical Accompaniers pose with Father Manuel Musallam, the priest of the Latin Church in Birzeit



Raja Basir, President of the Taybeh Women's Association



Jannette Michael, Mayor of Ramallah



Father Ra'ed Abu Sahlieh shows Ecumenical Accompaniers pictures of Taybeh taken before 1948



Father Manuel Musallam discusses Muslim Christian relations in Palestine

Palestinian. During the first Intifada, we suffered the same violence, and had even more confrontations with the occupation forces than most of the Muslim villages around us – five of our villagers were killed by the Israeli Military during those years and scores were injured, arrested and tortured, including my sister. Internally, we wanted to prove that as Christians we were also active patriots, and externally we wanted the world to see that the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land are against the occupation.”

Raja said that her generation has done their part, and now the Women's Association is assuming a more supportive role and letting the village's youth lead the way to keep Taybeh's heritage of non-violent resistance alive. During the second intifada, we continued down the non-violent path of resistance and organized local blood drives. During the massacre of Jenin; within two hours of calling for people to donate blood, we had more donors in line than we could handle. During Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, students organized a campaign to collect materials (cloths, candles, canned foods, etc.), and filled the municipality with supplies gathered from all over the village, and the churches facilitated their transportation to Gaza.

Jerusalem – Easter Sunday in the Crazy Land

Madeleine McGivern

Ecumenical Accompanier: April – July 2011

“We don’t call it the Holy Land anymore. We call it the Crazy Land”, said Bishara, a Palestinian Christian on Easter Sunday – 2011.

Easter is a time of chocolate eggs, spring’s showers and if we are lucky some sunshine too. The beginning of bank holiday season, family meals, newborn lambs in the fields, and children’s egg hunts. And if you are a Christian, it is also a time to go to Church not just once a week, but maybe even every day. This year, just like every year, many Christians from around the world flocked to Jerusalem to celebrate Easter in The Holy City, the place where the events of Easter have taken place; what a privilege. It is the tour companies best time of the year, shopkeepers ramp up the ‘special prices’ and walking in the Old City becomes a game of dodging the tour group umbrella.



Greek Orthodox youth celebrate the Holy Fire on Easter Sunday in front of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

And for Palestinian Christians, this is their chance to experience their religious festival in the land they were born in, and the city of Jerusalem. Or is it?

Bishara is a Palestinian Christian. He is a mechanic and is married to a tour organizer Samya. They have two young children. He lives in the Old City of Jerusalem, which has a Muslim, Jewish, Armenian and Christian Quarter. His house, which incidentally has a demolition order on it, is a five-minute walk from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the focal point for Christians celebrating Easter in Jerusalem. Yet, when he tried to enter this Church on Holy Saturday, Israeli police blocked him. A complex system of mini checkpoints, barriers, and blockades, along with a police presence so heavy it might have outnumbered priests, was put in place across the Old City and Palestinian Christians were prevented from worshipping freely. 'Go home' the soldiers told him with few words of explanation; 'You won't be getting in here today.'

Yet ironically, Bishara was one of the lucky Palestinians who were able, by virtue of living here, to access Jerusalem. This year, the Jewish Holiday of Pesach (Passover) coincided with Easter, which meant holiday time for the soldiers, border police, and Jerusalem police who man checkpoints in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Thus, the West Bank was put under military closure, and checkpoints between West Bank and Jerusalem were closed to all Palestinian, non-Jerusalem residents for one week, denying Palestinian Christians of their human right to worship, while Israeli settlers living in the West Bank could access Jerusalem and the rest of Israel as normal.

Any Palestinian living in the West Bank with a permit to work or study in Jerusalem was simply not able to access that work or school. If your business or school remained open, tough, you missed those days. Of the approximately 15,000 Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank who applied for permits to access their holy sites in Jerusalem to worship, only an estimated 2,500 received permits (Heads of Churches in Jerusalem figure). No Jewish people have to, or have ever had to under the occupation, apply for permits to visit their holy sites in Jerusalem.

As an Ecumenical Accompanier we monitored the limits placed on Palestinian Christians over Easter, observing events at checkpoints and access points to holy sites and the Christian Quarter. Instead of an atmosphere of peacefulness, spirituality and celebration, the large numbers of police, all heavily armed of course, evoked feelings of stress, anxiety and tension. Even when inside Jerusalem, just like thousands of other Palestinian Christians, Bishara and his friends and family were deprived of their right to worship. Article 27 of the 4th Geneva Convention states that 'civilians are entitled to respect for their person, their honor, their family rights, religious convictions, and traditions.' Article 46 of The Hague Regulations states 'access to religious institutions' as a protected right. Yet, the Israeli authorities ignored both of these pieces of International Law over Easter, one of, if not, the most important time of the year for Christians.

EAPPI is a program that arose from a request from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem in 2002. Almost ten years on, Christians here still need help as they try to go about

living normal lives, where access to work, education and worship is severely restricted through a complex collection of policies, permits and policing.

For now, Passover and Easter fade away, and things get back to 'normal'. 'Normal' where every day thousands of people must pass through checkpoints to go to work or to hospital, and Palestinian farmers are forced to wait for Israeli soldiers to open gates to let them access their own farmland. Where children must show birth certificates to men armed with assault rifles to go to school and where families live with the daily and constant threat that the next person at the door will be the settler or the bulldozer, primed for eviction or demolition. The message of Easter is one of hope and forgiveness. Two concepts severely lacking here in the Crazy Land but two concepts which are absolutely essential if normal is ever to mean normal here in the Holy Land.

Freedom of Worship & International Law:

Israel has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, which provides that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

Movement restrictions that impede access to religious institutions -and are not necessary for the maintenance of public order - infringe on the rights of the Palestinian population to freedom of religion and worship, according to article 46 of the Hague Regulations, article 58 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, article 75 of the First Additional Protocol (IAP).



Jeries Zeidan digs through the rubble of his recently demolished house for salvageable items

Israeli Military Demolishes Homes in Area C

Judeh Abu Sa'd, Paul Raymond & Nader Muaddi
EAPPI Field Officer, Communications Officer & Advocacy Officer

Fuad & Miranda Zeidan are from the Christian town of Beit Jala. On 13 December 2011 at 7:00AM, they woke up to a phone call from a friend informing them that the Israeli Police had surrounded their house in the Al-Makhrour area of Beit Jala and that a bulldozer was on site.

The Zeidan family was not living in the house, because Israeli occupation policies pertaining to the area make it too difficult to live there. Instead, they live in the heart of Beit Jala with their two sons and three daughters, and visit the house regularly for family get-togethers and to relax while farming their land.

When the Zeidans arrived at their house it was being demolished. The family said that they have never received any demolition orders, so they were unable to file an appeal in court. Miranda said, "We rightfully own this land, and have all the necessary legal documentation as proof. They forced us to leave our house so they can destroy it."

The Zeidans were not the only family to have their house demolished that morning; another nearby Christian family, the Khalilias, and their Muslim neighbors, the Abu Odeh family had their houses demolished that morning as well.

A few hundred metres away in the illegal Israeli settlements of Gilo and Har Gilo, Israelis live in modern homes surrounded by swimming pools and lush gardens. These rapidly expanding settlements are built on privately owned Palestinian land belonging to Beit Jala.

