



LIVE FROM Palestine

TESTIMONIES FROM THE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA SUPPORT GROUP

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Witnessing Apartheid in Al-Khalil (Hebron) and Susya

By Simon Marshall, October 2015

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My name is Simon. This past spring I spent six weeks as a volunteer with the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine. I had never been to Palestine or the region before. As I sat on my flight many thoughts ran through my head. To be honest I was pretty nervous. I had a friend who volunteered with ISM in the past and he told me some interesting stories about a few people on his team that had been shot by the IDF while taking pictures at local demonstrations.

I arrived in Ramallah on a bus from Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. It was a contrast to Jerusalem; not very many tourists could be seen walking the streets. My first impression of the ISM apartment where I was receiving my training was that it looked like a college dorm. Posters of the occupation hung on the wall, empty teargas canisters lay on the coffee table. The rooms were a bit dirty and cluttered as people were coming in and out of the apartment. I felt a little unsettled. Over the

A demonstration in Susya over Israeli plans to evict and demolish the entire village.

course of a few days I got the in's and out's of ISM history, philosophy, cultural training, and the purpose of our teams. I met some good people during the training and decided to go and stay in the Hebron house.

Hebron or Al-Khalil was like nothing I've ever seen. Most Israeli settlements are placed just outside Palestinian towns in the West Bank but in Al-Khalil the settlement has taken over half of the town. Many of the narrow streets had multiple checkpoints. Heavily armed soldiers and settlers wandered the streets with automatic weapons. There is one section where the street is literally split in half: with Palestinians only allowed to walk on one side. It is an active example of apartheid. The Israeli settlers are protected by IDF soldiers and rarely have consequences for their actions, while Palestinians live in fear. Israeli human rights group Yesh Din reports that 83% of

Jesse Locke

all crimes committed by settlers against Palestinians are not investigated.

ISM in Hebron had been experiencing problems with IDF coming to the house shortly before I arrived so there was some anxiety amongst the group. Most days we spent walking with Palestinian youth to school as a form of protective presence. They often faced harassment from occupa-

The Israeli settlers are protected by IDF soldiers and rarely have consequences for their actions, while Palestinians live in fear.

tion soldiers and settlers. Every week reports came in of settler crimes of harassment, assault and vandalism against Palestinians and their property. Our job was to interview families, take pictures, and write reports for the ISM website. One family in particular had two very young daughters around two or three years old. They have settlers that live next door and the family is in fear everyday to even go outside. While I was there the neighbors had thrown glass bottles at the little girls and fragments of glass had cut the children. Their reports to the IDF fell on deaf ears. There were times when myself and ISM housemates were walking with Palestinian children and settlers would throw



Two of these girls in Hebron suffered facial injuries when settlers threw bottles at them

Photo: Jesse Locke

trash and rocks down from their houses above. I witnessed the IDF or as many in ISM refer to them IOF—Israeli Occupation Soldiers harass children as young as seven years old.

Every Friday I went with ISM volunteers to different demonstrations in Palestine: Nabi Salih, Bil'in, and sometimes near Ofer Penitentiary which houses around a hundred Palestinian minors under the age of eighteen. I could write pages about what we encountered at the "demos"—IOF shooting tear-gas, rubber bullets, and live .22 bullets at children, journalists, and unarmed international activists. I saw several people shot over the course of my time.

Another area where we did a direct action was in Susya. This is located in historical Palestinian Bedouin lands with a school and playground. Israel is threatening to displace all 400–500 villagers off their land so that Israel can take it for their own developments. I went with a team on Nakba Day, which was very symbolic and fitting as this was the day that hundred of thousands of Palestinians lost their homes and farms to the newly immigrated European settlers. We talked with school kids who expressed how they were worried that they would lose their homes and told us about how Israeli settlers often try to steal their backpacks and rip their books just to threaten them.

Seeing the situation in Hebron, Susya, and in a few of the villages during the Friday demos was very disturbing for me. It's absolutely unbelievable that the world doesn't know the level of injustice that is ongoing against the Palestinians. I believe the work that we are going with ISM is helping for a few reasons: our timely reports and documenting through filming and photos help expose the truth though online media, working in partnership with Palestinians helps provide some support through solidarity: they know they are not alone in the struggle, IOF and settlers are less like to commit violent acts against children when we accompanied them on their way to school in Al-Khalil.

