

FFIPP delegation to Israel/Palestine Dec 28, 2003 to Jan 6, 2004.

Day 1: Jerusalem

Parents' Circle - Families Forum

www.theparentscircle.com/parents

Van Leer Institute, meeting with an Israeli and Palestinian member of the Parents' Circle - Families Forum, an organization of Israeli and Palestinian bereaved families who have, as a result of the Israeli - Arab conflict, lost a family member, a first-degree relative. The Families Forum believes in solving the conflict between Israel and the peoples of the region by way of a political process that eventually will lead to a peace agreement and co-existence based on mutual respect.



(Photo: Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem. The delegation met with Rami Elhanan who lost his daughter in a suicide bombing in Jerusalem)

The delegation met with Ghazi Briegieth who lost his brother who was killed by the IDF and Rami Elhanan who lost his daughter in a suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

The most powerful message from these two was if they are able to sit down and talk to each other in the name of peace, others who have not suffered such personal tragedy and loss should be able to as well. They continuously referred to each other as "my brother." Their story is how they dealt with the loss of their loved ones. Both are motivated by the desire to ensure that other families do not have to experience the suffering they have endured. Rami told of how he is called a traitor, while Ghazi tells how he teaches his children to make the distinction between the actions of Israeli soldiers and Jews. In addition to their speaking engagements and educational activities, the Families Forum runs a summer program for Palestinian children and Israeli children who have lost family members.

Nir Barkat, Jerusalem City Council Member

Town Hall in Jerusalem, meeting with Nir Barkat, a member of Jerusalem City Council. Mr. Barkat, a millionaire businessman, ran in the last election for the mayor Jerusalem in June 2003. He took second place with 43% of the vote. The winner was Uri Lupolianski, the first ultra-Orthodox mayor of the city. The low voter turnout of 37% highlighted the fact that the non-haredi population of the city chose not to vote.

Day 2:

Bethlehem and Beit Sahour

Dr. Jad Issac, Director, Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ)

www.arij.org

The Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem, is a Palestinian organization that makes maps of Israeli settlement building in the occupied territories using satellite images it buys commercially.

The delegation met with Jad Isaac, director of the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem. Mr. Isaac showed the delegation a power-point presentation, mostly consisting of maps illustrating Israel's system of land confiscation in the occupied territories, settlements, walls, and roads used in the employment of this system.

Mr. Isaac discussed the 1947 partition plan in which the Jewish community who, while only owning 7% of the land, were awarded a state amounting to 54% of historical Palestine. He discussed the paradox regarding the Palestinian refusal of this plan, as they owned 93% of the land but were only given 46% with which to create their state. Mr. Isaac demonstrated the motive behind the Jewish choice of land being a strategic interest in control of water resources, as opposed to a religious or ideologically inspired decision. His maps clearly showed the location of the historic holy sites in contrast with the areas of intense settlement activity.

The issue of the Israeli settlements was a key point in Mr. Isaac's presentation; he discussed the process of settlement expansion using outposts to confiscate the land surrounding the settlements, and the perpetual increase in the number of new settlements built. According to ARIJ, in the years between 1992 and 2002 the number of settlers increased from 206,000 to 435,000. This was contrasted with the much lower actual growth in the Israeli population. One of the explanations for this dramatic rise being, as Mr. Isaac said, economic incentives including tax exemptions and housing subsidies.

Mr. Isaac also discussed the bypass roads, 734 kilometers of which bisect the West Bank but are restricted to most Palestinians. Maps demonstrated the destructive policy of “shaving” in Gaza - stripping the land along the roads of all vegetation, orchards and buildings. Further destruction is caused by the Israeli defense wall, which creates tremendous complications for Palestinians in the most practical sense. Qalqilyah, a city of 41,000 inhabitants is completely surrounded by the wall with only one entrance.

Meeting with Zoughbi Zoughbi, director of the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center Dheisheih Refugee Camp

The delegation was given a guided tour through the Dheisheih refugee camp in Bethlehem to observe the conditions within the camp and speak with members of the community. The guide spoke of the various problems in the camp including the lack of basic facilities, services, travel restrictions, and the constant threat of Israeli military incursions.

After the tour the delegation visited the IBDAAC cultural center, founded in 1994 to provide enrichment classes and activities such as dance and sports for the children in the camp. The dance program was so successful an invitation was extended for 30 children from Dheisheih to visit France.



