

# Letters from Palestine

2013-4-30 - Few more stories from Palestine

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Hello again Friends,

First of all, I will mention that I am aware that this issue of relations between Israel and Palestine is full of complexities. My letters will not attempt to give an overall assessment of the conflict. For a great introduction to the issues, please watch this 7-minute video from the group Jewish Voice for Peace:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y58njT2oXfE>

In this letter I will cover three topics: one, the peaceful resistance of Nabi Saleh village; two, a Ramallah conference regarding Palestinian prisoners; three, the continued squeezing of Battir village.

Saturday night I heard the stories from two people of Nabi Saleh village, a place which is becoming more and more well-known for its peaceful activism. Since December of 2009, on every Friday, villagers of Nabi Saleh have been regularly demonstrating in opposition to an Israeli settlement which took lots of land from the villagers. Nabi Saleh had a good amount of water in the past; the Israeli settlement homes were particularly built in the places that had much water. Nabi Saleh is a small village of only 600 people. One of the speakers, a courageous father whose children were present at the talk and who participate in the protests, said that he hopes that Nabi Saleh's attribute of being such a small village and yet holding such a prolonged stance against occupation will inspire larger villages to take up the challenge as well. 173 members of the village have gone to jail over the protests. 2 have been killed. We watched videos of the villagers protesting. I was particularly moved by seeing the video of the children facing the soldiers directly, defiantly resisting their violent presence in their village. Those same courageous children were present in the room, quietly, restlessly walking around, like children do, patiently awaiting the finish of their father's impassioned speech. We also watched video of a protest which included footage of the Nabi Saleh villager Mustafa Tamimi who was shot in the head by a teargas canister from less than 10 meters away. See video here about the day Mustafa Tamimi was shot and the funeral held in the village: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GgqVodd9Bc>

On Saturday, I attended the "International Meeting of Freedom and Dignity" held in Ramallah. Many people came from around the world to represent either activist groups or governments which are concerned about the plight of Palestinian prisoners. France was most well represented, with 120 French people attending the conference. I witnessed a round-table discussion with very impassioned speeches from representatives of the following countries: Italy, Spain, Chile, Greece, Argentina, UK, Uruguay and Palestine. Here are some statistics reported that day regarding Palestinian prisoners: 4,900 are being held right now in Israeli prisons; (I mentioned last night to a friend that the US prison system is increasingly being privatized, and becoming more and more of a money-making operation, as 25% of the world's prisoners are in US prisons. My friend said in Israel it is also a "business" to imprison people.) Of the total number of Palestinian prisoners, 236 are under 18 years old. 14 of the current prisoners are female, while many thousands of females have been arrested. 14 are parliament members. The lawyers do not know why the vast majority of the prisoners are in jail. Several people said the vast majority of the prisoners are being accused of the so-called "crime" of simply living in their home, which became illegal at the moment Israel decided to annex their village and declare it a place illegal for Palestinians to live. This taking by force of people from their homes is an international crime. 40% of Palestinian prisoners have been in jail over 6 years. Speakers also focused on the question of proper categorization for the prisoners--prisoners of war or political prisoners, a distinction which affects what type of court in which they would be tried, military if prisoner of war or civilian if resistor of occupation. Several people mentioned that torture is happening at the prisons, with denial of sleep and food and proper medical care. Some prisoners have cancer or other diseases and are not being treated. The government of Israel should be on trial for these crimes, as well as the deaths of so many people who have been killed simply for doing various innocent activities, such as walking down the street or picking olives or throwing a rock from a distance at an armed soldier who is part of an occupying force threatening to bulldoze their homes and farmlands.

The Squeezing of Battir village:

The story of Battir is complex, partially because Battir has been inhabited for over 3000 years. This village is unbelievably gorgeous and incredibly rich in history. I cannot even touch the significance of this village in this letter, based on my one visit there. Nevertheless, here are a few facts: Some olive trees date back 3000 years

in this village. In 1948 many villagers left Battir because of the ethnic cleansing by Israeli forces which was then underway all over Palestine. In 1967, the entire area of farmland and also homes was declared to be completely under Israeli control. Right now Israel is proposing to put the separation wall (which runs along the green line throughout Palestine) through this village, destroying much of its farmland and trees and blocking the villagers' access to their lands which provide many of them their livelihood. For much more in-depth information about this fascinating, beautiful village, please see these articles and video:

<http://electronicintifada.net/content/sixty-years-ago-battir/7482>, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battir>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4K5xXOtnPc> This is just one example of so many instances of the type of squeezing having been done to hundreds of villages already and being done to many more now.

Truly, the state of things in occupied Palestine is nearly beyond my belief. I am continuously appalled upon hearing the specific stories of life here directly from the people living those stories. I am not just hearing stories; I am seeing the rubble of houses, the massive separation wall, the worry--and courage and determination as well--on the people's faces. It is difficult to believe I have only been here one week. So many people have opened their hearts through sharing their stories with me.

Hugs to you,  
Deb