I know that my Palestinian experience has forever changed my view of the region and that I will never look at the "conflict" the same way. I would love to go back and help with the olive harvest in October. Thanks to NorCal ISM for your support in helping me participate on this trip. ■

Simon Marshall is a Canadian-American musician who lives in Oregon. He is a first-time ISM volunteer.

One Broken Camera (so far)

In February, 2008, our ISM chapter in Northern California received a request to buy a new camera for Emad Burnat in Bil'in, on the Palestinian West Bank. Our donors responded, and that became the second of Emad's Five Broken Cameras, the film that was nominated for an Academy Award in 2011.

In the report by Daniel Roberts elsewhere in this issue, look at the picture of A'had and her brother. The photo was part of a video taken by Bilal Tamimi. Bilal produced the footage used by Aljazeera at <https://goo.gl/YnoJ2>. As Dan-

iel says, Bilal is a kindhearted man who has been diligently documenting the military occupation and the conflict in Palestine from his village of Nabi Saleh. His clips have been used by the *New York Times*, *Aljazeera*, *+972 Magazine*, *Mondo-weiss*, and other media. There is an article in the *New York Times* about his efforts at <http://goo.gl/WiPywa>

Daniel told ISM-NorCal that Bilal's current video camera is on it's last leg and is not high quality. So we bought a used Canon 7D camera recommended by Daniel, along with zoom lens, camera case, CF card, and Rode mic, even though our

bank account has rarely been lower. The camera and equipment have now been delivered to Bilal in Nabi Saleh through our contacts.

We then appealed to you, our community, to cover the costs of this purchase, and I'm happy to report that you restored our bank account to a little more than the low level where it was before the purchase. With your help we will hopefully have the resources to meet the next urgent need of this kind. In the meantime, watch for the next Palestinian nominated for an Academy Award, or maybe a Pulitzer. It might be Bilal. ■

Our solidarity community is growing and has made much positive progress over the years like the rise of the BDS campaign, an increase in campus activism and the increased visibility of Palestinian voices in the media. But we can't overlook the Palestinian economy, which has been strangled and blockaded just like Palestinian lives and property. With that in mind I've worked with the Northern California chapter of the International Solidarity Movement (NorCal ISM) to bring you Palbox!

Palbox is a totally new way to support Palestinian farmers, artisans, craftspeople and Palestinian nonviolent resistance that completely bypasses all Israeli control. Palbox is a gourmet gift box delivered four times a year to your doorstep and includes:

- a 25 oz bottle of Palestinian olive oil
- 2 bars of olive oil soap
- a bag of za'atar
- a new, hand-curated Palestinian cultural product in each box (the first box will contain a downloadable album of music from Haidar Eid)

- a sterling silver piece of Arabic calligraphy jewelry.

The first Palbox ships December 1, just in time for the holidays. You must order during October to receive the December 1st shipment. To order, see the NorCal ISM website: <http://www.ism-norcal.org/> ■



Solidarity Through Filmmaking

By Daniel Roberts, September 2015

Earlier this year I went to Palestine for my second stint as a volunteer with ISM. When I made the crossing via the Allenby Bridge from Jordan I was taken out of the normal line and into a little room for questioning. I had an hours worth of questions, soldiers went through my phone and laptop. My previous experience in ISM had prepared me for this and I was ready. There was one point where I really thought by the tone of the questioning and their rude treatment that I wouldn't be allowed in. Border soldiers are trained to keep out activist and journalist that have any pro-Palestinian leanings. My cover story was that I had a friend who was a pro-Israeli skater and that I was doing some filming for a skate video that was featuring the Tel Aviv skate scene. I had his cell phone number. He is a well-known guy so I believe that's what helped me get in.

I had a few other friends that I recruited to volunteer with ISM. As they completed their training in Ramallah I had a chance to catch up with ISM friends. Often times living in the US I feel very isolated in my passion for Palestine. The narrative is very pro-Israel at home. A recent survey by The Brookings Institution on the American public view on Israel and Palestine found that 55% were in favor of Israel's side of "the conflict," 39% were neutral, with only 6% leaning towards Palestine. Facing that kind of cultural bias can be a daunting task in our efforts of educating,

reporting, and raising awareness about what's truly going on. One of the things that I enjoy about ISM is that like-minded people from around the world come to the occupied West Bank because they are passionate about the Palestinian issue. Being part of an ISM community means breaking bread daily with people who share the same heart and drive about Palestine, and discussing how we can make a positive change. I've had housemates that have ranged in age from retired to straight out of high school. It was great being back in Palestine with a supportive community.

