

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel



Hassan (12) and Emir (8) Muhtasseb arrested by the Israeli Military

Articles written by Gerry O'Sullivan

from 1st January 2010 to 31st March 2010

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Background to the Ecumenical and Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

Gerry O'Sullivan, a conflict mediator and trainer, who lives in Castlegregory, Co Kerry, Ireland, lived and worked in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank for three months from the 1st January 2010. Gerry worked for Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) as an Ecumenical Accompanier serving on the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). This programme was set up as a result of an invitation from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. The aim of the programme is to end the conflict through a negotiated settlement, based on International Law.

Gerry lived alongside Palestinians in Hebron in the south of the West Bank. Part of her role was to witness and to provide protective presence to Palestinians at potential flashpoints, to take testimonies from people who had suffered human rights abuses and to work closely with Palestinian and Israeli peace activists. Monitoring International Human Rights abuses was also part of this role.

Gerry was based in Hebron, in the south of the West bank. She monitored International Human Rights violations. Among many other tasks, Gerry accompanied Palestinian children to school as they were less likely to be harmed by Israeli settlers if they had an international person with them. She supported the parents of young boys who were detained and imprisoned and she accompanied them to Ofer military court for their sons' trials. She supported Israeli and Palestinian Peace Activists in their work.

The commitment to EAPPI was to undertake advocacy work, both in the Ecumenical Accompaniers' placement bases, and following their return home. Communication of the reality and of the injustices of the military occupation of the Palestine Territories, as witnessed and experienced by Gerry O'Sullivan, forms the basis of these articles written during her stay in the West Bank.

Gerry O'Sullivan worked for Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) as an Ecumenical Accompanier serving on the World Council of Churches (WCC) as an Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) The views contained in this document are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of QPSW or the WCC. If you would like to publish the information contained here (including posting it on a website), or to distribute it further, please contact the QPSW Programme Manager for Israel/OPT teresap@quaker.org.uk for permission to do so.

THE SETTLERS TOUR OF HEBRON

A sunny Saturday afternoon in the old city of Hebron can be spent with the barrel of a gun directed at you from a distance of four feet. It does not matter that a few Palestinians, including old men, women and young children, and my two team mates and I, are innocently standing in the hot sunshine. What matters is that Saturday is the day that the Settlers Tour of the Old City of Hebron takes place.

Five hundred settlers are residing illegally in the city, contravening the 4th Geneva Convention. They have the protection of 1,500 Israeli military and despite this illegal residency, 35- 40 Israeli Settlers on the *Settler's Tour* are surrounded by 18 gun pointing Israeli soldiers and the guns are pointed at the Palestinians and at the Internationals working in the area. (See photo attached)



Israeli soldiers on patrol

So who are the Settlers? They are Israeli Jews who have been encouraged by the Israeli government to come to settle in the West Bank. They are permitted to carry arms while, according to Hashem, a Palestinian source, he will be arrested if the military find a bread knife in his house that is overshadowed by a settlement.

And why is this tour taking place? Hebron is the location of the second most important holy site for the Jews and the fourth most holy site for the Muslims. The Settler's tour takes their visitors to see the locations that are important to their religion, in particular The Tomb of the Patriarchs/Ibrahimi Mosque.



The settlers' tour leaves the Beit Romano settlement, at the edge of the cold, dark tunnel-like old city streets, and takes visitors to see the old city. We could see them gathering through the locked gate below the military outpost. They were wearing traditional black and white clothes. They are under strong military protection and the tense atmosphere is mixed with the wonderful aroma of the spices which is all over the Old City. This is the chilling and warm contrast that reflects the experiences we have had so far in Hebron.

While this tour takes place, Palestinians are kept back by the soldiers and are blocked from entering the Old City to go to their stonewalled ancient shops and homes. There is an atmosphere of tension and fear as this tour takes place because no one knows if there will be violence. The Israeli military will protect the illegal settlers but will not protect the Palestinians. (See photo attached)

The Palestinian population of Hebron is approximately 180,000 people. After the Oslo Accords, the city was divided into two areas, H1 under Palestinian Authority control and H2 under Israeli Military control. There are 500 settlers living in the centre of Hebron city and there are 1,500 Israeli military personnel protecting them. There are 40,000 Palestinians living in the Israeli controlled H2 area which causes a lot of tension. They are not allowed to drive or walk through some of the streets and on occasions they have to walk on one side of the street inside a barrier, while Israelis and Internationals are allowed to walk on the other side with no barrier.

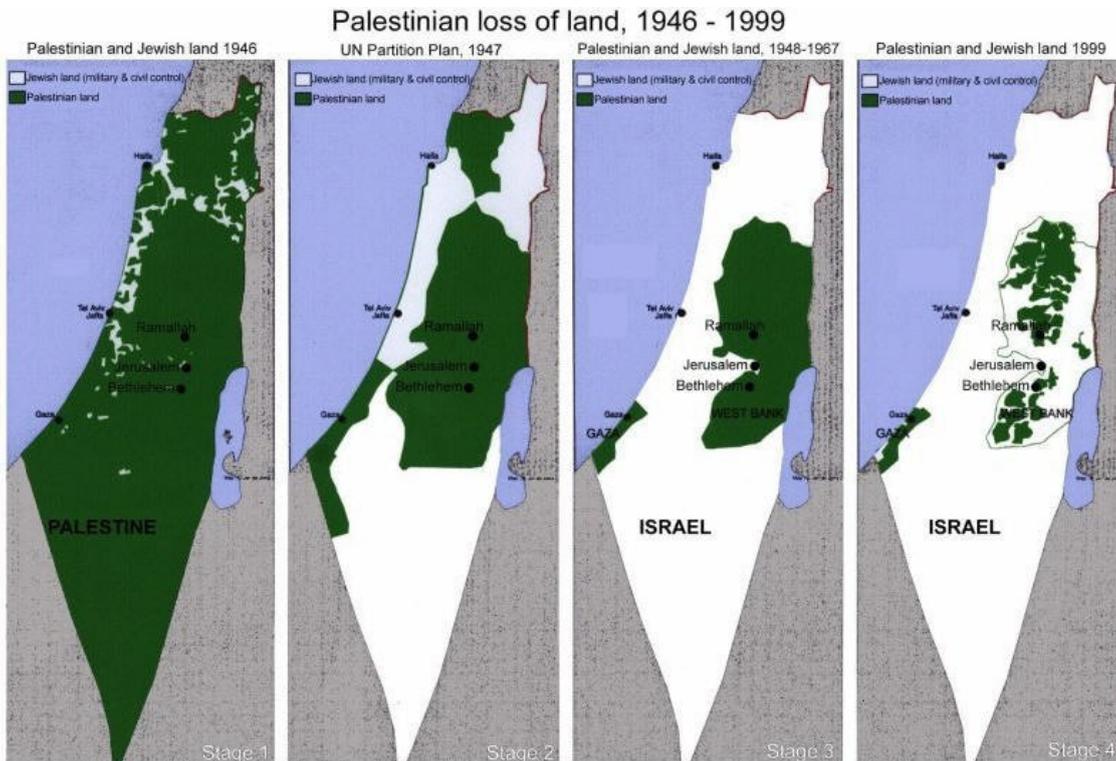
Hebron is the second largest city in the West Bank and, outside of Jerusalem; it is the only city where Palestinians and Israelis live in such close proximity to each other. You can jump from the roof of a settlement in the old city to the roof of one of the Palestinians homes. Indeed, this is exactly what happens when the Israeli military want to leave their roof top guard posts to get to the street – they jump to a Palestinian family's roof and go through

