



WEST WALES FRIENDS OF PALESTINE

CYFEILLION PALESTEINA YNG NGORLLEWIN CYMRU

Newsletter No 1 Cylchlythr Rhif 1 (October / Hydref 2015)

The aims of the WWFoP

WWFOP are concerned about the unfairness and injustice suffered by the women, men and children of Palestine because of the policies and practical actions of Israel. We believe that we can support the people of Palestine by fostering friendship and understanding between our communities.



We have made a friendship link with the community based around Rummanah, in the northern part of the West Bank, on the border wall with Israel. The lives of the people of Rummanah typify many of the daily experiences of indignity and loss suffered by Palestinians. For example, many families are split by the wall; people, including women, suffer arbitrary imprisonment; they can get no permission to build/rebuild their homes; there is restricted access to their land for growing and harvesting crops; and the land is damaged by military exercises, chemical defoliation.

WWFOP aims to give moral support and give a voice to our friends in Palestine by raising awareness of their plight with the people of West Wales by encouraging visit from individuals and groups from both the linked communities in order to broaden mutual understanding. We will also engage in small scale fund raising activities to support twinning projects. We are members of a UK-wide network of friendship twinning communities and are building regular contacts with our friends in Palestine by email, Skype and visits.

Dates for your diary

November 28th International Day of Solidarity for the Palestinians

- Vigil to light a candle and to distribute information – Guildhall Square, Carmarthen 11 am.
- Join us for an evening of music and a talk at the Angel Inn, Llandeilo (upstairs). Free entry on the door on the night. 7pm – 11pm.

January 30th Palestine social evening (details to follow)

March 14th AGM (details to follow)



The group visit to Palestine

Climbing into the coolness of the taxi minibus gave us relief from the sun which even at 9am was feeling quite fierce. We were traveling from Sebastia to meet people from Rummanah and Faqqua, the two communities that had been identified as a possible Friendship Link.

The rounded hills around Mount Gerzim are lightly wooded with more open, seemingly scrubby areas. We passed through some villages, each with its speciality - pottery, camel meat. In a slight gorge, lined with a bank of tall deciduous trees, there was a potter selling his wares from the fuselage of a passenger aeroplane. This is recycling in a truly imaginative way.



As we sped our way towards Jenin, which is the capital of the farming area, the plains began to take over from the hills and mountains. The crops, some were cucumbers and courgettes, (very popular foods in Palestine), were being harvested from the long, straight, green rows that grew towards the horizon. The temperature was rising up to 36 degrees – in the shade-but people were out in the full sun gathering in their crops. Some tractors and

even forklift trucks were being used in the collection of the food. Polytunnels were very much in use to shade some of the crops. One can understand why the name “Jenin” means heaven. It is the bread basket of Palestine.

Towards Rummanah, the green fertile plains became hilly & lightly covered with olive trees. We arrived into the bright courtyard of the kindergarten in Rummanah where we were greeted by a crowd of people sheltering from the heat (unusually intense at this time of year). In the kindergarten courtyard, we were welcomed by the headteacher and some of the children from Rummanah and the other 3 villages which form part of the community (Taybe, Aineen and Salim). The community is part of the Jenin region in the North West of the West Bank in Area C. The population of 15,000 is very close to the Green Line and the Fence.



The people are all refugees, having been moved from their original homes by the Israeli government. The community are keen to develop friendship links with others and have set up a charity association with elected members.



We were warmly welcomed with water, fruit juice, cake and delicious Arabic coffee. The children greeted us and delighted us with singing and dancing a greeting of friendship.

We had a meeting with a group of village representatives of their Association who talked about their community and their experiences and concerns.

The concerns discussed were:

- Families are split by the wall. One man said that he can only visit his wife and family once a week, if they are lucky. Another explained that although he had some family and olive trees on the other side of the fence, He was allowed to harvest his olives on **one day only**, in October, when he could see the rest of his family and gather his olives.
- ❖ The villages are subjected to military exercises on their land. There are unexploded munitions left on their land and this raises concerns for the safety of all the community but mainly of the children.
- ❖ Some of their land is sprayed with chemicals from planes which means that some of the olive trees have lost their leaves.



- ❖ Wild pigs, dogs and other animals are let loose on the villagers' land, which causes havoc amongst their meagre crops. One man has been killed by the wild pigs.
- ❖ One of the committee members who met us has three sons in prison.
- ❖ Two men have been murdered. One man of 25 had five bullets in his leg and received no immediate treatment.
- ❖ Women have been imprisoned for a day for seemingly no real reason.
- ❖ Permission from Israel is required to build/rebuild their homes and permission is usually not forthcoming. One man has had his home demolished three times.

