



KAIROS PALESTINE
CHRISTMAS 2013

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Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 2013

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

For Christians, Advent is the spiritual preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ. Most of the time, however, we tend to lose our focus along the way, distracted by the “commercialized” Christmas. It is hard to concentrate on the spiritual importance of the Advent season while we are busy decorating our Christmas trees, selecting our presents and planning our Christmas parties.

There is nothing wrong with all these joyful projects, but it is important to balance the spiritual aspect of Advent with all our other activities. If we don’t make time for reflection, meditation, prayer and thinking about God and others, we find ourselves physically exhausted and spiritually unsatisfied.

Living where I live, Advent is, for me, the rebirth of truth and the beginning of the church year.

Advent is an opportunity to ready ourselves to receive Jesus Christ in our hearts and lives. It is a time to pray and repent. It is a time for joy and hope. It is a time for feeling the presence of Christ among us. It is a time to reconcile with God, with ourselves and with our neighbors.

In the Scriptures, Advent equals readiness, promise and hope for a rebirth of new life.

During Advent, we affirm that Christ has come, that Jesus Christ is present in our world today, and that He will come again to redeem all humankind. This acknowledgment provides a basis for our celebrations and longing for redemption. In Advent, we also confess our own responsibility as people of faith to “love the Lord your God with all your heart” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Advent in Bethlehem is full of preparations, full of expectation, and full of longing for freedom and reconciliation. In the Kairos Document written from Bethlehem, Christians cried out and expressed their yearning to be delivered from the evil and sin of Israel’s military occupation of their land as the Israelite slaves in Egypt cried out for their freedom from slavery and oppression. Through Kairos Palestine, we raised our voices in solidarity with all those who have experienced the tyranny of injustice in a world full of sins and destruction – but who still hope for and trust in deliverance by a

God who has heard the cries of the oppressed and brought them liberation.

Just like last year, Kairos Palestine, together with various Palestinian civil society organizations, is producing this booklet as part of the preparations and promise of Advent. Last year, too, we addressed this resource to our sisters and brothers around the world who, in this season, turn to Bethlehem – informing them about our lives under occupation and raising their awareness about our plight. We echoed a call from the Kairos Document itself: “Our question to our brothers and sisters in the Churches today is: are you willing and able to work with us to restore our freedom? Our freedom will be the only sustainable foundation for both Palestinians and Israelis to live in love, justice, peace and security.”

Like last year, too, we wish to share our reality with you, as well as our hopeful reflections on these realities. We seek to enable you to see and experience the modern Bethlehem – which remains the “little town of Bethlehem,” surrounded by the Wall and many settlements.

In this booklet, we will once again focus on Bethlehem and some of the problems its inhabitants face today:

On the 1st Advent Sunday: We will shed light on the refugees and refugee camps in Bethlehem.

On the 2nd Advent Sunday: We will focus on the plight of Palestinian prisoners, both children and adults.

On the 3rd Advent Sunday: We will address one of the major difficulties and injustices facing many Palestinian families: the divisions afflicting individual families due to obstacles imposed by the Israeli state. These obstacles that prevent families from being unified and living together violate a basic human right.

On the 4th Advent Sunday: We will talk about the main cause that pushes Palestinians to leave their country: namely, settler violence against them, their properties, their land, and their trees.

The materials will include statistics and facts on the ground, as well as theological reflections and interpretations written by members of the Palestinian Christian Community.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are counting on you. With this Christmas Alert, we are asking you to turn the tide by getting involved through the following activities:

1. Please distribute and study background materials and theological reflections in your own churches each Sunday of Advent to inform and educate your sisters and brothers about the situation of your Palestinians brethren living under Israeli occupation.
2. Please share the alert with congregations and dioceses across your country.
3. Please send letters of solidarity and support for justice in Palestine/Israel to the Israeli embassies in your own country. For further information, see www.allembassies.com/israeli_embassies.htm
4. Please come and see. We will fulfill our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike. (Kairos 6.2)
5. Please inform your Palestinian brethren about the way you have been involved with the Christmas Alert by writing us at this email address: info@kairospalestine.ps

With your help and solidarity, we can finally live in peace with justice: the peace that all people aspire to, the peace that was announced in Bethlehem.

O God of all creation, who sent us the ONE who would baptize “in the Holy Spirit and fire” in order to save us, give us the power to repent, and to become your faithful and courageous servants. Bless us with fiery steadfastness to walk with you and stand against all forms of evil. Open our eyes to see the suffering of your people and strengthen our determination to stand in solidarity with all those who thirst for your purifying water, cleansing fire and your everlasting hope and love. In faith, we glorify your name.