The delegation tour guide in the Dheisheih refugee camp in Bethlehem)

The children chose who should participate through a democratic process - each school classroom voted on which five students they believed deserved to go on the trip. The thirty twelve year olds went to France and performed a dance show, which later prompted further invitations from other countries around the world, including two in the United States.

Using the funds generated from these dance tours, the IBDAAC center created the first computer lab in the occupied territories, organized summer camps in Cyprus for children from refugee camps in Lebanon and the West Bank, and sponsored the first women’s basketball team in the occupied territories. In addition, over 1,000 women and children receive services from the center each week.

Rassan Andoni, Director, Palestinian Center for Rapprochement (PCR) and Co-founder, International Solidarity Movement (ISM), Beit Sahour

The delegation met with Rassan Andoni, head of the International Solidarity Movement, founded in 1988 after the first Intifada in order to support civil rebellion against the Israeli occupation. Between that time and the present conflict, the group sought to promote dialogue but after the events of September 2000, decided that the way to end the occupation was through non-violent resistance.

Mr. Andoni was very quick to point out the fact that ISM is not a neutral group, but specifically works towards ending the occupation. Mr. Andoni mentioned the difficulties ISM has encountered in its history, mainly in the form of arrests and raids on ISM offices, in which computers and files were confiscated, and in some extreme cases, the intentional killing of ISM activists by IDF forces in an attempt to intimidate the group into ending its activities. Mr. Andoni described the killing of Rachel Corrie, a young American volunteer who was crushed by a bulldozer driven by an Israeli soldier. She had been just talking to the driver of the bulldozer and was wearing the unmistakable bright orange vest of the ISM volunteers. She was knocked over by the bulldozer, covered with dirt and then crushed as the bulldozer drove over her. He had no doubt that she was completely visible to the driver the entire time.

While recognizing the Palestinians right to oppose the occupation with force, Mr. Andoni took care to explain that ISM always promotes non-violence, and sees their purpose as monitoring the situation and acting as witnesses, as well as peacefully obstructing the occupation.

The question was asked of Mr. Andoni by a member of the delegation, if he had considered taking steps to empower Palestinian society in its struggle, and Mr. Andoni responded: "I will not allow myself to empower the Palestinians, they empower us. We need to believe in the ability of the Palestinians..." Another student asked as to what ISM would do should the occupation end, Mr. Andoni replied that ISM would disband.

Day 3 – Hebron

Mustafa Abd al-Nabi Natshe, Mayor of Hebron

The delegation attended a meeting with Mustafa Abd al-Nabi Natshe, the mayor of Hebron in his office at the city municipal building. The mayor began with some words regarding the history of the conflict, saying, "Our

struggle is not new” and citing the roots of the conflict in 1917, 1948, and 1967.

He spoke of the contradiction in the statements of the Israeli government that “Israel is for peace” while building more settlements, and occupying more land. The mayor said of the American-led “roadmap to peace” that the Palestinians accept but Israel continues to provoke and antagonize.

The bulk of the meeting, however, was spent discussing Hebron, a city of 170,000 inhabitants and how the conflict affects the city and its people. The two most dramatic sources of this impact are the IDF policies and actions and the 450 settlers who dwell in the heart of the old city. The two elements are somewhat cooperative in their disruption of Palestinian life. The IDF imposes curfews, which create tremendous difficulties in movement. The IDF has occupied three schools and turned them into bases, creating problems in the educational system. In addition, the IDF fails to act to prevent harassment of Palestinians by the settlers. The mayor began his discussion of the settlers and their impact on the city by mentioning the massacre in which a settler, Baruch Goldstien, killed 29 Muslims in prayer at Abraham’s tomb.



(Photo: The delegation attended a meeting with Mustafa Abd al-Nabi Natshe, the mayor of Hebron.)

A member of the delegation asked the mayor about the problems he is faced with as mayor, and he responded that according to agreements, the municipality is responsible for providing services, even to the settlers, who make it very difficult for the city. The old city of Hebron where the settlers are located is designated as a separate zone from the rest of the city and is under the control of the Israeli military. Thus, permission needs to be

obtained from the Israeli military to cross into this area to provide services. The mayor said that what he sees as the biggest problem is how to show the world, and particularly, the United States, what is happening in Palestine.