Some of the committee members showed us their land and the wall scarring its way across the landscape. There are villages and towns dotted around the area, many affected by the wall.



Everyone we met was extremely friendly but seemed desperate for some support and contact with the outside world. After such a brief visit we reluctantly said our goodbyes with promises to keep in contact. *By Pat Gill*



The major challenges facing the Palestinian people include housing, access to land, the economy and security and access to water. These challenges will be covered in more detail in future editions of the newsletter.

Water the building block of life – and of a State?

- " There is no reason for Palestinians to claim that just because they sit on lands, they have the rights to that water." Mr. Katz-Oz, Israel's negotiator on water issues
- " All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based on the principle of mutual benefit and international law."
- Article 1 (2) of the 1966 United Nations Human Rights Covenants
- Members of our group who recently visited Palestine were forcibly struck by the iniquity of the lack of access to water supplies endured by West Bank villagers. They saw for themselves how Israeli settlers illegally

occupying the lands of a Palestinian village could sink wells and have access to water sufficient to graze cattle on green fields. However the Palestinians from whom the land had been seized were not only forbidden to sink wells but had to buy their water from the Israelis, delivered in inadequate quantities by tankers.



A Palestinian girl rests on her way to collect drinking water in Gaza, where most of the water available is polluted and unfit for human consumption. Collecting water for family consumption is the work of women and small children. Photo by Iyad El Baba/UNICEF-oPt

- The Israeli military through military conquest have governed all sources of water in the West Bank and

Gaza since 1967 and 1974. In 1982 the Ministry of Defence sold the entirety of the West bank's water infrastructure to semi-private Mekorot for one symbolic shekel. Today the Palestinians in the West bank buy over half of their water from Mekorot often at a higher price than nearby settlers. Mekorot's governance of water ensures Palestinians are dependent on Israel for their water while prohibited from using the water



flowing beneath their feet or from developing their own water infra-structure.

- The result is that of water available from West bank aquifers (underground water sources), Israel uses 73%, West Bank Palestinians use 17% and illegal Israeli settlers use 10%. Israel consumes the vast majority of the water from the Jordan river despite only 3% of the river falling within its pre-1967 borders with one quarter of its total water consumption coming from the Jordan river, whereas Palestinians have no access to it whatsoever due to Israeli closures. Israel does not allow new wells to be drilled by Palestinians, has confiscated many wells for Israeli use and sets quotas on how much water can be drawn by Palestinians from existing wells.
- Some 113,000 Palestinians are not connected to the water network. Hundreds of thousands of others are cut off from a regular supply during the summer



Israeli officials destroy a water storage facility used by Palestinian farmers outside the West Bank village of Yatta, near the Israeli settlement of Sosia, in early June 2011. Photo by EPA

months, something not true of the illegal Israeli settlements. In Area C, Israel forbids even the digging of cisterns for collecting rain water.

- The Oslo Agreement cut off the Gaza strip from any water outside its boundary and made it wholly reliant on a single aquifer within its borders but close to the sea. This is totally inadequate resulting in overpumping causing seawater and sewage to penetrate the aquifer, making 90% of the potable water undrinkable. UN scientists predict that Gaza will have no drinkable water within 15 years.
- Sources: Palestine Monitor Fact Sheet Israeli Newspaper 'Haaretz' 16/2/14
- Charlotte Silver - Al Jazeera 30/3/14 Palestine Chronicle 1/8/15

Further information: see www.ifjp.com (search Water)



What can you do to support the Palestinians?

Join the WWFoP.

for more information contact Ann Dorsett
(Membership Secretary) - dorscrox@aol.com

Write to your MP to express your concerns and
to ask for questions to be asked and actions
taken.

www.parliament.uk

Join the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions
(BDS) movement which aims to boycott Israeli
products and projects.

<http://www.bdsmovement.net/>

Link with other supportive organisations such as
The British Shalom-Salaam Trust
(www.bsst.org.uk)

The Palestinian Key of Return

When the Palestinian refugees of 1948 and 1967 left their homes, they took their keys with them in the belief that their return was imminent. More than sixty years have passed, and their numbers have multiplied to around five million in Palestine, the Middle East, and beyond. The keys have been passed on from generation to generation as a keepsake—as a memory of their lost homes and as lasting symbols of their desired "right of return."



In 2008, the residents of the Aida Refugee Camp near Bethlehem collaboratively produced what is said to be the largest key in the world (its makers have even attempted to gain this official title from Guinness World Records). The key, weighing close to one ton and measuring around nine meters in length, was made of steel and installed at the entrance of the camp as critical manifestation of nonviolent expression and a means of overcoming victim portrayals.