their home to the front door. The Settlers fire guns at the roof water tanks of the Palestinians so they will not have any water collection from the rain.

After the 6-day Israeli/Arab war in 1948 The UN General Assembly called for partition and an armistice line was drawn dividing Israel/Palestine into two parts, with the new state of Israel on the western Mediterranean side and the Palestinians on the east side (The West Bank) and also on a westerly strip of land bordering the Mediterranean sea (Gaza). There is no connection between Gaza and the West Bank causing each area to live separately from the other with families not meeting each other.

The dividing line became known as "The Green Line". Since that time the Israelis have continued to build self-contained villages and houses on the Palestinian side of this Green Line. This contravenes the 4th Geneva Convention. The Israelis continue to fragment the land and its Palestinian people.

The movement and access of the Palestinian people is seriously curtailed and this deeply affects their families and their livelihoods. They are caught in a prison and they need permits to move around. They need to go through checkpoints to get to work or to go to their farmlands - if they are one of the lucky few to be given an identity card and permit. The road system is divided in many areas, one road for the Israelis and the other road for the Palestinians. The Israelis say this is necessary for security.



Palestinians' houses are demolished to make way for the building of homes for settlers and they are forced to live in tents or refugee camps. Their agricultural land is seized by the Israeli military and they are forced to leave their farms.

CAULIFLOWERS AND WAR IN THE LBWAYREEH AREA, HEBRON

Why would a man build his home with only one window and one door in it? Why does he, and his wife Zbaideh, live inside their home feeling scared and vulnerable?

“The Israeli military demolished our home in 1990 and blocked our water wells”, said Adel Karim. The Israelis have occupied our land, our life and our work. They have raped our land. The Israeli Settlers who have now moved to live here throw stones at us, they attack our house, and they have destroyed our electricity connection many times. They have killed our sheep and goats.”



Zbaideh and Abdel Kamir

The area in which Adel Karim and Zbaideh live has a beautiful landscape with hills and valleys and it lies at the edge of Hebron city. It contains the most fertile land in the area and used to produce the best olives, grapes, apples, cauliflowers and carrots. But this was before the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and before the building of the Kharseena Settlement for Israelis in Lbwayreeh.

International Humanitarian Law prohibits the transfer of the occupying power’s civilians into occupied territory and so this settlement is illegal, but, despite its illegality, the residents of the Settlement are protected by the Israeli military. Boulders, barbed wire and fences are used to control the movement and access of the Palestinian farmers who live there. The Israelis say that this is needed for security purposes.

A new road has been built for the sole use of the settlers and the Israeli military, while the old Palestinian road has been blocked. This curtails the movement and access of the Palestinians severely. Adel Karim told us that it is not considered good if a Muslim woman has a baby on the road and that this has happened because of the movement restrictions. They said that some of their neighbours have died because they have not been able to go to hospital. Ambulances are not able to come through the road blocks.

Alex, Sofia and I (from EAPPI) are sitting in Adel Karim and Zbaideh’s reconstructed house that has only one window and one door in order that they will be less vulnerable if they are attacked. The walls are not plastered, and of course, not painted. We sit in the room with the concrete floor and the unfinished block wall as Zbaideh brings us peeled carrots to eat. There is a very warm fire in the centre of the floor, with a funnel to the ceiling that allows the smoke out. There is one electricity socket with a 6-adaptor appliance and all the electricity in the house comes from that source. The wire for the light in the centre of the ceiling dips across the room. There is a television and two couches. The couple have only built the very basics as they have been issued with a further demolition order on their property.

Since the Israeli occupation life has changed completely for this couple. Zbaideh said that one day their horse bolted and she ran after it to try to bring it home as her husband was not there. Neither she nor the horse went outside the borders of their own land and yet she was tear-gassed by the Israeli military as they maintained she was on Israeli property.

She said she was very, very frightened.

“I used up all the credit on my phone trying to get help that day. My health has been affected (she said as she rummaged for her tablets). A month ago I opened the door one night and there were four settlers outside holding guns. They were aged between 10 and 18 years of age. They looked hard and hard and hard and watched me and then walked away. I knew what the message was.”

Adel Karim can no longer bring the farm produce to the Jerusalem market where he traditionally traded with a buyer. This buyer cannot come to the West Bank to do his purchasing either. Adel Karim now sells in the local Hebron market for a much lower price.



Transporting produce by mule

He has to transport his produce by mule instead of by car because of the road block. There are other obstacles to Palestinian farmers. Their water wells are continuously filled in by Israeli military. The soldiers do this as they say that the Palestinians have no permission from the Israeli government to build wells. The Palestinians only have access to 20% of the water resources in the West Bank. The Settlers have access to 80% of this water. Farmers are not permitted to dig their land to a depth of more than 30 centimetres.

We asked Zbaideh how the occupation has affected her as a woman. She replied –
“My life has been turned upside down. We have very little money now. I use the washing machine only once a month. I have to think very hard before I risk going to the shop as I am attacked going there, and again on my way back.”

Zbaideh’s sister and her sister’s four children, ranging in age from 1 to 6, can no longer come to visit. If they do, they are attacked by the settlers who use stones and sticks. They have told Zbaideh that they are too afraid to visit her anymore.

But Zbaideh did smile as she brought us a plate of delicious mandarin oranges and told us about the day that she and nine other women, with their small children worked until nine o’clock at night clearing part of a road block so that they could have pedestrian and animal access.

Adel Karim told us that he is convinced that their continuous intimidation is a deliberate Israeli policy in order that Palestinians will leave their land and more Israelis can take their place. He wonders what else could be the reason for the fact that the Israeli military only protect the settlers and do not protect them. He cannot understand why Jews and Muslims cannot live peacefully together as they did in the past.