Al-Makhrouf is in Area C, an area of the West Bank marked out during negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 1995. Israel has full control over security, planning and zoning in the area, which covers almost two-thirds of the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority has limited control over the remaining land (Areas A and B), which mainly consists of Palestinian cities.

Area C never came under Israeli sovereignty, and was meant to be gradually transferred to Palestinian administration. But the Israeli authorities have consolidated Israel's grip on it. Most of the area has been reserved for military training or settlement expansion. Violence by Israeli settlers also restricts Palestinian access to pastoral land - most attacks by Israeli settlers take place in Area C.

The military authorities impose severe restrictions on Palestinian construction. Around 300,000 settlers currently live in illegal settlements in Area C. Less than 1 percent of the zone is available for Palestinian development. This makes it almost impossible for Palestinians living there to obtain building permits. Many are forced to build in defiance of military orders and face having their homes flattened. During the first half



A bulldozer accompanied by Israeli military vehicles arrive in Beit Jala to demolish three homes

of 2011, the Israeli authorities demolished 342 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C, making 656 people homeless, says the UN. The structures include several funded by foreign donors such as the EU and USAID. As well as homes, the army demolished dozens of animal shelters and 20 rainwater collection cisterns. Over 3,000 outstanding demolition orders include 18 targeting schools.



Fuad Zeidan salvages the door to his recently demolished house

In a recent study, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) found that in ten out of 13 Area C communities surveyed, families have moved away because “policies and practices implemented there make it difficult for residents to meet basic needs or maintain their presence on the land.” The pressures causing Palestinians to leave Area C have led some analysts to suggest that Israel’s grand strategy there is “transfer by stealth” of Palestinians to Areas A and B.

A map of the West Bank shows several motives: Area C includes almost all of the Jordan Valley, a strategic buffer zone between the West Bank and Jordan, with plentiful water resources. The current government has frequently stated its intention to hang on to the valley despite being at peace with Jordan.

Area C is also the fabric that links up the north and south of the territory and the islands of Areas A and B.

Without it, a Palestinian state in the West Bank will be little more than a series of cantons separated by Israeli controlled territory.

“Israel will need to be more forthcoming when it comes to the approval of projects” in Area C, said Christian Berger, a high-ranking European diplomat. Israel “should also think of handing over parts of Area C to the Palestinian Authority in order to allow better use for economic activities.”

While some Israeli politicians have spoken about annexing Area C, this appears unlikely in the immediate future. However, the pressure to leave is clear. Those who remain here are isolated from other areas of the West Bank, and face a life of severe hardship as herders and subsistence farmers, and the pressure is on them to leave.

A de facto Israeli takeover of Area C will have profound implications for a two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It threatens the Palestinian Authority’s state building project and makes a viable Palestinian state hard to envisage. EAPPI calls on policy makers and international donors to support projects in Area C that promote Palestinian economic life, to condemn Israel’s discriminatory planning, water and land access policies in Area C and to call on the Israeli government to stop demolishing Palestinian homes and rescind all demolition orders against Palestinian-owned structures.



Miranda Zeidan and two of her children Lubna (left) and Jeries (right) watch helplessly as their house is demolished before their eyes

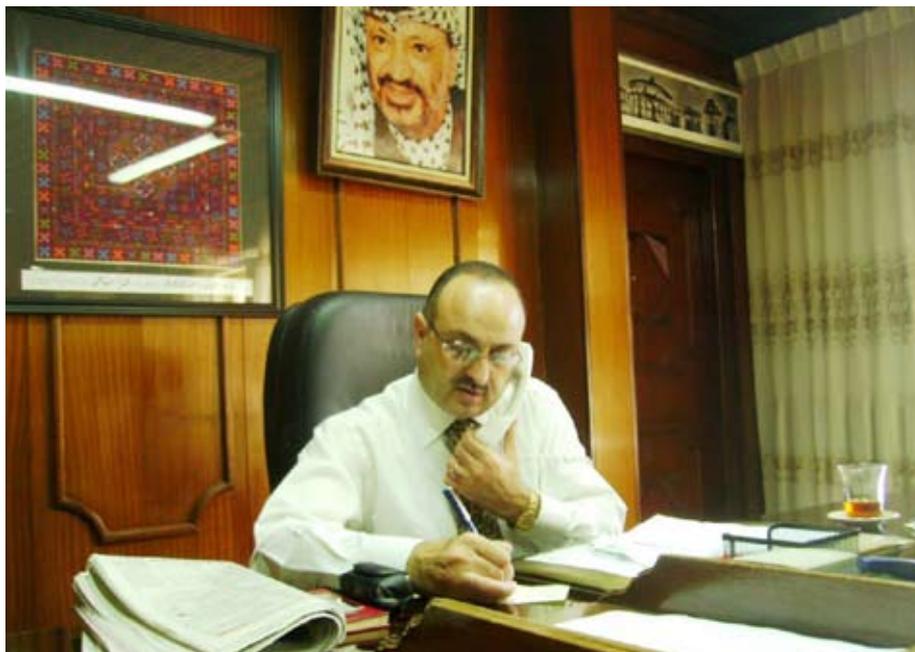


Miranda Zeidan stands in shock as she observes the ruins of her recently demolished house in Beit Jala

They Had the Wrong Car

Leif Dahlin

Ecumenical Accompanier: July – October 2009



George Sa'adeh, Deputy Mayor of Bethlehem

I visited the Municipality of Bethlehem and met with George Sa'adeh, the Deputy Mayor for a cup of coffee as he told us his story. One evening in March of 2003 he, his wife and their two daughters, Marianne, age 15 and Christine, age 10, went out for a drive to do some shopping in Bethlehem. Along the way, they passed three Israeli Military trucks.

Suddenly the soldiers opened fire at George's family; 30 bullets ripped thru the car, nine of which hit George in his back and abdomen, one hit Marian in her knee and another hit Christine in the head as she was reading a book in the back seat – instantly killing her. Only his wife managed to escape harm's way. The soldiers who shot at them approached the vehicle, understood that they had made a mistake and called an ambulance. When the ambulance finally arrived, it took them to the Bethlehem Checkpoint, where they had to wait to be transferred into an Israeli ambulance to be transported to the Hadassah Hospital.

George and Marianne recovered physically, but they had a long emotionally recovery to overcome as they had lost Christine. Many people from Bethlehem shared the family's suffering, and more than 30,000 people attended her funeral.

A month later, George received a call from an Israeli man who invited them to the 'Parents' Circle', a forum that brings together Israeli and Palestinian families who lost loved-ones as a result of the conflict. He, his wife and his daughter attended the meeting and have been regulars at their gatherings ever since. When asked how it felt to go there and meet Israeli families, he said:

It was strange at first, but when we got to know the each other and understood that everyone was suffering from a loss; we were able to connect on a deep level and help one another cope. I do not hate Israelis, I hate the occupation; it is the occupation that is the problem. The occupation has to end and we must have peace with justice and mutual respect. Without justice there can be no peace. The wall has to be removed, we have to meet each other, learn to trust each other. This has to be done soon; the occupation has been going on for too long. As a Christian, I am ready to forgive, but the occupation must come to an end and there has to be justice and equality for all.

When asked why they were shot at, he said, "At first the Israeli Military claimed that we had tried to run over the soldiers, but there were too many witnesses, so that story did not hold. The truth is that the soldiers were actually out to kill two "wanted men" who reportedly had the same exact car as the one that I had. Even if that were true, it is a violation of international law to engage in assassinations and instigate fire fights in a residential neighborhood."