Trying to sum up almost two months of experiences in a short article can be difficult. I've learned that within the ISM group we as individuals have the ability to use our individual gifts to contribute to the overall efforts. One of the core priorities of ISM is documentation. This is from the ISM website "documenting and reporting to local and international media about the daily life under apartheid and countless human rights and international law violations by the Israeli military. The need for documentation is not just to show that there are illegal and unjust actions going on, but also to provide a real means of evidence for accountability to the police and courts, case by case."

Parts of our daily activities were interviewing Palestinian families and publishing stories, videos, and photos after an incidents of violence

Ahed struggling to pull her brother away from a soldier in their village of Nabi Saleh.

Photo: Bilal Tamimi



perpetrated by illegal settlers and IOF incursions. During my first experience with ISM we had discussed making a short film focusing on one village to better document what daily life in Palestine is like. Karam who is one of the main Palestinian leaders in ISM has spent a lot of time in a small village of Nabi Saleh. Every Friday he goes to the village to participate,

take photos, and video the demo. He introduced us to the Tamimi family and A'hed Tamimi. When she was just 13 A'hed won the Handala Award for courage from Turkey. She was flown to Turkey with her mother where she was presented the award and met with Prime Minister Erdogan.

During our trip we spent a lot of time in Nabi Saleh, gathering stories from the people, documenting night incursions by the IOF, and documenting the weekly demonstrations. Nabi Saleh is unique because it is one of the few villages where women and girls participate in the weekly demonstrations. A'hed and other teen girls leave their heads uncovered and are actively part of the non-violent protests. A'hed has long curly blonde hair and blue eye so she shatters many stereotypes of what a Palestinian looks like.

A'hed, her family, and friends had a very



Janna Ayyad marching in a demonstration on Nakba Day.

Photo: Rise Up International

People can follow our facebook page for ongoing updates on the project. www.facebook.com/radianceofresistance Our efforts would not be possible without the support of ISM in California and ISM Palestinian leaders including Karam who

Being part of an ISM community means breaking bread daily with people who share the same heart and drive about Palestine, and discussing how we can make a positive change.

deep impact on me. After several viral videos, including the incident a few weeks ago when she intervened as a soldier was choking her brother she has become the poster child for Palestinian resistance against the occupation. We plan to use the video, photos, stories, and interviews to release a short film about A'hed and the unique non-violent resistance techniques that Nabi Saleh uses. I believe that as the outside world learns more about the Palestinian struggle through the eye of a teen that sympathy will grow for the independence movement. Our film titled *Radiance of Résistance* focuses on A'hed Tamimi, Janna Ayyad, their friends, and family will be released in 2016 in film fest around the world.

served in a producer role. It was amazing to have the support locally in Nabi Saleh, with Karam and the ISM community. As we look to the future of ISM, I can see us getting involved in more projects like this where we balance the daily reports, with larger film projects and stories that raise awareness on a larger scale. ■

Daniel Roberts is an American who has volunteered with ISM two different times. His involvement with Palestinians started in 2012 when he received a grant to teach art classes at Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan. A year later he was part of a team built the first skate ramp in Gaza.

It is a Life of Desperation: Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

By Claire Thaliana, April 2015

This message came from Umm Ahmed, a Palestinian grandmother who's lived her whole life in the Jabal al-Hussein refugee camp in Jordan. She was recently able to visit her daughter in Palestine for the first time after seventeen years of being denied by the Israeli embassies. She asked me to get bring the message home about the injustices Palestinian refugees face every day. This story is my attempt to do just that.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

"It is a life of desperation." Each of the ten people I interviewed said that at some point when I asked about the economic conditions in the camps. The youth in particular face unemployment, low wages and an impossibly high cost of living, and can't raise the money they need to

desperation, youth get to where they don't feel anything. And then they say they wish it were a chaotic situation like Syria, so they could move about and steal what they needed. One even said that if he could join one of the terrorist organizations he would, because they would provide a living for him, but if he had any other way to feed his children and cover his expenses, he would be the first one to fight *against* such organizations.