“We are peaceful people. We are religious brothers. This is the land of Jesus, Moses and the prophet Mohammed. The Israelis are monsters. They have not come here to live with us, but to remove us from our land. The occupation is the problem, as are the Zionists that have come to live in the Settlements.”

When I asked what message Adel Karim would like to give to the people in Ireland, he replied...

“Ask those with a conscience to try to help us live and work safely because we want to live and not to make war.”

FARMING AMIDST CONFLICT IN THE HEBRON HILLS

The sun and peaceful quietness of the tiny village of At-Tuwani, in the Hebron Hills, masks the conflict taking place in this area. On top of the hill, we can see six members of the Israeli military and two Israeli policemen arriving in their vehicles to join a small group of local settlers. The military and police start to walk down the hill towards us. They are all carrying weapons.

Five days previously, in the dead and darkness of the night of the 18th January 2010, the Israelis living in the settlement on the top of the hill that looks down on At-Tuwani village and its farmlands, destroyed 20 olive trees. This has not been the first attack in the South Hebron Hills. Homes have been destroyed, poison has been spread on the lands, crops have been burnt and sheep have been shot.



Destroyed olive trees

We (EAPPI) have been asked to join with other internationals, and with the local families, to plant new olive trees to replace the destroyed trees. We arrive to find 30 locals and 15 internationals preparing for the planting.

As we set off walking across the hills in the hot sunshine, with a tractor taking the tools and the new olive tree plants, the Israeli military and police are moving closer to us. We start to plant the new trees while Palestinian journalists film us and take photos of the events. The soil is dry and made of clay. We are instructed that only women can work with the Palestinian women and only men with the Palestinian men.

There are approximately 6 trees planted by the time the military and the police have come closer to us. They call us over and start to tell us to leave the land. They state that the area is a closed military zone and that we have no right to be on it. The Palestinians argue that this is their land and that they have a right to farm it. The Palestinian women become very emotional and you can see the frustration that has built up in them. They are shouting, they take no pause or break in their talk, and their hands are gesticulating all over the place. Their faces are brown and creased with the sun.



Pleading with the military police

But their arguments seemed to fall on completely deaf ears as we were all told by the police and military to move away. One of the Palestinian journalists from PAL Media was detained and taken away.

We left new trees planted on the Palestinian farmland, but for how long will those trees remain planted? As we prepare to leave and return home to the relative safety of our apartment in Hebron, we ask ourselves what the night will bring for those poverty stricken and vulnerable families. In an occupied country Palestinians say that there is no point in making a complaint to the occupier.

The next morning I receive a phone call from one of our Hebron Palestinian contacts to say there is a photo of me on the front page of the Palestinian newspaper planting an olive tree with the women of Tuwani. It states I am an Israeli peace activist. But the Palestinian media are not our target audience, it is the international media. What a shame. These stories need to be heard by the world.

On the following Tuesday, the 27th January, we read a report from the Christian Pacemaker Team (CPT), who have a presence in the village of At-Tuwani. This report stated that at 9:20 am on the 26th January 2010 three army jeeps with fifteen armed Israeli military, a pickup truck with Israeli settlers from the Havat Ma'on settlement and an armed settlement security guard drove into At-Tuwani village.

The settlers walked throughout the village, entering Palestinian homes, accompanied by the soldiers and settlement security guard. Villagers from At-Tuwani gathered to protest the settlers coming into their village and entering their homes. They told the settlers to leave. The settlers accused the villagers of stealing goats.

At-Tuwani residents said that a soldier punched Fadi Rabaii, a villager who demanded to see a search warrant. Rabaii, 41, was taken to the hospital where his nose was found to be broken.

Immediately afterwards, Israeli settlers began throwing stones at the Palestinian villagers while soldiers fired three canisters of tear gas at the Palestinians. Afterwards, the settlers drove to the entrance of At-Tuwani, and began throwing stones at passersby on the road.

Women of At-Tuwani told the Christian Peacemakers Team members that, during the attack, soldiers threatened them and their children, saying that if they did not leave the area, soldiers would arrest all of the men of the village and kill at least one. Despite their fear, the women remained where they were and told the soldiers they were welcome to arrest them as well as the men.

The day after the attack, doctors reported that the Palestinian who was punched in the face will need surgery.



Gerry planting olive trees

THE PALESTINIAN WEDDING WHERE PHOTOS WERE NOT PERMITTED

Alex and I were on our way back from the Mosque/Synagogue Checkpoint Watch on Friday 25th January 2010 when we saw a crowd gathering. We asked what was happening and we were told that the bride and groom were about to arrive. They would both go into the room where all the women guests were gathered. The men were gathering in a separate room.

As usual we were greeted with *"Hello. Welcome to Hebron. What is your name?"* So we explained who we were and were asked to come to the celebration in the womens' room. When we entered we were immediately surrounded by women, teenager girls and little girls and given a great welcome. The room was full of women sitting in rows facing a stage. Dance music was playing and girls were dancing on the stage. For the first time we saw many women without their heads covered and dressed in very fancy clothes.

Alex was invited to come on the stage and dance with some of the teenagers. She handed me her very high tech and complicated camera so that I could take photos. While I was adjusting the focus I was immediately confronted by some angry women. They were shouting at me in Arabic and had backed me into a wall. I guessed it was about me taking photos but we could not understand each other.

Eventually an English speaking Palestinian woman came to my rescue. She explained that the women wanted to check the camera to see if I had taken any photos and, if so, they wanted them deleted. I explained that I did not have a clue how to do this and would have to wait until Alex came off the stage. Eventually Alex arrived and showed them that no photo had been taken. They calmed down.

What had caused this intense drama? I heard from my rescuer that Israeli soldiers in Hebron take photos of Palestinian women and then they edit these photos so that the women appear naked. These edited photos are then shown to the women and the military threaten to give the photos to their fathers unless they act as spies for the military. She told me that some of the fathers do not have an understanding of technology and do not believe their daughters.

I checked this story with our contacts and I was assured that this was the case. It had been particularly prevalent after the Second Intifada in 2000.

So, there are no photos with this report.

SHOVELS AND PICKAXES – THE INCH BY INCH WAR

On the sunny morning of the 28th January 2010 a group of 20 settler teenagers, armed with pickaxes and shovels, crossed Hebron's Route 60 highway by the gas station at Baqa and proceeded to dig on Palestinian farmland what seemed like holes for fencing. They were accompanied by two adult settler men who were armed. They were all surrounded by, and protected by armed Israeli military.

EA, Sofia and I were there when they returned again in the afternoon. They started to climb up through the land while digging what seemed like many random holes.



Young Palestinian boy watching what is happening.