The only official response that he received from the Israeli Military was that the incident was a mistake and that such things do happen in war. However, he refutes, "There is no war. It is an occupation and according to international law the Israeli army is responsible for our security. They are obligated to protect us, not to kill us."

He has taken his case to the Israeli Courts, but after 5 years, the case was dismissed. Now he is waiting for the decision of the Supreme Court. "I have to keep hope", says George.

***Facts & Figures – Israelis & Palestinians Killed,
Injured & Imprisoned During the Second Intifada:***

According to 'If Americans Knew', from 29 September 2000 thru 3 June 2011, 6,340 Palestinians, including 1,463 children, and 1,084 Israelis, including 124 children were killed, and 45,041 Palestinians and 9,226 Israelis were injured due to the conflict. Also, as of 1 January 2011, figures indicated that Israel was detaining 5,935 Palestinian political prisoners (209 of whom were children), while Palestinians were holding 1 Israeli prisoner.

No Longer Palestinian

Nader Muaddi
EAPPI Advocacy Officer

John owns and operates an Auto Upholstery shop in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – USA with his youngest of four sons, Naseem who he is training to take over the family business. Together, the father and son duo restore and customize classic muscle cars as well as modern sports cars, in addition to the occasional speedboat and motorcycle here and there. John has been in the Auto Upholstery business for more than 35 years and is 62 years old. He is very proud of the business that he built-up from nothing, and of the quality craftsmanship that has earned his son a high reputation amongst car fanatics in the tri-state area. Now he would like to apply for early retirement and go back to his hometown to spend the rest of his life tending to his father's olive groves and spending time with his relatives and childhood friends, but he cannot.



John, a Diaspora Palestinian Christian stands in front of his auto upholstery shop with his son

John is a Palestinian Christian who emigrated to the United States of America back in 1971 when he was only 23-years old.

I was young, and I had two brothers already in the US. At first I did not want to emigrate, as I was the last of my father's sons still around to help him. So after I finished high school, I began working between the family farm and my father's rock quarry trying to find a way to live through the difficult times we were in, but the situation was not stable – the 1967 war just ended and the 1973 war was looming. It became obvious

that I had no hope for a future in the land that I love. Anyone who had a relative abroad was emigrating back then. My father knew that I was partly sticking around because of him, so it was not until my dad told me to leave that I did. He knew that I would forego so many opportunities if I stayed, so he borrowed money from several relatives and friends and gathered just enough to buy me a ticket and put \$50.00 in my pocket.

When I asked him about what he felt as he was leaving, he said:

I knew I would return, or at least I thought I did. I promised my friends that I would only leave for 3 to 5 years and then I would come back with my savings and build a house start a business and get married. Although I was young and naive, those were my genuine intentions at the time. When I left for the US, I was told at the border crossing that I would have to exchange my ID card for a “laisser passer” card or travel document. I was weary at first, but they said it was the only way I could leave and everyone else who had left had said that they had to do the same thing – I figured it was just a routine policy.

The routine policy that John is referring to is actually a recently discovered covert procedure that Israel has used to cancel the residency status of 140,000 West Bank Palestinians. A document detailing the policy was recently obtained by an Israeli human rights organization, Hamoked – The Center for the Defense of the Individual, and was made public in May of 2011 by the Haaretz News Agency. The document states that the procedure was used on Palestinian residents of the West Bank who traveled abroad between 1967 and 1994 – from the occupation of the West Bank until the signing of the Oslo Accords. Palestinians who wished to travel abroad were ordered to exchange their ID cards for a card allowing them to cross. The card was valid for three years and could be renewed three times, each time adding another year. If a Palestinian did not return within six months of the card's expiration, his / her documents would be sent to the regional census supervisor. Residents who failed to return on time were registered as NLRs - no longer residents. The document makes no mention of any warning or information that the Palestinians received about the process.

John recalls when he first became an NLR:

I came back for my first visit in the summer of 1977 to find a bride and settle down. When I arrived, the soldier at the border crossing asked me, “Do you have another passport?” and I replied, “Yes, I have an American Passport”. He then asked to see it and then he stamped it with a 3-month tourist visa. I told him that there must be a misunderstanding, that I am not a tourist, that I am a Palestinian, that I was born in the West Bank and lived there for most of my life, and that I left my ID card here and that he was supposed to return it to me. Instead, the soldier replied, “You are not Palestinian anymore.” He then tossed the ID on the counter in front of me and said “Welcome to Israel.” I was shocked and confused; I was certain that the soldier was an idiot and surely made a mistake that I could fix. However, when I got back to Taybeh I found out that everyone who had left at the time were no longer Palestinians.

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics says the West Bank's Palestinian population amounted to 1.05 million in 1994, which means the population would have been greater by about 14 percent if it weren't for the procedure. Today, a similar procedure is still in place for residents of East Jerusalem who hold Israeli ID cards; they lose their right to return if they have been abroad for seven years. Palestinians who found themselves "no longer residents" include students who graduated from foreign universities, businessmen and laborers who left for work abroad. Over the years, many of them have started families, so the number of these Palestinians and their descendants is probably in the hundreds of thousands, even if some have died.

Looking back, John said, "I do not know why they revoked my Palestinian ID, I come from Taybeh, a small town just north east of Ramallah – in an area that would surely be part of a future Palestinian state – the only way this would make sense is if Israel does not want it to be a Palestinian state." Taybeh is a small Christian town that has a current population of about 1,400 inhabitants and Diaspora community that is greater than 9,000 people. Although all West Bank towns have been affected by this policy, this drastic scenario is very similar to what happened to other Christian towns in the West Bank (i.e. Beit Jala, Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Rafidiya, Birzeit, Aboud, Jifna, Ain Arik, Zababdeh, etc.), as Palestinian Christians are a migrant community.

John adds, "I visit my hometown every year, nobody returned for good – they are not allowed to – only two of my classmates remain there – everyone else emigrated. This policy killed Taybeh. I have more family and childhood friends in the US than I have in Taybeh because of this policy. On the other hand, I also have two sons who work in the West Bank for international humanitarian organizations – one has been there for more than 4-years, he has not been stripped of his American citizenship – where does Israel come up with such bogus policies? Israel should reinstate all revoked ID cards for those affected by the policy, as well as their descendants – this is illegal. Also, what right does Israel have to choose who is Palestinian and who is not? I carry my identity with me everywhere I go with or without a piece of paper to prove it."

The Bishop of Jerusalem Who Cannot Enter Jerusalem

Nader Muaddi
EAPPI Advocacy Officer



*Rt. Revd. Suheil Dawani,
Bishop of the Episcopal
Diocese of Jerusalem and the
Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem*

The great majority of Palestinians have not been allowed by Israel to enter East Jerusalem, a part of the oPt, which Israel illegally annexed in late 2000. The small minority of Palestinians who have been able to enter the Holy City have permits that are specially issued by Israel on the basis that one works in Jerusalem or is married to a Jerusalemite – the latter has also been difficult to obtain, as cases of family reunification for Palestinians who are married to Jerusalemites have also been delayed since late 2000.

Palestinians who work in Jerusalem often complain that they are only allowed to enter the city for a specific period of hours each day, which makes the early morning rush to Jerusalem rather chaotic, and that they are often denied renewal of their permits and consequently lose their jobs due to false charges that would make them a ‘security threat’ or without any justification. These Palestinians are usually construction or factory workers; however, the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem and Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, the Rt. Revd Suheil Dawani has also been denied the renewal of his “Temporary Residency Status” in Jerusalem.