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

The intermittent employment people face in the camp also affects their access to healthcare, since health insurance is only available to employed people. Refugees with Jordanian citizenship can access the same healthcare system as Jordanians but those without citizenship are in a vulnerable

We'd live under a tent in the rain as long as we could live in our homeland.

leave the camp even if they want to. These issues can ultimately be traced back to the disparities in legal status between Palestinian refugees and Jordanians in Jordan. Less than half of students make it through secondary or professional school, and those lacking Jordanian citizenship are given lower consideration for scholarships and jobs in their fields than Jordanian citizens with less education. Exploitation of low-wage workers is common, and labor laws in Jordan are rarely enforced.

Meanwhile, the cost of living has drastically increased in the last few decades, and even more since the Syrian crisis.

Let me tell you a truth about poverty everywhere, for poverty is in my lived experience too – it means making terrible choices when all the other options are gone. Saeed (psdudonym) a young married man with several children, painted a clear picture of day-to-day living in the camp. Young people just want to buy a coffee or cigarettes, but can't afford even these simple pleasures in their circumstances. So they ask older people for money... but it's humiliating.

After a long time of living every day in

position. UNRWA clinics cannot help in emergency situations. One young man related how his wife had a miscarriage because he could not obtain the necessary 30 JD in time to have her admitted for a complication. The Jordanian government provides some medical aid to refugees with citizenship, but this ends up stratifying refugees by legal status.

RIGHT OF RETURN

Under international law, refugees displaced by military engagements have the right to return to their homeland, but this right is systematically denied by the Israeli government and has been ever since the Nakba (Arabic for "catastrophe," the term for the Israeli takeover of the 1948 territories) displaced at least 750,000 Palestinians in 1947-49. Though families have lived out their lives in the camps, people overwhelmingly told me they would exercise their right of return and live in Palestine given the chance. I also heard several older people exclaim with exasperation after years of being denied entry into Palestine that they just wanted to visit – their homes, their villages, their families who are still there.

The stories I heard from people who were unable to visit their family members in Palestine made me sick with rage, especially since I, with no family or cultural connections to Palestine, have the privilege to cross those borders any time I want. Umm Ahmad, the same woman who couldn't visit her daughter for 17 years, said that her husband was unable to attend his brother's funeral, nor can he visit his 90-year-old mother in 'Aqa. Also in Jabal al-Hussein, a woman named Su'ad Abu Sharma told me that she'd been denied a visa consistently from 2000-2013; when she finally visited her family she stayed one extra day, and for that reason she's being denied again now. Because of this, she was unable to attend her brother's funeral. This would be painful for anyone; no one should have to live cut off from the ones they love.