These teenagers jeered and taunted the Palestinian men, women and children who watched completely helplessly. The settler teenagers sang and danced like a victorious football team as they went about their work with the complete protection from the Israeli military. They called Sofia and me Nazis, they told us we were destroying Israel, they said we were only doing what we were doing because we hated Jews. They were protected by the Israeli military all of the time.

They continued for nearly three hours while we filmed and took photos, along with some journalists who started to arrive.

I noted that one of the military wore a black woollen neck scarf which covered his face from the eyes down. He hung around the jeep at the rear and only seldom did he come close to the centre of the activity. He turned away from me whenever I pointed the video camera at him. He seemed surrounded by silence.

This farmland is hilly and rocky but it is the main income generating activity for the families who live on it. We were told by Atah Jaber, one of the Palestinians who lives and farms there, that neither he nor any of his grown-up sons have other work. He told us that his house was attacked and occupied by settlers during the second Intifada in 2000. Palestinians did not traditionally use the legal system to determine home or land ownership. During the Ottoman period they exchanged property with a hand shake and good will. Atah is one of the only farmers there who has papers to prove he owns his land. After his home was occupied he called his lawyer and, as a result, the settlers had to leave his house, only to be replaced by the Israeli military who occupied it for 36 days for stated "security" reasons.

Atah stated that the events in the last days have been the first occurrences since 2000. Sofia and I called the following morning to see how the families were. We were shown that, since the time we left the previous evening, the Israeli military had removed the mound of earth and stones over which the settlers had climbed the previous day. They did this with a bulldozer. This road entrance had been blocked by the Israeli military for the last 7 years so that the resident Palestinians could not exit from it with a vehicle.

Atah also pointed to the new settlement outpost (like a pre-fab) that we had noticed on one of the hills the previous week on the other side of Route 60. I asked him what did all this mean. He replied that the recent events showed that there was a plan to expand the Israeli settlement across Route 60 and onto their farm land.

"We have lived here for five or six hundred years." Atah said. You could practically put your hand out and touch the sense of helplessness and despair among the Palestinian families who were watching and talking about the unfolding of events. This is the silent, inch by inch war that will never make the news headlines and so the world does not know what is happening.

Atah asks – *"What about our humanity? We want it from you Internationals. We will never get it from the Israelis."*

DONT TALK - STAY ALIVE

"The only way I survived the torture at the hands of the Israeli military was because I heard inside my head the words - "Don't Talk - Stay Alive" said Hani Abu Heikel. He said that these words continued and continued and continued in his head through day after day of torture. It was how he survived.

I spent an evening with Hani Abu Heikel and his family. Hani lives in Tul Rumeida, Hebron, and his home is surrounded by Israeli settlements. From the time the first settlers came to live behind Hani's home in 1984, he became more and more angry.



Hani Abu Heikel

"The settlers had not started to attack us when they first arrived, but we would wake in the morning to find our garden chairs stolen and our plants cut at the roots. We complained to the Israeli police and they just told us that settlers don't do anything wrong. I became more and more angry and three years later when I was in University I joined Fatah in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). From this time I was detained many times, I was beaten by the Israeli military. They attacked our home. I became even more hating and was becoming angrier."

Hani joined the PLO about the start of the 1st Intifada in 1987. This intifada was the expression of frustration and revolt by a whole generation of Palestinian youth, who had been born into the Israeli occupation. Hani said he found soul mates in the PLO, people who felt like he did. They all talked about revenge. Hani's first arrest was in 1988.

"By this time, I was in control of the Intifada strikes in Hebron. We asked traders to stop selling Israeli goods. If they refused, we first gave them a warning then, if they did not cooperate, we burned their materials and produce right there in the street. We Palestinians had good yogurt, we did not need Israeli yogurt. We in the PLO were well supported by our community, we demonstrated, we had power! Yasser Arafat had been deported and was based in Tunis and we had channels through which we received our orders. I was 18 and 19 years old then and I felt I was a hero, I was useful!"

Hani was finally arrested.

"The Israeli military locked me in a cell on my own for 3 days. I was kept in silence and darkness, except for the few times a day when the 7 cms peep hole in the door was opened by a soldier. I shouted and cursed at him to get him to talk to me, but there was only silence."

Then the interrogation started. Hani said that they put a bag that stank of blood over his head and handcuffed his hands behind his back as they beat him towards the interrogation room. The interrogation continued relentlessly. The Israeli military would open his cell door every 10 minutes and throw a bucket of water over him. I asked him how he managed to not break under this torture. He said he heard the words in his head - "Don't Talk - Stay Alive" - over and over and over again. His only goal was to survive each of the nights. This continued for 30 days.

Hani's hands were tied to a ceiling for 2 days. - And still he heard in his head - * "Don't Talk - Stay Alive" - over and over and over again. Then he was tied to a chair with no back for 3 days. "If I needed to go to the bathroom I had to do it on myself." And still he heard in his head - * "Don't Talk - Stay Alive" - over and over and over again. Hani was left out in the cold all night in the rain with no clothes, but they did not break Hani. The military continued to move him around to other jails and to torture him. When he finally arrived at the last jail he knew he was with his own people. They were men from Hezbollah, from Lebanon, from Libya, from Jordan. He spent 20 months with them.

"At this time, I was now proud and happy. I did not think I had done any wrong. Most of the prisoners were academics and intellectuals. I continued with my studies in prison - Business Administration, Political Science, History, Hebrew, English. I was proud; I met my heroes in jail."

After twenty months, Hani was finally released but after this he was constantly detained and released and spent four more long periods in Jail.

“Then we were watching a peace activist on TV wearing a sign that said – ‘No occupation.’ My cousins laughed and said how stupid he was. But I did not laugh. This man was surrounded by cameras and the photos would probably go to at least 15 other countries. Yet, every time I was arrested and jailed I was achieving nothing!”

This subject of non-violent activism started to occupy Hani’s thinking. His first opportunity came when the water supply of his area, Tel Rumeida, had been damaged by the settlers. The Israeli military did not allow the Palestinian Municipality to bring trucks of water to the neighbourhood, nor to mend the pipes.

So Hani decided to have a community sit down picnic. He contacted the media and nine TV stations arrived. The following day the Israeli military made a wall between the trucks and the settlers to stop the settlers blocking the trucks. It was to be the start of many more non-violent activities, as well as projects, in Hebron.

Hani raised the topic of non-violence at a PLO meeting, but he was the only one supporting non-violent methods.

“But years later they come to our non-violent demonstrations, they give us equipment and they assure us that no-one will stop us.”