Bishop Dawani, one of two Palestinian Bishops in Jerusalem, was elected in 2007 as Bishop of the Diocese and was recognized by the State of Israel as the head of the Episcopal Diocese in accordance with the decision by the State of Israel in 1970 that acknowledged the Diocese as one of the thirteen recognized churches in Israel. All Anglican Bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem who have not held Israeli citizenship have been granted A5 residency permits to allow them to live in Jerusalem where the Bishop’s residence, diocesan offices and cathedral are located.

Bishop Dawani, his wife and daughters had successfully renewed this permit in 2008 and 2009. However, on 24 August 2010, Bishop Dawani went to renew the permit with the Ministry of the Interior and was informed in writing that permits for him, his wife and youngest daughter would not be renewed because of allegations pending against the Bishop. The letter, in Hebrew, said: “Bishop Suheil acted with the PNA in transferring lands owned by Jewish people to the Palestinians and also helped to register lands of Jewish people in the name of the Church.” There were further allegations that the Bishop forged documents. The letter also stated that Bishop Dawani and his family should leave the country immediately.

Bishop Dawani replied to the Israeli Minister of the Interior denying all accusations and requested the restoration of the residency permits for himself and his family to provide for his ongoing leadership of his Diocese and residence for himself and his family. Bishop

Dawani did not receive any response from the office of the Minister of the Interior. Bishop Dawani then delivered another letter to the Minister of the Interior challenging the allegations and requesting any documents or evidence against him. Israeli authorities never produced any proof of the allegations made against Bishop Dawani.

Bishop Dawani initially sought to resolve this issue quietly without resorting to any publicity; seeking confidential support through religious and diplomatic channels. The Archbishop of Canterbury, as the spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion and church representative of the Queen of England, contacted the office of the Prime Minister of Israel and Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amer to resolve the issue. In addition, Bishop Dawani met personally with the Chief Rabbi, who is a good friend of both Bishop Dawani and the Anglican Church, who took immediate action to try to restore the Bishop's residency rights. The Archbishop of Canterbury received assurances that the situation would be resolved promptly. Other Anglican leaders, including the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington DC and the Primates of the Anglican Communion representing Anglicans throughout the world, have all used their influence individually and collectively with Israeli authorities without success to date.

Diplomatic efforts through the office of the British Foreign Secretary, the British Ambassador to Israel, the British Consul-General in Jerusalem, the State Department of the United States and the American Consul-General in Jerusalem have provided support for Bishop Dawani and ongoing contact with Israeli authorities but without tangible results in terms of discovering the source of the allegations against Bishop Dawani or the restoration of the residency rights which are crucial to his providing leadership of his Diocese and residency in Jerusalem for himself and his family.

Bishop Dawani attempted to resolve this with restraint and without causing the government of Israel any embarrassment. The lack of resolution, despite all the efforts outlined above, required Bishop Dawani to seek legal counsel. Bishop Dawani's legal advisor sent a letter to the Attorney General of Israel seeking an explanation of the allegations against him which have been the basis for the denial of the residency rights for himself and his family. After waiting one month without an explanation of the allegations from the Attorney General and upon the recommendation of legal counsel, Bishop Dawani chose to take his case to court seeking redress through the Israeli legal system.

Bishop Dawani finally went public in 2011 with his struggle to reside in Jerusalem and sought assistance from a wide-array of church-based organizations, ecumenical partners and international non-governmental organizations. It was not until September 2011, thirteen-months after this ordeal started, that he and his family received their permits to reside in Jerusalem.

The average Palestinian does not have the networks and resources of a Bishop, and when an average Palestinian's residency permit is revoked or not renewed, it can be a life-shattering experience that may result in family separation, loss of livelihood, inability to continue education or receive medical treatment, denial of the right to worship, etc. In fact, East Jerusalem accounts for 35% of the oPt's economy and its illegal annexation and closure to Palestinians residing in other parts of the West Bank has been one of the main reasons behind mass Palestinian emigration post 2000, especially amongst Palestinian Christians.

My Mother... the Refuge and Refugee

Yusef Daher
JIC Executive Secretary

My mother, Nahia, came from the Bahouth family, a wealthy, Palestinian family that used to live in a prominent Haifa neighborhood on Abbas Street. The family originally came from Shefa Amro, a town northeast of the city of Haifa, where most of their property is located, but they moved to the nearby city to better manage their businesses. Like many other families in northern Palestine, the Bahouths decided to flee to Lebanon from fear of being massacred by Jewish militias if they remained in their homes. They thought their stay in Lebanon would be temporary and that they would be



Yusef Daher, Executive Secretary, Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre

able to return home once the 1948 war was over. Two weeks passed and my grandfather had kept his keys in his pocket. He did not know that this was the first two weeks of a long refugee journey and that he would never see Haifa again.

They reached Beirut and stayed with my grandmother's brother's family, the Sabbaghs. Though they managed to create a comfortable environment with their extended family, whom were also now refugees, they had to move to Damascus, Syria to find work. My grandfather found a job at a hotel and my grandmother worked at the Mobile Oil Company. Both of my grandparents were doing well due to their educations, so they built a new home in Damascus, even though they had already made a down payment on a new apartment in Beirut, in Ein Rumana.

My mother was living in Damascus, while my father was a Jerusalemite – today these two cities seem a world apart. Yet, for a short period of time, between 1948 and 1967, the borders between Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon were open – something inconceivable these days. Both of my parents were members of the 'Legion of Mary' movement. During one of the Legion's trips to Damascus, my father met my aunt Vida

who was a leader in the Legion of Mary-Syria. On another trip he met her sister, my mother, and his future bride – he fell in love with her at first sight.

He then started writing letters to her and getting responses, which were sent and received by friends as they traveled to and from Syria. He eventually decided to make another trip to Syria to ask for her hand. The engagement and wedding were in Damascus.

My aunt eventually moved back to Beirut and my mother moved to Jerusalem. She remained a refugee, but because she married my father and moved to Jerusalem before 1967, Israel had to give her an ID card allowing her to reside in Jerusalem on a permanent basis. So the refugee from Haifa became a resident of Jerusalem where she built a refuge for her three boys and one girl.

Though her story of displacement is not uncommon amongst Palestinians, many of whom have moved continents away from their homes, she is one of the few who made it back to Palestine, and hopefully one day she will be allowed to live in her parents' home in Haifa again.

(Endnotes)

1 Raheb, Mitri (2004) 'Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble' Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

2 Raheb, Mitri (2004) 'Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble' Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

3 Alternative Tourism Group, citing the Palestine Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and Israel Ministry of Tourism.

4 Rami Kassis 15th Nov 2010, ATG, interview by Mathilda Lindgren, Terry Crawford Brown and Ulrich Kadelbach

5 Alternative Tourism Group (ATG)

6 Alternative Tourism Group (ATG)

7 Arab Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ) interview by Aimee Kent and Mathilda Lindgren

8 Raheb, Mitri (2004) 'Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble' Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p.138

9 Borer, Tristan Anne: Challenging The State: Churches as Political Actors in South Africa 1980-1994, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1998.

10 Polakow-Suransky, Sasha: The Unspoken Alliance; Israel's secret relationship with apartheid South Africa, Jacana Media, Johannesburg, 2010.