MESSAGES FOR THE WEST

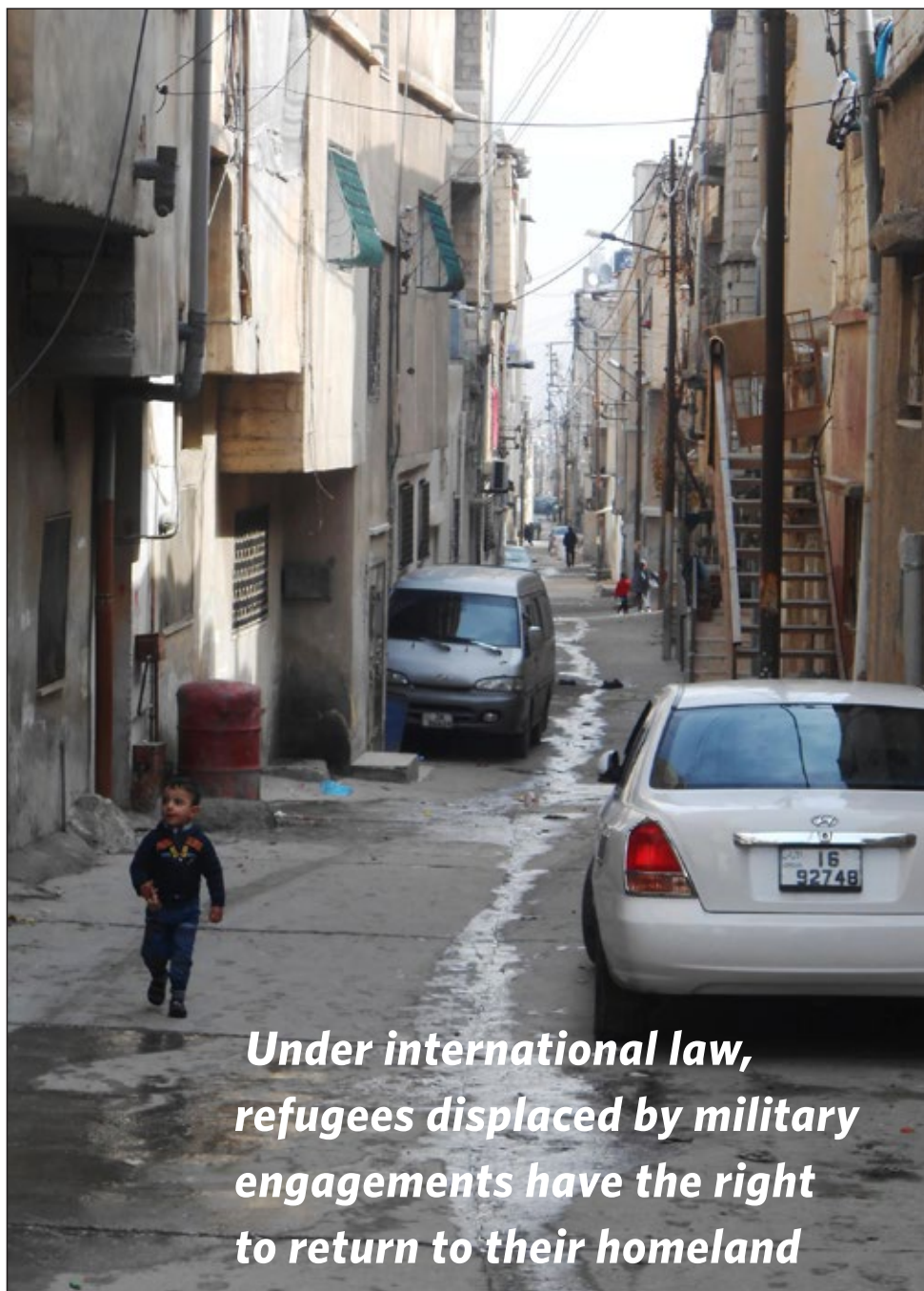
I asked each interviewee what messages they most wanted me to carry back to a Western audience. People had two main messages, which I'll go into in detail.

First, people wanted to correct the Western story about Islam and Palestinians. Islam as a religion teaches peace, social justice and harmony with others; terrorists represent only themselves and not the Palestinian people and certainly not Islam. Palestinians don't hate Americans either, only our government as it gives unmitigated support to the Israeli state while it commits human rights abuses. People often joked that if they thought the American people were like our government I would not be allowed into the camps.

Finally, in the words of a lady I interviewed in Jabal al-Hussein Camp, "No more talk! It's time for direct action." We need to support people on the ground. Monetary assistance is great, and it should take such forms as funding businesses and providing scholarships to local universities,

but the most important thing we can do is fight for the Palestinian right of return. For Westerners, that means the struggle is here in our home countries as well – it's time to hold our elected officials accountable for being complicit in Israeli oppression, and keep fighting until all our governments recognize the Palestinian right of return. ■

Claire Thaliana is a US-based activist, writer and biochemistry student who uses her mad scientist skills to fight oppression



***Under international law,
refugees displaced by military
engagements have the right
to return to their homeland***

Jabal al-Hussein refugee camp in Jordan

Photo: C. Thaliana

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For more information or to register: www.ism-norcal.org/

Call for Volunteers

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) needs nonviolent resistance volunteers to stand with Palestinians against the theft and colonization of Palestinian land. You will witness and report human rights violations, participate in nonviolent demonstrations, resist home demolitions and land confiscations, accompany children and patients to school and hospital, remove roadblocks, or just share time with Palestinians, listen to them, and help ensure that their voices are heard. When you return to your community you will be better equipped to advocate for the freedom and self-determination of the Palestinian people.

More info: solidarity@ism-norcal.org,
510-236-4250, www.ism-norcal.org or www.palsolidarity.org ■



Speakers Available

ISM volunteers who have recently returned from Palestine are available to make presentations to high school and college campuses, churches, organizations and house parties.