The Peace Activist that Hani had seen on TV, Mobarak Awad, invited Hani to speak at a conference in Bethlehem, after he had heard about the work that Hani was doing.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS – MID TERM

I would like to tell you about my life here in Hebron in the West Bank....I was going to say I love it but that would not be quite right. Maybe it would be better to say that I am deeply moved by it. The Palestinians are a remarkable people. They are caged in their lives. They smile and joke and everywhere we go it is so welcoming. My team mates are living on strong black tea with massive amounts of sugar. Luckily for me I have learned the Arabic for "allergic" so I can politely decline. No matter what is happening in their lives, the end always results in "Come and have tea". It does not matter if they have just been evicted from their homes or have been attacked by settlers it is always - "Come and have tea".

Their creased faces and black eyes always ask - where are you from? If I was in their situations I would not care where that international came from - but they have a gentleness that needs to know all about you. And so the conversation can be about us - How many children do we have? Where do we live? I cannot even contemplate how they manage. It is ok for us to visit and to experience what we THINK it may be like, but we have no idea. And then we return to our safe apartment and soon we return home to our very safe countries and they are left behind....as it has been for the last 40 years. The strongest emotion I have seen here is helplessness. When you live in an occupied country to whom do you voice your complaints? The occupiers? And still they smile and say "Welcome to Hebron - thank you for being here."

The bustle and noise and the activity of the centre - "Al Bab Azaywe" is captivating. "Buy from me" - is what they are all saying. They are steeped in poverty. The deep colour of the mounds of oranges stacked high is amazing and the care that they all take to stack their spices results in an art form, the smell of the spices - oh my God!! And everything is on a cart that has to be packed up again and trolleyed home in the evening or transported by taxi as they may not be able to drive a car to their home because of the checkpoints and road blocks manned by 18 year old Israeli soldiers who are scared in case they will be killed. The result is, of course, aggression.

The military are a diverse bunch. They can be the guys who ask me for a light for their cigarette, or they can ask me from where I come from, or they can have hatred in their eyes when they look at me. Or there are some who do not look at all. There are 500 ex-Israeli Military who have formed a group called "Breaking the Silence". If you are interested in hearing their story their web address is <http://www.shovrimshatika.org>. People here say that the women soldiers seem to be the worst. Our contacts say that some of them seem to be on a mission with hatred towards the Palestinians. The form is to humiliate them. And the unreal thing is that the Palestinians take it so passively, with shrugged shoulders...Inshallah.

Last week a Palestinian police man stabbed an Israeli soldier who has since died. And why is it that the last time that this has happened has been 2 months ago? This was followed by the killing of a Palestinian in Hebron a few days later by an Israeli soldier. The Israeli military state that he was carrying a knife. The Palestinians say that the knife was placed beside him after he was shot three times the latter two when he was lying injured on the ground. Palestinians say that they are caged with a tight noose around their souls. They cannot afford to do anything. Settlers are allowed to have rifles but a Palestinian in Hebron, living with armed and aggressive settlers overlooking his family home, says that he will get a year in jail if his kitchen drawer has a bread knife in it.

There is a street here where the Palestinians are only permitted to walk on one side, it is narrow, with a barrier separating them from the rest of the street. The Israelis and the few internationals here are allowed to walk on the rest of the wide street.

I really do not know what more to say. Except that it is a joy and an honour to be with such remarkable people, to eat with them, to live on falafels and humus. To be presented with oranges and crushed grapes; to hear their stories; to play soccer with the young boys. I am still put in goals, which is where every good woman should be ... of course. And then when I let too many goals in, the little guys relieve me of my duty. What we in EAPPI do here is "non-violent activism". We state what we need to state with

asked to leave. , with our laptops and cameras. There is a project for young people here. It is called "Shooting Back". Their implement of war is a camcorder. Their target audience for the distribution of these images is the international community. This is their way of stating their plight.

RIOTS AND CHILD PRISONERS

There was a monthly average of 324 Palestinian minors detained by Israel each month in 2008. Of this number, 26.7% were charged with stone-throwing. (Source: The Israel Prison Service and visits by Defense for Children International (DCI).

I would like to tell you about Abraham who is 15 and Mahmoud who is 13. They were both arrested in Bab Al-Baladdeia, Hebron on the 24th February at 15.30. A young on-looker, also called Mahmoud told me that the soldiers took Abraham and grabbed him by the chest and banged him against the wall twice. They then hit him across his cheekbone. Abraham's mother, Samira, told me that after the boys were taken by the military they were blind-folded and had their hands tied behind their backs. She screamed at the soldiers to give her son back to her, she tried to get through the military barrier gate to where he was being taken. They stopped her. They said they would arrest her too if she did not go away. She tried to push open the gate, continuing to scream. Then they closed the gate completely on her.



Hebron

I accompanied these two distraught and tearful mothers, Samira and Afaf, to try and find out where their children were detained. Were they still at the police station in Kyryat Arba or in the prison in Ramallah? We eventually found out that the children were being held in the police station At Kyriat Arba.

While accompanying Samira and Afaf, I found out about the justice system for Palestinian children in the occupied territories. Palestinian children can be kept at a police station for 8 days with no family visits allowed. In some cases, even a lawyer can be denied access to them. They may, or may not be released on bail. I was quietly told by a Human Rights lawyer that children can be beaten until they confess.



Hebron

A "Defense for Children International" (D.C.I.) publication, "Sustained Occupation, Suspended Dreams – An Analysis of Human Rights Violations Against Palestinian Children in 2005" states that:

"Once in the military jeep, alone with soldiers, children are invariably subjected to cruel and humiliating treatment at the hands of their captors. They are usually made to sit on the floor of the jeep, at the soldiers' feet. Often the soldiers kick and beat the detainees, and curse, threaten and subject them to a torrent of verbal abuse for the duration of the journey to the detention centre. If such events were isolated occurrences, then the treatment could be explained away as the actions of a few ill-disciplined soldiers. As it is however, such abuse and humiliation is the norm. It is systematic and well documented, designed at inculcating fear in the prisoner, and softening them up for the next stage of the arrest process: interrogation."

A contact in Machsom Watch (An Israeli women's group against the Occupation) told me that the sentence for stone-throwing can sometimes be as long as 18 months in jail. It does not matter that they are 13 and 15 years old.

An Israeli minor, e.g. the child of a settler living illegally in the occupied Palestinian territories, is under Israeli civilian jurisdiction. They can throw stones at Palestinians, they can invade Palestinian farmland in Al-Baqa carrying pickaxes and shovels, as I have described in a previous article, but this does not seem to matter. Furthermore, they do it under the protection of the occupying Israeli military and police. Palestinian children living in their own land, but under military occupation are subject to Israeli military law.