11 "Kairos Palestine 2009 -- A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of the Palestinian suffering," Bethlehem, December 2009.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The clearest conclusion that we gathered from these case studies is that Palestinian Christians are disproportionately affected by the occupation; therefore, impacts of the occupation on Palestinian Christians must be viewed in terms of proportionality – not numbers. The community is already small in terms of numbers; thus, any impact on the community results in a higher percent of people affected in comparison with the general Palestinian society.

A continued Christian presence in the Holy Land and greater Middle East is vital, so that the dynamics of the conflict do not change into a religious conflict between Islam & Judaism. To this, if Israel persists to demand that it be recognized as a Jewish state, it would set a precedent for an Islamic state of Palestine; thus leaving no home for Palestinian Christians in their homeland. Any call for exclusivity by any faith over any part of the Holy Land should be denied for the preservation of all communities and for the hope of peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, Palestinian Christians took a leading role in forming the Palestinian identity, and if they diminish, they will impoverish the cultural and anthropological landscape of Palestine. Palestinian Christians are also a bridge community between the East and West; thus, the community has been specifically targeted by Israel because the West sympathizes with it. When things are wrong for Palestinian Christians, they are wrong for all Palestinians and the root of all Palestinians sufferings is founded in the Israeli military occupation of their homeland.

If you are involved in a church, we recommend that you link your congregation with one in the oPt to show your support, and show Palestinian Christians that they have not been forgotten.

If you would like to become an Ecumenical Accompanier or take an EAPPI tour of any of our seven placements, we ask that you please visit our website (www.eappi.org) for more details.

For more information on actions that you can take to work towards ending the occupation and realizing a just peace, we recommend that you refer to Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh's '50 Ways to Act for Peace with Justice' in Appendix I of this report.

VI. APPENDICES

Appendix I

50 Ways to Act for Peace with Justice

Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh

1. Educate yourself via reliable books. For example books by Ilan Pappé (Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine), Edward Said (The Question of Palestine).
2. Educate yourself and track current information and key historical data via websites (and disseminate it). For example look into <http://www.imemc.org/>, <http://electronicintifada.net/>, <http://english.aljazeera.net/>, Encyclopedia of the Palestine Problem, Palestine Remembered, and similar websites.
3. Educate yourself by visiting Palestine and writing about it. There are many organizations doing tours that inspire. Examples Siraj Center, Alternative Tourism Group, Holy Land Trust, Global Exchange, Birthright Unplugged, ISM etc.
4. Practice using clear and unambiguous vocabulary including language to protest apartheid and colonization. See for example developing anti-apartheid framework for the struggle (PDF File): <http://www.endtheoccupation.org/downloads/AAF%20curriculum%20training%20.pdf>
5. Challenge media bias by first educating yourself and others about its existence and the extent of the bias. See for example <http://ifamericansknew.org/>
6. Write to the mainstream media. You can do letters to the editor (usually 200 words) and/or opinion pieces (700-900 words).
7. Start your own group or join an existing organization that works for justice. Simply search/google your city with the word Palestine to identify candidates.
8. Join the International Solidarity Movement, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program (EAPPI), Christian Peace Maker Team or other groups doing work in the occupied areas
9. Develop close working relationship with progressive parties and groups in your country.
10. Network and enhance groups working on sanctions and suspension of US aid to Israel. e.g. Suspend US Aid to Israel Now
11. Lobby. This is done individually or by supporting/joining one or more of the many groups doing it, e.g. Council for the National Interest, Citizens For Fair Legislation, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, and American Association for Palestinian Equal Rights (<http://www.aaper.org/>).

12. Hold a teach-in, seminar, or public dialogue. This is straightforward: you need to decide venue, speakers, and do publicity. This can be facilitated through such groups as Palestine Media Watch which have speakers bureaux.
13. Send direct aid and support for people on the ground through transparent and trustworthy groups.
14. Use YouTube and Google video to disseminate information
15. Challenge Israel in local and International courts.If you are a lawyer, donate your time and start some networking and initiate cases (e.g. US congress is violating US laws by sending money to Israel, US Citizens can bring cases against foreign governments that harmed them). Groups with great interest and activism on behalf of Palestinians includes Lawyers Without Border, National Lawyers Guild, Al-Haq, Yesh Din, and Adalah - Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel.
16. Help coalitions work for Palestine and insist they do not leave this issue; example is <http://CTUnitedforPeace.org>.
17. If you work in a group, suggest formation of local or national coalitions to increase the power by association.
18. Join the campaigns for economic boycotts. For example see successful examples here: <http://www.qumsiyeh.org/boycottsanddivestment/>
19. Join or initiate a campaign for cultural and academic boycott; see also <http://pacbi.org/>.
20. Host an art exhibit or other art performance (music, dabka etc) that highlight the rich Palestinian culture.
21. Engage in civil disobedience actions to draw attention and change policies.
22. Develop campaigns to support the right to enter: see www.righttoenter.ps Israel Takes Aim At Palestinian Families By Ida Audeh <http://www.countercurrents.org/audeh110907.htm>
23. Facilitate a visit by the Wheels of Justice bus tour to your area (in the US) or create a bus like that (e.g. in Europe). See justicewheels.org
24. Donate to aid Palestinian Children. For example, Palestine Children Relief Fund, and Playgrounds for Palestine
25. Develop campaigns to ban Political Junkets to Israel. Here is an example “In a challenge to one of the most powerful lobbying tactics used by the Jewish community, a county in Maryland decided last week that local legislators could no longer go on sponsored trips to Israel. <http://www.forward.com/articles/11553/>
26. Support the campaigns to end the siege on Gaza. See <http://www.freegaza.org/>, <http://www.witnessgaza.com/>
27. Work in your country against discrimination. See Arabs Against Discrimination: <http://www.aad-online.org/> – OR – American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee <http://www.adc.org>
28. Support Human Rights: Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org>, Human Rights Watch: <http://hrw.org/doc/?t=mideast&c=isrlpa> B’Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories <http://www.btselem.org>
29. Support the Right to Education Campaign: <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/>

30. Donate to United Nations Relief and Works Agency: <http://www.un.org/unrwa/>
31. Work against home demolitions: Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions: <http://www.icahd.org/eng>
32. Support empowering Youth from Palestine e.g. see <http://www.yfppal.com/> and <http://www.alrowwad-acts.ps>
33. Write to and work with alternative mass media (like DemocracyNow, Public Access TV).
34. Create your own content and post it to the web
35. Utilize social networking sites to reach a mass audience (e.g. facebook)
36. Go into chat rooms, email discussions etc and spread the word.
37. Buy Palestinian Products, for example from www.palestineonlinestore.com, www.canaanfairtrade.com, www.palestinefairtrade.org.
38. Pray for Peace and Justice or if you are not religious, take time out to think and meditate on what can be done to achieve Peace with Justice
39. Make a podcast or public service announcement and spread it
40. Drop a banner from a traffic bridge or any other publicly visible location
41. Put out an information table in a university student center, public gathering, festivals, or other places where people congregate.
42. Host a fundraising party or dinner at your home.
43. Show a documentary in a public setting and then have a discussion about it.
44. Organize a public debate between those who support Zionism and those who support equality and justice
45. Learn Arabic or if you are an Arab learn another language (including Hebrew) so that you can communicate better
46. Make a street theater
47. Engage in Civil disobedience acts (this may entail getting arrested).
48. Reach out to Christian religious leaders and ask them to act based on the Kairos Palestine document www.kairospalestine.ps
49. Challenge the Zionist attempts to doctor Wikipedia (ie. imposing a Zionist distorted version on this free web encyclopedia).
50. Start a genuine interfaith dialogue based on acting for justice rather than chatting to hide injustice.
51. Find a way not to pay taxes to governments that violate human rights and use your taxes for war and oppression.
52. Host a dinner with Arabic food and show people the rich cultural traditions like embroidered dresses that go back to Canaanitic times.

Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh teaches and does research at Bethlehem and Birzeit Universities in occupied Palestine. He serves as chairman of the board of the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between People and coordinator of the Popular Committee Against the Wall and Settlements in Beit Sahour. He is author of "Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human rights and the Israeli/Palestinian Struggle" and the "Popular Resistance in Palestine: A history of Hope and Empowerment"

Appendix II

The following excerpt is a summary of the Kairos Palestine 'Moment of Truth' document:

Word of faith, hope and love from the heart of the Palestinian suffering

This document is the word of Palestinian Christians. We address it to ourselves first, and to all the churches and Christians around the world asking them and work for a just peace in our region, and to receive our call and support it as they did with the document of Kairos South Africa issued in 1985, in order to make it an instrument of struggle for peace, dignity and security, for every human being in this Holy Land, and bring the occupation to an end.

Why now? Because the Palestinian tragedy has reached a dead-end, while decision-makers seem to manage the crisis rather than work seriously for a viable solution. The issue is not merely a political one, it is a policy where humans are being destroyed, and this moment of truth is a glimpse of hope.

Themes of the document:

1. In this first part, we focus on the realities lived by the Palestinians, Christians and Muslims alike: separation wall, Israeli settlements, the daily humiliation at the checkpoints, the separation of family members, limitation of religious freedom, refugees, prisoners, Jerusalem, emigration, and the Palestinians in the State of Israel.

"They say Peace, peace, and no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14).

2. **Word of faith:** We believe in God, Creator of all. We believe that his goodness will one day prevail on the evil of war and end conflict in our land. We believe in the Word of God, Old and New Testament. We believe that the word of God is a source of life for all. It cannot be a source of life for one people, and a source of death for another. Therefore, the promise of the land cannot be understood as a political agenda that fuels the conflict today.

As Christians we believe that in Christ all promises were accomplished and that his message is universal, to all humans.

We see the present Israeli occupation of Palestinian land as a sin because it deprives the Palestinians of their God-given basic human rights.

3. **Word of Hope:** The current situation does not promise any near solution or an end of the occupation imposed on us. However, we still hope. We do not give in to the evil. Rather we face it and continue resisting it with our hope that we derive from our faith and from our continuous existence in this land for the past two thousand years.

4. Word of Love: To Love an enemy is a difficult commandment, but we accept it. However, loving the enemy does not mean to love the injustice that he imposes upon us, but rather seeing the face of God in him, his human dignity, and to help him liberate himself from the injustice that is in him.

Therefore, our Christian choice in the face of the occupation is to resist it, for the good of the enemy and for our own good. Our resistance will remain: creative non-violent resistance, such as advocacy, popular resistance, perseverance, an economic boycott of all the occupation products, and all peaceful ways of pressure on the Israeli leaders so that they enter the ways of peace and justice.

5. Our word to our brothers and sisters: A word of steadfastness and patience at a time where we have reached a dead end. To our Muslim brothers and sisters, it is a message of love and coexistence. To the Jewish people, we say that we are capable, today and tomorrow, to love each other and live together, after doing away with occupation in a just manner.

6. Our word to the churches of the world: A word of thanks and appreciation to the positions of many churches and Christian supporters of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We call upon the rest of the Christian churches in the world not to provide a theological cover for the injustice and the occupation imposed upon us.

7. Our word to the international community: A call to refrain from “double standards” and the application of the relevant international resolutions concerning the Palestinian cause on all parties involved.

8. Our call for the Palestinian and Israeli people and the Jewish and Muslim religious leaders: is an invitation to see the face of God in all His creatures. Whenever a state is created, we call for the principle of having a state for all its citizens, based on respect of religion, equality, justice, freedom and respect for pluralism. Jerusalem will always remain the spiritual base of our vision and our lives, open to all and shared by the two peoples and three religions without any kind of exclusivity.

Conclusion: We believe in a good and just God and that his goodness will triumph over the evil of hatred and death that persist in our land. Only then will we see in Jerusalem “a new earth” and a “new human being” capable of loving all his/her brothers and sisters in this land.

**For more information and to sign the document please visit
www.kairospalestine.ps**

Appendix III

The following table is an excerpt is from the Diyar Consortium's 2008 report, 'Palestinian Christians – Facts, Figures and Trends'.

| Locality / District | | Christian Population | | | | Total Population 2007 | % of Christians | |
|---|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | | Jordanian Census 1961 | Israeli Census 1967 | Estimated 1995 | Estimated Dec 2006 | | | Estimated 2007/8 |
| Bethlehem District | | 15,234 | 14,406 | 20,487 | 22,000 | 22,440 | 176,235 | 12.73 |
| of which | Bethlehem City | 7,246 | 6,405 | 6,799 | 7,000 | 7,140 | 25,266 | 28.26 |
| | Beit Jala | 4,530 | 4,271 | 6,343 | 7,000 | 7,140 | 11,758 | 60.72 |
| | Beit Sahour | 3,458 | 3,730 | 7,345 | 8,000 | 8,160 | 12,367 | 65.98 |
| Hebron | | 168 | 200 | - | - | - | 552,164 | - |
| Jericho | | 1,212 | 539 | 535 | 450 | 459 | 42,320 | 1.08 |
| Jerusalem | | 10,795 | 10,813 | 11,910 | 8,000 | 9,260 | 363,649 | 2.55 |
| of which | Jerusalem City | - | - | - | - | 8,000 | 225,416 | 3.55 |
| | Ezzariyyah | - | - | - | - | 550 | 17,606 | 3.12 |
| | Qubebeh | - | - | - | - | 11 | 3,172 | 0.35 |
| Ramallah & Al-Bireh District | | 15,371 | 10,597 | 12,362 | 12,500 | 12,750 | 279,730 | 4.56 |
| of which | Ramallah | 8,745 | 6,966 | 6,450 | 6,000 | 6,120 | 27,460 | 22.29 |
| | Ain Arik | 260 | 86 | 328 | 400 | 500 | 1,567 | 31.91 |
| | Jifna | 5,650 | 538 | 649 | 1,100 | 1,122 | 1,716 | 65.38 |
| | Birzeit | | 1,351 | 2,158 | 2,200 | 2,244 | 4,529 | 49.55 |
| | Taybeh | | 1,156 | 1,760 | 1,600 | 1,300 | 1,452 | 89.53 |
| | Abud | 716 | 500 | 1,017 | 1,200 | 1,224 | 2,084 | 58.73 |
| Nablus (& Rafidiya) | | 3,069 | 688 | 1,041 | 700 | 714 | 320,830 | 0.22 |
| Salfit | | | 1,628 | - | - | - | 59,570 | 0 |
| Qalqilya | | | - | - | - | - | 91,217 | 0 |
| Tubas | | | - | - | - | 60 | 50,261 | 0.12 |
| Tulkarm | | | 100 | - | 50 | 16 | 157,988 | 0.01 |
| Jenin District | | | 1,045 | 2,789 | 2,100 | 2,951 | 256,619 | 1.15 |
| of which | Jenin | | 123 | 537 | 300 | 306 | 39,004 | 0.78 |
| | Zababdeh | | 922 | 2,252 | 1,800 | 2,500 | 3,665 | 68.21 |
| | Kaferqod | - | - | - | 24 | 1,143 | 2.1 | |
| | Deir Ghazaleh | - | - | - | 8 | 895 | 0.89 | |
| | Jalamah | - | - | - | 50 | 2,060 | 2.43 | |
| | Burqin | - | - | - | 63 | 5,685 | 1.11 | |
| Gaza Strip | | - | 2,478 | 2,439 | 3,000 | 3,060 | 1,416,543 | 0.22 |
| Total West Bank and Gaza Strip – including the Arab population in Jerusalem | | 45,855 | 42,494 | 51,563 | 48,800 | 51,710 | 3,767,126 | 1.37 |