Tour of the Old City of Hebron and the Cave of the Patriarch

A walking tour of the old city followed, guided by members of the Christian Peacemaker Team and Al-Jazeera reporter. The delegation walked towards the old city, passing through bustling streets and markets. As we came closer to the center of the city, the streets became empty. Cars were forbidden by the Israeli military and few pedestrians ventured into the area. Shopkeepers complained that their business is ruined because no one comes. At one point the new huge yeshiva is visible, built on top of the older buildings. A young teenager settler peeks around the corner at us, armed with an automatic weapon and wearing a bulletproof vest and helmet. Beyond this point, all the shops are closed and there is virtually no one on the streets. Above the narrow lanes there is a canopy of fencing, installed to catch the refuse and garbage that was thrown down on the shoppers by the Jewish settlers who occupied the apartments above. The army has since ordered hundreds of shops closed, creating a ghost town in the center of the city. The walls are marked with anti-Arab graffiti, ironically in Hebrew.

Day 4 – Haifa Haifa University

The delegation attended a meeting with faculty and students from the University of Haifa, organized by professor Yuval Yonai, who began the discussion by saying that he saw Haifa University as a microcosm of Israeli society and decided a few years ago, to create a model of how life could be between Israelis and Palestinians, as 20% of the student body at the university is Arab-speaking.



(Photo: Meeting students and faculty at Haifa University)

Despite this relatively high percentage, however, much of the discussion

focused on the difficulties Palestinian students face on a daily basis. For example, the Israeli high court ruled that all signs on the campus should be printed in Arabic as well as Hebrew, but the president of the university ignored the decree.

The Palestinian students also have a significantly reduced chance of being awarded campus housing, and Jews are much more often preferred as recipients of scholarships, not to mention the tremendous identity conflicts suffered by many Palestinians living within Israel.

The Palestinian students attending the meeting cited several other problems they face as students. For example, because the university automatically regards the Arab student body as a threat, there are restrictions on the right of free speech, and opportunities for Arab student activism is greatly limited, despite the resentment within that demographic. Any Arab student protests are met with IDF anti-riot squads, and that is provided that the students even receive permission for the demonstration, which is rare and very complicated to obtain.

One of the underlying problems presented in the discussion was that minorities in Israel are often neutralized because they assimilate into Israeli society and, therefore, do not side with the Arab cause for fear of seeming ungrateful to Israeli society for the benefits they receive as a result of that assimilation.

Woman-To-Woman Feminist Center

The delegation attended a meeting at the Woman-to-Woman Feminist Center in Haifa. The center is a coalition of four separate woman's organizations; Woman to Woman, Kayan, a Palestinian woman's group, the Haifa Rape Crisis Center, and the Battered Woman's Shelter. The meeting was run by representatives from each of the four groups, which all work together with certain shared goals and philosophies, but with individualized concentrations on specific issues.

One of the principles which define the four groups together is the involvement with Arab, Jewish, and Christian women, regardless of ethnicity or cultural distinction. Kayan, the first Arab feminist organization, encourages economic independence for Arab women, and gives support for gay Palestinian women.

The Battered Women's Shelter, said a representative from the group, does not consider the idea of co-existence between its Israeli and Palestinian members as the term implies equality, and instead tries to use the idea of

cooperation to empower the women who receive services from the shelter. The women live together and work together regardless of their backgrounds, in the spirit of cooperation and unity.

The Rape Crisis Center became an NGO with help from Woman to Woman in 1978, and in 1997 formed a group specifically for Arab women. They provide help for rape victims, seek to raise awareness in the community, and have a hotline.

The question was asked by a member of the delegation if Woman to Woman works with ultra-orthodox women, and the response was that the religious women have their own support groups and rarely work with Woman to Woman.

The women representing these groups took care to mention that while they all identify themselves as feminists and liberals, the two concepts are not necessarily interchangeable when it comes to actual political beliefs and that Woman to Woman technically has no political position. Woman to Woman does not operate or provide services past the green line, or 1967 borders, partially as a result of various sponsorships from organizations that do have definite political stances.

Day 5 - Haifa and Ain Hod



(Photo: The delegation attended a meeting with Yona Yahav, Mayor of Haifa)

Muhammad Al-hajj, Founder of the Association of Forty, Ain Hod
www.assoc40.org

The delegation visited Ain Hod, an unrecognized Palestinian village, and met with Muhammad Al-Hajj, a community leader and head of the "Association of Forty". The Association of Forty was formally established in 1988 in the

unrecognized village Ein-Hod, by the local committee of the village, by the inhabitants of unrecognized villages and also by Arab and Jewish volunteers from all over the country.