If Israeli minors are arrested they cannot be detained longer than 12 hours without being brought before a judge. They cannot be interviewed without the presence of their parents and any questioning that is done is carried out by a "child investigator", usually with a social work background. (Source: Defense for Children International)

So what has led to these terrible events where a 13 year old and a 15 year old are in prison and cannot see their mothers? The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, announced on Sunday the 25th February that the Ibrahimi Mosque as it is known to Muslims, or the Cave of the Patriarchs, as it is known to the Jews, belongs to the Jewish national heritage, even though it is outside the state of Israel, This is where Abraham and Sarah are buried. The Palestinians are afraid that this holy place will be denied them.



Hebron

And Netanyahu makes this announcement the same week as; the anniversary of the Goldstein massacre in Hebron when 29 Muslims were killed in the Mosque in Hebron in 1994; the birthday of Mohammed; and the Jewish "Purim".

The Palestinians' response in Hebron was to call a general strike on the following day. Thousands gathered on the streets to protest. The tension and the anger were palpable. The response from the Israeli military was to fire tear gas and stun grenades. For me, the tear gas resulted in nauseous illness and vomiting.

During the riots crowds of Palestinians ran through the streets shouting and throwing stones. The Palestinian armed forces in the H1 area and the Israeli armed forces in the H2 area sealed off the streets. The riot police lined up in the streets with their batons and shields. The Israeli military raided many homes.

The traders rushed to gather up their trolleys of oranges, strawberries and spices. In one shop in the old city, I passed a barber's shop where an Arab was having a shave, unperturbed by the events surrounding him. Is this what is known as "normalization"?

And lots of children threw stones. And Abraham and Mahmoud are still in Israeli military custody and have not seen their mothers since they were taken by the Israeli military.

As we were returning home from the demonstrations in Hebron on the 25th February at 17.30, where hundreds of Palestinians and Internationals faced up to the Israeli military and police in a non-violent demonstration, we were told that two young boys were in the process of being arrested.

We rushed to the scene to see that one boy was already in the police jeep and the other was surrounded by police and soldiers and was being pushed in. He looked about 13. I asked the police and soldiers why the boys were being taken away. The officer in command ordered the others not to answer any questions. Systemic silence. The jeep drove away from us as we watched helplessly. The number of the jeep was 611.124.

These arrests had taken place in the quietness outside the mosque and out of view of the large number of photographers and journalists who were present at the demonstration. Who were these children? They are two of the thousands that are arrested each year in the occupied territories.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child states that the arrest and detention of children must be used only as a measure of last resort, and for the appropriate period of time, and that the juvenile detainees must be separated from adults, allowed contact with their families, and receive appropriate assistance, including access to education, recreation and rehabilitation.

THE MILITARY TRIAL OF ABRAHAM AND MAHMOUD

The Israeli military trial of Abraham (15) and Mahmoud (13) (not their real names) took place on 28th February 2010 in the military court in the prison of Ofer. The two Palestinian boys were tried for the alleged crime of throwing stones at soldiers five days previously. Their families have not been allowed to visit them since their arrest.

There was a monthly average of 324 Palestinian minors detained by Israel each month in 2008. Of this number, 26.7% were charged with stone-throwing. (Source: The Israel Prison Service and visits by Defense for Children International (DCI).

Fifteen year old Abraham was charged and will be given between 3 and 6 months in the military jail, and will be returned to his accommodation in a tent holding ten boys and men with only monthly family visits allowed. Thirteen year old Mahmoud was granted bail but can only be released to his family on the payment of 2,000 shekels (£330). His mother cannot afford this money; she has already borrowed money for the bus journey. Both mothers were crying as I met them. Their sons will appear in the Military Court again on the 11th March for sentencing.

Coming back to Hebron on the bus, Abraham's mother told me that their two sons were brought into court chained at the ankles and handcuffed. She said she was able to talk to her son from a distance, but he was not able to answer as he was crying so hard.

Abraham appeared before six Israeli Military Courts, at all times professing his innocence. He finally relented on the 22nd April 2010. On release he told of the interrogation and torture used to force him to sign a confession. He had no food for the first three days, he was locked up and alone in a cell for three weeks except for three hours per day. He is now a branded criminal and if he is arrested again, the sentence will automatically be up to 8 months in jail without trial, and these sentences are often extended as court dates are continually postponed.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child states that the arrest and detention of children must be used only as a measure of last resort, and for the appropriate period of time, and that the juvenile detainees must be separated from adults, allowed contact with their families, and receive appropriate assistance, including access to education, recreation and rehabilitation. If Israeli minors are arrested they cannot be detained longer than 12 hours without being brought before a judge. They cannot be interviewed without the presence of their parents and any questioning that is done is carried out by a "child investigator", usually someone with a social work background. (Source: Defense for Children International).

CHILD PRISONERS AND TORTURE

On Monday the 1st March 2010, two young brothers from the Al-Muhtaseb family were arrested just before 15.00. Al Hassan is thirteen years old and Al Emir is eight. The thirteen year old was taken to Kyriat Arba police station and then to Ofer military prison, in the West Bank, where he was imprisoned for six days. Young Al Emir was taken to a military base inside the Beit Ramona Israeli settlement area in Hebron, where he was subjected to a horrifying experience.



Al-Emir Muhtaseb

Al Emir's father told us that his eight year old son was blindfolded and was left sitting on a chair in the open air. He could hear the breathing of a dog beside him throughout his experience. He was jeered at by settler children. He was not given food or drink and was not allowed to go to the bathroom. His only recourse was to wet himself. He was kept like this until his release at 23.00 that night – practically eight hours.

When we met Al Emir a few days later he looked deathly pale. His father told us that he is screaming in his sleep, he has lost control of his bladder and that initially he was not talking, but just staring straight ahead. He is being attended to by a specialist doctor from the Prisoners' Torture Centre in Hebron.

Meanwhile, Al Hassan (13) was detained in Ofer military prison. According to a report from an Arabic News Agency, Ma'an News, one of the lawyers representing the child was quoted as saying, "*The boy was detained near his family home and there were no witnesses who testified that he threw stones at Israeli soldiers. No indictment¹ was filed against the boy.*"



Al-Hassan Muhtaseb

On Wednesday the 3rd of March, Al-Hassan's detention was extended, with his father commenting, "*My child was brought to court with both his hands and feet cuffed. He was very scared of the many soldiers around him. It is ironic that the judge extended his detention until Sunday until an indictment is issued against him.*"

Al Hassan appeared again in Ofer military court on Sunday 6th March. His father Fadel was asked to pay bail of 5,000 shekels (1,000 euro), which was then reduced to 2,000 shekels (800 euro) "*What law allows a child to be tried in court and then asks his father to pay a fine?*" he asks.