Appendix IV

Jerusalemite Christians: Sharpest Decline Under Israel

Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)

Yusef Daher

Jerusalem Christians relate their indigenous origins to the time of Christ and his followers. They have survived all kinds of military occupations, wars, and hardship. They existed among Muslims and Jews in the city that was politically and physically annexed by Israel illegally after 1967 war. The International Community does not recognize this annexation and awaits final status agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians in this respect.

The following table shows the trend line of the different religious groups in the City. Focusing on the Christian community one can easily determine the risk facing continuous existence of this community.

Many reasons exist behind the decrease in the percentage of Christians in the City. In 2009 Palestinian Christians are estimated at 9,000. Occupation and Israel's racist policies implemented on the city's inhabitants, insecurity, economic depression due to the Wall, and isolation from the West Bank are the main factors.

Negative impacts on Jerusalem Christians: Israeli policies of the Ministry of Interior, the Municipality of Jerusalem and other related government institutions including the army are the more direct factors that threaten the preservation of this community in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Restrictions on residency rights, family reunification and housing limitations are main factors driving Jerusalem Christians out of their city.

| Source | Year | Population | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|------------|--------|---------|------------|-----------|---------|
| | | Total | Jews | Moslems | Christians | | |
| | | | | | Pal. | Christian | Foreign |
| British Census | 1910 | 69900 | 45000 | 12000 | 12900 | | |
| British Census | 1931 | 90200 | 51000 | 19900 | 19300 | | |
| Wasserstein, Yale | 1946 | 164400 | 99300 | 33700 | 31400 | | |
| Wasserstein, Yale | 1967 | 267800 | 196800 | 58100 | 12900 | | |
| Wasserstein, Yale | 1983 | 428500 | 306300 | 108500 | 13700 | | |
| Israel Central Bureau of Statistics | 2000 | 650700 | 439600 | 196900 | 14200 | | |
| Israel Central Bureau of Statistics | 2006 | 732000 | 469000 | 239000 | 10000 | | 4700 |

1) The Jerusalem residency rights policy:

Israeli Ministry of Interior will withdraw the “permanent residency” status of a Palestinian Jerusalemite under the pretext that she/he has acquired a foreign nationality or a residency permit in another country or has lived outside the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem for more than seven years. These rules apply to children too. If these policies are pursued at the same momentum, the number of Jerusalem Christians is expected to fall from 10,000 to 5,300 in the coming 7 years.

In addition Israel issues and changes laws frequently with the single objective of gaining a Jewish majority in the city in the long run. In 2010 Israel issued an intention of law to deport 300 Jerusalem Palestinians for political reasons. If passed, this law might be the grounds for more deportations and transfer of people to come.

2) The separation policies and family reunification restrictions:

The Wall and the Israeli procedures hindering the issuing of permits for West Bankers to live and work in Jerusalem, have greatly affected the formation of the family nucleus. Young men and women are not able to meet with their family members and friends beyond the walls due to movement restrictions, Israeli military checkpoints, roadblocks and other measures. Palestinian Christians in the West Bank, who are being denied access to Jerusalem, lose their chances to find suitable work, spouse, education and adequate health treatment.

In June 2002, the Israeli Government issued a “temporary law” depriving citizenship to the husband/wife of any Jerusalem or Israeli citizen. In practical terms, this means that a wife/husband, who are from West Bank towns, will not be granted residency in Israel and therefore cannot join the spouse. This illegal measure under Human Rights Law largely affects Palestinian Christians due to their small numbers in the country, and owing to tight family relations between Jerusalemites and West Bankers (mainly Bethlehem and its surrounding Christian areas). This “temporary law” has been renewed to date.

In practice, a married Jerusalemite whose partner is from the West Bank, when checked in Jerusalem by an Israeli military patrol, will be fined \$1,000.00 USD and be obliged to drive his/her partner back to the West Bank and return to Jerusalem alone.

A Palestinian from Bethlehem married to a Jerusalem “resident” would, after five years of marriage, obtain an approval for a temporary residency permit in Jerusalem renewable every 27 months. That was the common procedure. Because of the “temporary law”, the reunification permit is renewable every year, but the person is not allowed to drive a car, and is obliged to issue a special entry permit to Jerusalem twice a year from the military offices in the West Bank. The estimated number of Christian families affected by such measures is 300.

3) Housing limitations:

Again, due to the small number of Christians in Jerusalem, the housing limitation affects them more severely, leading them to leave the City. The area open for expansion in East Jerusalem is extremely limited. Only 13 % is designated for construction. Almost all of this area is already constructed. Obtaining construction permits are an endless hardship not mentioning the related financial burdens that are beyond the capacity of the majority of the people. The settlement expansion in East Jerusalem reduces considerably the chances for Palestinians to build on whatever is left from the land. In this respect the number of housing units in East Jerusalem for Palestinians during the period from 1967 to 2002 was 19,056, while the Israeli settlement units in the same period reached 85,806.

Appendix V

REPORT

Holy Week and Israeli restrictions (2010 -2011)

Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)

Yusef Daher

For the past six years, Israel has upheld the following policies during Religious celebrations:

- Entry to Jerusalem for West Bank and Gaza Christians is always restricted. On the occasion of Easter, Palestinian Christians living outside of Jerusalem in the West Bank and Gaza are required to apply for permits to access their holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem. It is estimated that of those, only 2,000–3,000 Palestinian Christians received permits. Jews do not have to apply for permits to access their holy sites during their holy days nor in any other day and Muslims usually are treated in a different way where closures are lifted on people who fall within certain age groups.
- During Jewish holidays, Palestinian areas are put under military closure in the West Bank, and many times Jerusalemites are not allowed inside the Old City.

2010 Report

The following is a compilation of facts on the ground created by Israeli policies and actions against the local Christian community, starting with Palm Sunday throughout the duration of the Holy Week.

- Two buses from Ramallah and Bethlehem with worshippers on their way to attend the Palm Sunday procession were stopped on their way to Jerusalem by an Israeli military checkpoint.
- It took the Holy Family Scout Group of the Roman Catholic Church in Ramallah four hours to reach Jerusalem due to Israeli movement restrictions. Consequently, the scouts missed the procession from the Mount of Olives to the Old City of

Jerusalem. The distance between Ramallah and Jerusalem is only 18 kilometers.