The residents of Ain Hod and the other unrecognized villages, as Mr. Al-Hajj explained, are tax-paying citizens of Israel, and yet they receive no services from the government under the "absent-present" law, which states that even if the citizens leave their homes for a few days their land becomes property of the government. In 1948 the residents of Ain Hod left their village in search of refuge from the Israeli war of independence, but one family of the village stayed in the area, hiding in the mountains as most of their friends and fellow villagers fled to Jordan and Syria. When the war ended this family returned to their homes, only to find that in their absence a community of Jewish artists had settled in their village, so the family began to rebuild a community less than a mile away from their ancestral homes. Over time this community became the unrecognized village of Ain Hod.

The village is on no Israeli map, has no electricity, no water, no roads, and no building rights. Only recently, through the actions of the Association of 40, the Israeli government agreed to pump water to the village, but the residents of Ain Hod have to construct and pay for the entire apparatus.

The Association of 40 has been working to raise awareness of these issues and to bring rights to the thousands of citizens who suffer under the same conditions. Mr. Al-Hajj was asked if Ain Hod has any relations with the Israeli artist community that resides in their former home. The artists pretend they don't exist, and offer no assistance of any kind.

When asked what his advice would be to individuals with similar concerns, Mr. Al-Hajj replied, "You need to believe in your cause, you need to have patience, and you need to speak to people in the administration."

Apartheid Wall, between the villages of Baka al-Sharkiya and Baka al-Garbia

The delegation visited a completed section of the separation wall. The wall, surrounded by the rubble of Palestinian homes demolished for its construction, split the village in half, making travel almost impossible and entirely destroying the economy of the area.



(Photo: The delegation visited a completed section of the separation wall the villages of Baka al-Sharkiya. The wall, surrounded by the rubble of Palestinian homes demolished for its construction.)

The delegation spoke with several Palestinians whose homes had been demolished, one after only being given 15 minutes to evacuate the home he had built with his own hands, and housed his entire family. The residents of the village spoke of how the wall and its construction has frustrated and complicated their daily lives. The resounding sentiment expressed by the villagers was that this wall could not be built by a government truly desirous of peace.

Day 6 – Tel Aviv

Visit with members of Ometz Lesareve in Tel Aviv, Rami Kaplan, Chen, Arik
www.seruv.org.il

Courage to Refuse was founded following the publication of The Combatants Letter in 2002, by a group of 50 combat officers and soldiers. In the letter they wrote: We, combat officers and soldiers who have served the State of Israel for long weeks every year, in spite of the dear cost to our personal lives, have been on reserve duty in the Occupied Territories, and were issued commands and directives that had nothing to do with the security of our country, and that had the sole purpose of perpetuating our control over the Palestinian people.

We, who understand now that the price of Occupation is the loss of IDF's human character and the corruption of the entire Israeli society. We, who know that the Territories are not a part of Israel, and that all settlements are bound to be evacuated. We hereby declare that we shall not continue to fight this War of the Settlements.

We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people.

Day 7 – Negev

South of Be'er Sheba- unrecognized Bedouin village

The delegation visited an unrecognized Bedouin village south of Be'er Sheva in the Negev Desert, and spoke with individuals from a local tribal committee seeking to have their villages recognized and provided for. Many issues discussed were similar in nature to those voiced by Mr. Al-Hajj at Ain Hod, and the challenges faced by the Bedouins of the area are comparable to communities in other parts of the country.

The lack of government services, lack of medical facilities, electricity, and water is identical to Ain Hod. The visit to the Bedouin, however, raised additional problems and concerns, namely; the difficulties in maintaining the traditional customs and heritage of the Bedouin people in such limited conditions. For example, as was described by members of the Bedouin council, the Bedouins have historically held great cultural importance in raising and herding animals, however, the Israeli government has restricted their right to use the amount of land necessary for raising animals, and so the society has been forced to become an agriculturally based society contrary to its historical traditions.

Day 8 - Jerusalem

Notre Dame Hotel: Attending FFIPP Conference

Meeting with Benjamin Pogrund, Director of the Center for Social Concern at the Yakar Center in West Jerusalem

Meeting with Lior Horev an advisor to Ariel Sharon.

Day 9 - Jerusalem

Notre Dame Hotel: Attending FFIPP Conference

Meeting with Professor Ezrahi from the Hebrew University



(The delegation attended the 2nd FFIPP International conference: An End to Occupation, A just Peace in Israel-Palestine, at the Notre Dame Hotel, Jerusalem.)

Day 10 – Ramallah

Passing the Kalandia Checkpoint

Meeting with students and faculty at Birzeit University

Passing by Arafat's compound



Meeting with students at Birzeit University in the West Bank

Photos were taken by Matt Edmundson and Elliot Fratkin.