According to Article 37 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Israel ratified on the 3rd October 1991, "*The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.*"

Fadel invited Samir, one of the mothers that I accompanied to the trial of her young son two weeks previously, and me, to come to Ofer where the children's military court was sitting, on Sunday the 6th of March. Fadel had alerted the media to this event and two TV crews and journalists arrived, including CNN. During the military hearing, Fadel was able to see his son Al Hassan across the court, but when he tried to talk with his young son he was pulled back by the soldiers. CNN filmed this as it happened. Fadel has given many media interviews and Samir was interviewed by CNN about the plight of her son and his continuing imprisonment. Samir has given TV interviews to Reuters, to LBC TV, which broadcasts to all Arab countries, and also to a Swedish radio station "P4". Samir is achieving what she announced she had wanted to do two days previously. She had said, "*I want to talk to TV. I want to tell all the other children in the world what happens to Palestinian children.*"

Defence for Children International, DCI-Palestine - Research into the Ill-Treatment of Minor Detainees

The results of a recent analysis of 100 sworn affidavits collected by Defence for Children International, DCI-Palestine, from children in 2009, are presented in the table below. We suspect that the incidents of sexual assault, and threats of sexual assault, may be understated due to the reluctance to speak out about such matters.

Ill-Treatment of Minor Detainees	Percentage
Hand ties	97%
Blindfolding	92%
Confession during interrogation	81%
Beaten or kicked	69%
Arrested between midnight and 4am	65%
Verbal abuse	50%
Threats or inducements	49%
Signed confession in Hebrew	32%
Position abuse	26%
Solitary confinement	14%
Threat of sexual assault	12%
Sexual assault	4%

DCI-Palestine has reviewed 100 sworn affidavits collected from children in 2009, and in four percent of cases, children report being sexually assaulted, whilst in 12 percent of cases, the children report being threatened with sexual assault. The sexual assault and threats of sexual assault documented by DCI-Palestine include grabbing boys by the testicles until they confess and threatening boys as young as 13 years with rape unless they confess to throwing stones at Israeli settler vehicles in the occupied West Bank. DCI-Palestine suspects that these figures may understate the extent of the problem.

Each year around 700 Palestinian children are arrested, interrogated and prosecuted in the Israeli military courts. The most common charge is for throwing stones. The children are interrogated in the absence of a lawyer and family members and, in 2009, over 80 percent of these children provided confessions after a coercive interrogation, of which 32 percent were written in Hebrew, a language few Palestinian children understand. Following their conviction in the military courts, the majority of these children are incarcerated inside Israel in contravention of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

On the 18th May 2010, DCI-Palestine submitted 14 cases of sexual assault, or threats of sexual assault, to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture for investigation. The cases occurred between January 2009 and April 2010 and involve children between the ages of 13 and 16 years -

Defence for Children International - Recommendations

No child should be prosecuted in military courts which lack comprehensive fair trial and juvenile justice standards. DCI-Palestine recommends that as a minimum safeguard in the light of consistent reports of mistreatment and torture, that the Israeli authorities:

1. Ensure that no child is interrogated in the absence of a lawyer of their choice and family member;
2. Ensure that all interrogations of children are video recorded;
3. Ensure that all evidence suspected of being obtained through ill-treatment or torture be rejected by the military courts;
4. Ensure that all credible allegations of ill-treatment and torture be thoroughly and impartially investigated and those found responsible for such abuse be brought to justice;
5. An immediate end to the practice of detaining persons under 18 years in administrative detention.

ARRESTS AND A LITTLE GOOD NEWS

As we were walking through the Old City in Hebron, we heard that two young men had been arrested. We hurriedly asked questions – “Who has been arrested?”, “Where?”, “Which way?” The complication of not being able to speak Arabic is always a problem when there is an emergency. So we rushed through the Old City towards the Ibrahimi Mosque. There were two members of the Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) with us. No one had seen any arrests.

CPT decided to go towards Shuhada Street which has been evacuated of Palestinians since 1994 when 1,865 Palestinian homes, shops and offices were closed down. This closing of the street was the military response to the Mosque massacre of 29 Muslims by Baruch Goldstein, a Jew, in 1994. A former Israeli soldier, who is now a member of “Breaking the Silence”, a 600 member organisation of ex-Israeli military personnel, told me that he was stationed in Hebron during these evacuations. He said that the Palestinians were given no time to gather their belongings – “We had a certain number of houses to evacuate each day and we did it, with a lunch break in between.” The entrances to these Palestinian buildings are now welded and sealed shut with their contents in the same places as they were left in 1994. Even the chickens were sealed into the chicken market.

Only Israeli security forces and settlers can now walk through what was once the main street in Hebron and the commercial centre of the West Bank. It is now a militarily sanitised ghost town occupied by soldiers holding their guns, settlers and some adult male settlers with guns slung over their shoulders with skull caps (kippahs) on their heads.

Still trying to locate the young men we had been told were arrested, we headed back towards the Old City and then saw Zamir and Afa running towards us. Yes, these are the two mothers I had accompanied to Ofer Military court some weeks ago. One of the young men arrested this time was another one of Afa’s sons. Samir and Afa took us through the tunnels of the Old City and banged on the door of a house asking the family to let us in. We rushed up the stairs of this house, out on to the balcony and climbed down to the eerily empty Shuhada Street. Zamir and Afa came too. I suggested they remain where they were and wait for us, as Palestinians can be arrested immediately for walking on Shuhada Street.

We rushed down Shuhada street and found our colleagues from CPT pleading with the soldiers to let the young men go free. We joined in these pleas. We told them about the difference between the Israeli Civil Law system for Israelis and the Israeli Military Law system for Palestinians. We told them about the many under age children already arrested and in prison the last two weeks. They disbelieved us and said that children as young as 13 would never be sent to a military prison and would never be in the same place as adults. Their faces really showed us that they were shocked that this could happen. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Zamir and Afa coming towards us. They would surely be arrested for walking on Shuhada street! It was obvious by their dress and scarved heads that they were Palestinian Muslim women.

Zamir came straight to one of the two soldiers and spoke with him. She did it so eloquently and so well. A settler woman drove by during this conversation. She glared at all of us. The soldier said he had to call his commander. We

CHECKPOINTS AND TRYING TO MAKE A LIVING

Standing for hours at the Gilo checkpoint in Bethlehem, I could hear the sound of “Click, Clack”. Each “Click, Clack” represented a Palestinian crossing from the Occupied Territories to Israel, for work. Ironically, many of them are heading to construction work in the illegal Israeli settlement of Har Homa which has been built on the Palestinian-owned lands of Abu Ghneim Mountain. 1,800 to 3,000 people pass through this particular checkpoint to go to work every day.