- Israel closed the Bethlehem checkpoint during Palm Sunday and the Holy Week. On Palm Sunday a group of Palestinians tried to access Jerusalem from Bethlehem within a non-violent march through the checkpoint, but Israeli forces violently repressed the crowd and arrested 11 people. As a result, Israel closed the checkpoint starting on Palm Sunday at noon through until Holy Thursday, as means of collective punishment, preventing Palestinian Christians from attending religious services in the Holy City of Jerusalem. The closure of the checkpoint also meant the deviation of pilgrims willing to visit the birthplace of Jesus.
- Before Palm Sunday, the Israeli police threatened Palestinian scout groups that they would deny their permits to access occupied East Jerusalem, if they wave their national flag during Palm Sunday and the Easter processions in occupied East Jerusalem. The ban was an attack against the national feelings of the scouts and contradicts the tradition of scouts all over the world to show their own national flags with pride.
- Due to a Jewish holiday, the Old City of Jerusalem was closed for Palestinians living outside the Old City. On Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week, Christians living in East Jerusalem were banned from entering the Old City and praying in their churches, while Jews were allowed to freely access the Old City. Also, due to the Jewish holiday, the West Bank was put under military closure and all issued permits issued to access occupied East Jerusalem were nullified.

Obstructing the Procession on Good Friday (Catholic Way of the Cross):

The traditional Catholic and Franciscan procession to the Holy Sepulcher through the Via Dolorosa was interrupted by an Israeli army roadblock established a few meters outside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; Israeli occupation Police behaved rudely beating young Palestinian Christian women and men, and later closed the entrance to the Plaza of the Holy Sepulcher; there were no clear reasons to interrupt the traditional procession.

A testimony from Usama, a Palestinian Christian who was attending the procession says: “We were at the procession following the 14 Stations of the Cross. Suddenly we realized that the Police had closed the road and soldiers started shouting at the priests (...) our people didn’t want to stop the procession without making it to the Holy Sepulcher and so we tried to continue but the army personnel hit a girl and then the men retaliated to defend her... at that moment the Israelis took one of the young men. Later on they opened the door and we were able to enter, but then several officers came to me and started screaming ordering me to leave, but I responded that I came to pray and I won’t leave until I finish the 14 Stations of the Cross. For the first time, they wouldn’t allow the procession to finish the way it was expected.”

Movement Restrictions on Holy Saturday:

The brutal scenes experienced a year earlier, where Christian families were beaten by Israeli army and police forces and the announcement of movement restrictions for Holy Saturday, plus the lack of permits for Palestinian Christians coming from other areas within the oPt dramatically reduced the number of people willing to access the

Holy Sepulcher area from thousands to a few hundred.

Palestinian Christians were met by Israeli occupation police in several checkpoints and roadblocks in and around the Old City on their way to the Holy Sepulcher; while Jews were allowed to freely enter the Old City, Palestinian Christians had to wait for Israeli permission to cross.

No one was allowed to get to the Mar Yacoub Church or the Holy Sepulcher plaza after 10:30AM. Only 8,000 Palestinian Christians were allowed inside the Church, while an estimated 200,000 foreign pilgrims were allowed to enter freely. After the community exerted pressure and with some legal aid, the Israeli Police allowed some Palestinian Christians to go into the roof of the Patriarchate, where according to tradition Palestinian Christians would wait for the Holy Fire, while leaving the church and the plaza of the Holy Sepulcher for foreign pilgrims.

Despite the Israeli occupation police's assurances that the place was full of people, the roof of the Holy Sepulcher was empty. A place where thousands of Palestinian Christians would meet this year had around 200 people, most of them young and almost no families made their way there fearing the Israeli occupation police. The heavy presence of Israeli armed forces, along with their rude attitudes and bad manners, disturbed the families who wanted to celebrate their religious tradition.

Moreover, Israeli Occupation Forces wouldn't allow the Holy Fire to access Bethlehem through the main checkpoint at Hebron Road and so it was forced to go around through Beit Jala. Almost no West Bank and Gaza Christians were seen at the Holy Saturday celebrations due to very bad past experiences of struggling in vain to be inside the Old City. Christians of Jerusalem origin, who are living in Gaza were not given permits to return to Gaza if they left; thus splitting families during Easter.

2011 Report

Palm Sunday:

Jerusalemite Christians were more visible than in the past few years. Christians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip were very few. Only 4 scout troupes were able to participate in the procession. The only West Bank troupe outside of Jerusalem that was present was the Jericho Catholic troupe.

Good Friday:

In general, the procession of the 14 Stations of the Cross went smoothly except for one recorded major incident at the entrance of the Holy Sepulcher, where the Israeli police temporarily blocked the Latin Patriarch from entering the church, instead to make way for pilgrims. After a short debate, one of the Israeli policemen pushed the Patriarch and then some seminarians started pushing back. A small fight broke out before the procession went on its way. Palestinian Christians from other parts of the oPt and from within the 1948 borders were very few.

Holy Saturday:

As in the past 7 years, Jerusalemite Christians had to fight for their right to pray again, as they had to pass thru 4 Israeli police checkpoints. No Christians from other parts of the oPt were seen in Jerusalem, thousands of foreign pilgrims showed up. The local community regained its traditional place on the roof of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate that day. When the community started its traditional celebrations in anticipation of receiving the Holy Fire, Israeli police fired tear gas at them. The crowd then started cheering, “Every year in Jerusalem” and “This is our tradition... we will never abandon it”.

Permits:

A survey among the different parish priests revealed that after applying for thousands permits for Palestinian Christians to access Jerusalem to exercise their right to worship, only a few hundred were obtained. Moreover, many of those who were fortunate enough to obtain permits were turned back at Israeli checkpoints as there was an Israeli military closure on the whole oPt, due to a Jewish holiday.

Appendix VI

Palestinian Christians & Palestinian Law

Since the inception of the PNA in 1994, there has been a commitment to the inclusion of Christian Palestinians based upon the recognition that they too have a stake in the outcome of the peace process.

1. Christmas was declared a national holiday by the PNA in 1996
2. A Presidential Decree, signed 30 December 2001, established that the head of the local council in the following 10 localities would be a Palestinian Christian: Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, Ramallah, Bir Zeit, Taybeh, Jifna, Abud, Ain Arik & Zababdeh.
3. A Presidential Decree, signed 15 September 2005, which established 16 Directorates in the oPt, also allocated 66 seats for the Palestinian National Council for members from these directorates, plus one at large seat. The decree also established that 6 of the 66 seats, or 10%, were reserved for Christian Palestinians.
4. A Council of Ministers Declaration, dated 11 September 2006, established that weekends at Christian, non—governmental Schools would be Fridays and Sundays, to accommodate both Christian and Muslim students.
5. A Presidential Decree, dated 3 March 2007 established a High Committee for Christian Affairs to:
 - Follow-up on the Christian affairs with local and international churches, including matters related to law, estates, and establishments;
 - Correspond with local, regional and international authorities concerning Christian affairs;
 - Follow-up on activities and actions related to inter-religious dialogue on the local, regional and international levels.
6. A Presidential Decree, dated 7 November 2008, and a Palestinian National Council Declaration, dated 8 August 2008 both officially recognized 13 Christian Churches in the oPt.

Moreover, governors, ministers, advisers, ambassadors, consul generals, heads of missions, UN representatives, Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) members, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) members, and heads of various political parties have been Christians.