Trying to get to work in the morning

We arrived to do checkpoint monitoring at 4.45 a.m. It was still dark and very cold. Six hundred Palestinians were already waiting there. The queuing starts at 2.00 a.m., but the barriers do not open until 5.00 a.m. The Palestinians stand crushed together in a three foot wide tunnel that is sealed by wire. They bring blankets for warmth. They bring cardboard with them so they can kneel and pray on it, if they can find room. This cardboard doubles up as a source of heat when they burn it in little piles.

Some of the more desperate men try to climb through the wire on the roof of the tunnel. When this happens, all the Palestinians inside the tunnel heave closely together so that those trying to skip the queue cannot drop down on the ground. One of these desperate men trying to skip the queue was taken to hospital by ambulance that day as a large piece of the metal had pierced his abdomen.

By 7.30 a.m., 1,200 Palestinians had passed through this first barrier - “Click, Clack”. They are allowed through in waves of 200 as their permits are checked, and then the barrier locks again. These 200 Palestinians can be seen running to the next humiliation. This is where they go through metal detectors and also have their hand prints checked.

They are watched by armed security walking above them on cat-walk type structures. These security men have their guns slung across their shoulders with their fingers on the trigger.

We leave at 8 a.m. and there are still 500 waiting to get through the first barriers so they can earn a living.

FINAL UPDATE FROM HEBRON

This is my last mail to you all. I am returning home to Ireland on the 1st April. The riots in Hebron continue to worsen, with reports of rubber coated bullets being fired. Child arrests continue. The scenes at the riots in East Jerusalem have been reported as being the worst for many years. People increasingly mention the possibility of a Third Intifada (Palestinian uprising).

On the other hand the relationship between the Israelis and the USA are reportedly at their lowest level since 1976. Could this latter be seen as good news?

If you wish to do anything to help the Palestinians, please ask your politicians what they are doing about the situation?

Ask why the USA gives more of its foreign aid budget to Israel than it does to any other country. During the Fiscal Year 2009 the U.S. provided Israel with at least \$7.0 million each day in military aid and gave the Palestinians \$0 in military aid. Israel has been the largest annual recipient of direct U.S. economic and military assistance since 1976. (Source: "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" . - John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt)

Ask why more than 60 of the UN Resolutions that were either pro-Palestinian or anti-Israeli were either defeated or vetoed, particularly by the US.

Ask why there are half a million settlers living illegally and under the protection of the Israeli military in the occupied territories? Ask why it is permitted that they can harass and injure the Palestinians under the eyes of the Israeli military?

Ask why does the building of settlements continue? Ask why Palestinian family homes are demolished? Palestinians are offered a choice: they can either demolish the homes themselves or pay Israel for the costs of the bulldozer used by the security forces.

Ask why the Palestinians are imprisoned by a Barrier Wall that is one and a half times the length of Ireland, while the land that has been left to the Palestinians to date is roughly the size of Munster? This will give you an indication of how the Barrier Wall snakes in and out of Palestinians lives. It results in farmers needing a permit to enter their cut-off farmlands, farmers being stopped going through the check point because their donkey, or the olive trees that they intend to plant, do not have permits. And if a Palestinian does not farm his land over a three year period then his land is confiscated and becomes Israeli property. Why is it that in rural Jayous the number of permits issued to the Palestinians to enter their fields has been reduced from 900 in 2003 to 115 today, for no obvious reason?

The Irish Representative to the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Jim Carroll, and the Irish Ambassador to Israel, Mr. Breifne O'Reilly, came to Hebron on 25 March and met many of the people I have written to you about over the last few months, including Atah in Baqa, Zamir, Afa and Fadel whose children were detained violently by the Israeli military, and people living in Tul Rumeida whose lives are constantly overshadowed and tormented by Israeli settlers who live within a few metres of their homes. These settlers physically attack their Palestinian neighbours, they cut down their olive trees and they burn their grape vines. Their violence caused a four month old baby to have seven stitches in his head. A female settler pushed a rock into the mouth of a seven year old child, Josef, and ground it in to break his teeth. The military base is on the roof of the Sharabatti family, day and night. The visit on 25 March and the efforts of many other concerned people will hopefully help the urgently needed change to become reality soon.

I have arranged to meet the Head of the Middle East Division in the Department of Foreign Affairs on my return to brief him on my observations and experiences. I will also be meeting Proinsias De Rossa, President of the European Parliament's Delegation to the Palestinian Legislative Council (DPLC).

Nessa Childers Irish MEP, visited Gaza in Jan 2010 has agreed to receive the articles I have written to date. I have also requested a meeting with her on my return home. Joe Costelloe, TD, has also agreed to receive the articles I have written to date and I have requested a meeting with him on my return home.

Please be aware that there are many Israeli peace activists working on the ground for the human rights of the Palestinians. There is Machsom Watch, a group of Israeli women who work tirelessly for human rights. They can be seen daily at checkpoints at four in the morning, and in military courts, observing and reporting on human rights abuses. There is the group called "Women in Black" who stage a non-violent peace protest in Jerusalem every Friday at 12 noon. There is the group called "Breaking the Silence". They are ex-Israeli military that have chosen to talk and publicise the abuses they have seen while in the military. There is Ta'ush who work with projects aimed at making the life of the Palestinians more bearable. It is the system that is sub-human and unjust, and this is a political issue.

The memories that I bring home with me have been of the children here, their warmth and innocence has captivated me. Every time we walk to the Old City or go to other areas, it has been with the receipt of "*Hello, How are you? What is your name? Where do you come from?*" This has always been accompanied with the tiny outstretched hand that wants to shake our hands. I tell them that my name is "Gerry". They start to call me all sorts of names like "Cherri" until I mention "Tom and Gerry" and then they get it. With huge giggles!

I described to you the effects on eight year old Al-Emir after his release from torture inside the Beit Ramona military base. I would like you all to know that I have met him many times since his release. He is smiling and joking now and he is working hard at impressing me with his English!

I would like to thank you all for receiving my updates. The response from you has been motivating and supportive and I would like to thank you deeply.

Thank you to those who have requested to send donations to those who do not have the means to pay the necessary court costs to release their children. Thank you to those who have made important contacts so I can carry out advocacy work for EAPPI. And thank you to those who have supported me with administration work

For me, I come home with mixed emotions. I am excited about coming home, but I want to stay here too. It has been good for me that you have all wanted to hear what is happening. But I will be sad leaving the Palestinians. I do intend to return here again.

Ma'salema,

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