Rifat Odeh Kassis

Kairos Palestine – A moment of truth,

General Coordinator

Kairos Palestine would like to thank all the contributors for their help in compiling this Advent booklet as well as all volunteers for translating it.

Please note that the deadline for the submission of the texts was in spring 2013. Updated numbers and figures can be found on the websites of the contributing organizations.

The “ Miracle of Christmas makes us whole and fully ” human

Written by Hind Khoury

It never ceases to amaze me how, every year, and as we get closer to Christmas, my burdened heart lightens up with joy and hope, as if through a miracle. I take heart from my fellow Bethlehemites, who over the ages, and through many a war and an occupation, have never failed to celebrate Christmas and to honor the newborn prince of peace and love.

My heart lightens in the shadow of the Apartheid Wall, at my doorstep in Bethlehem. The wall is a dark reminder of Israel's occupation, an occupation that strangulates our lives, devours our land, and denies us the freedom to move and visit friends and family. It reminds me that we simply aspire to live normal lives amidst the abnormality of colonization. We are submitted to this injustice, and to add insult to injury, our resistance is promoted as terrorism, and our victimhood as aggression.

This transformation is incomprehensible. How can the heart lighten up when our political prisoners linger in Israeli jails many of whom without legal process? How can it be lifted when our refugees wait in their camps only to be met with more frustration, denial, and further expulsion? More

still, what light is there in a region that is seeing millions of new refugees, and that is being divided by wars?

As I renew my hopes with another upcoming Christmas, and as my heart is filled with the joy of giving and caring, I turn to my fellow human beings with a greater belief in their good will. Life looks promising and worth every bit of struggle and hard work, and I am reminded that I cannot live without Christmas.

Through this modest birth in Bethlehem, humanity is saved. The simple message of Christmas is the secret of life, meaningful and vital to our very existence. Once the simple truth is revealed to us, we know that we are in this world to contribute so that we have life and have it abundantly.

My prayer this Christmas is for many of us to capture this miracle of Christmas and to think of the poor, the homeless and the oppressed.

My prayer this Christmas is for thousands of hearts to commit to work diligently for a better world where justice has some respect and where efforts are invested to relieve pain and suffering rather than banal interests and power mongering.

My prayer this Christmas is for people to seek their true genuine calling. With so many old and new refugees in our dear Middle East, including the Palestinian refugees who simply want to and have the right to go back homes. With so many homeless, stranded parents, children and elderly, so many more dead and injured, so many homes demolished, so much hardship, so many societies torn apart, there is certainly some joy and hope to give, some peace to construct, some good will to show that we care and to prove we are truly human and deserving of life.

Hind Khoury is a Palestinian Christian, a mother of three adults and married to a local architect. She worked for over twenty years in the economic development of the Palestinian Occupied Territories. In 2005 she was appointed as Minister of Jerusalem Affairs for the Palestinian Authority and later the Palestinian Ambassador to France.

1st Sunday in Advent: Refugees and Refugee Camps in Bethlehem

The on-going

Nakba

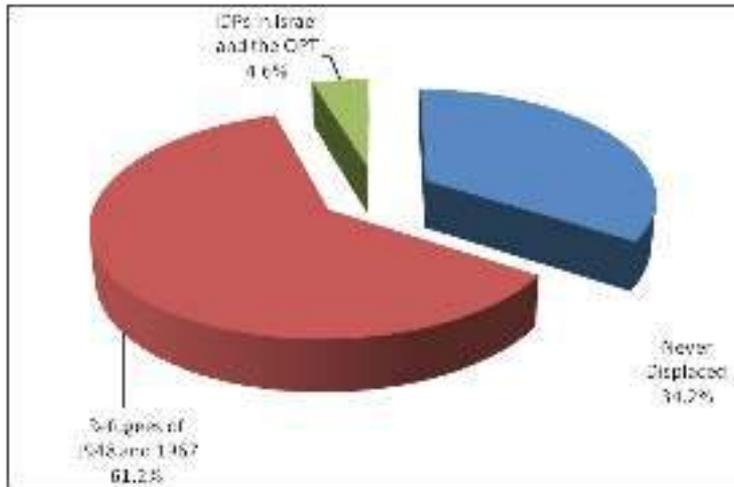
Written by Badil

Displacement is the biggest threat to Palestinian life today and it affects more Palestinians than any single military operation possibly could. In the past year alone, Israel displaced thousands of Palestinians in Jerusalem, West Bank Area C, the Gaza Strip Buffer Zone, and the Naqab desert (inside Israel).

Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons (so called IDPs) constitute the largest and longest-standing case of displaced persons in the world today and are mainly scattered throughout the Middle East. Out of 11.2 million Palestinians worldwide, 7.4 million (66%) are displaced.



Percentage of Palestinian Refugees and IDPs Worldwide¹

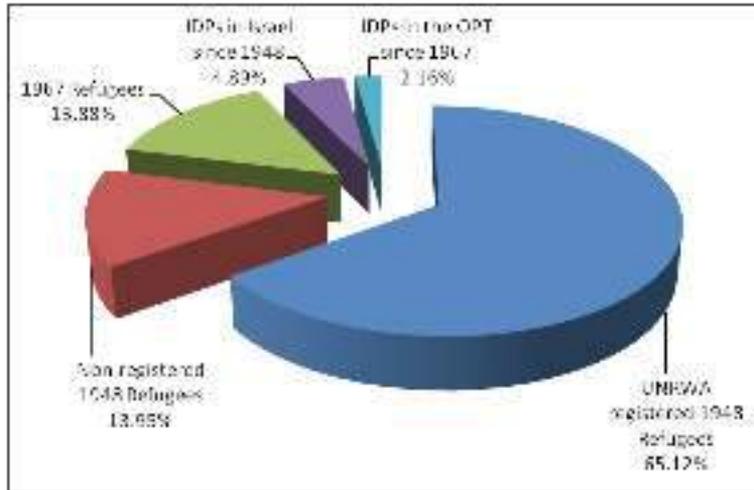


Registered Palestinian refugees mainly live in the occupied Palestinian territory (41%), Jordan (40%), Syria (10%) and Lebanon (9%)—often only a short distance from their homes and places of origin. In addition, less than 50% of the Palestinian people live inside the boundaries of Palestine. Approximately 1.4 million Palestinians live in Israel —of whom 25% or 360,000 are internally displaced— and slightly more than 4 million Palestinians live in the occupied Palestinian territory.²

1 BADIL, Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 2010-2012, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights (2012), page 3.

2 Ibid, page 6.

Percentage of Palestinian Refugees and IDPs by Group³



In order to forcibly transfer the indigenous Palestinian population, Israel has developed and utilized many laws, policies, and state practices. Today, Israel carries out this forcible displacement in the form of a “silent” transfer policy. The policy is silent because Israel applies it while attempting to avoid international attention by regularly displacing small numbers of people, which it presumes would go unnoticed. Moreover, Israel’s legal and political structure discriminates against Palestinians in many areas including citizenship, residency rights, land ownership, and regional and municipal planning.⁴

³ See supra note 1, page 5.

⁴ See Amjad Alqasis, ‘The Ongoing Nakba-The Continuous Forcible Displacement of the Palestinian People’, Al-Majdal Quarterly Magazine of BADIL, autumn 2012.



Aida refugee camp (BADIL 2012)

Approximately 28% of the Palestinians who are living in the Bethlehem district in the occupied Palestinian territory are refugees.⁵ Between 1949 and 1950, three official refugee camps (Aida Camp, Dheisheh Camp, Beit Jibrin/Azzeh Camp) were created in this district, in which today a total of 22,023 Palestinians reside.⁶ For example, Aida Camp, which covers a small area of less than 0.20 km², was built in 1950 on land that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) leased from the government of Jordan, which governed the West Bank until Israeli forces occupied it in 1967. Aida is located between the towns of Bethlehem and Beit Jala. The unemployment rate in all three camps is very high, ranging from 30–43%. Refugees in all three camps also suffer from severe congestion, including overcrowded schools, as well as poor water and sanitation networks.⁷ Furthermore, households in refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territory suffer from the highest rates of poverty according to food consumption patterns. Approximately 39% of camp households are poor, compared with 29.5% of other households.⁸

Demographic and socioeconomic indicators reflect the vulnerability of Palestinian refugees and IDPs over six decades of displacement. Israel's policies and practices of occupation, apartheid and colonization and a series of armed conflicts in the region have resulted in Palestinians' lack of personal security, socioeconomic wellbeing, and stability,⁹ especially when the status of a refugee is compounded with statelessness, ineffective protection, and insufficient assistance.¹⁰

5 See supra note 1, page 14.

6 See supra note 1, page 11.

7 See UNRWA website at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=67> (last modified 26 June 2013).

8 See supra note 1, page 18.

9 For examples of armed conflicts that have impacted Palestinian refugees in Arab host countries see: "Syria Humanitarian Response," UNRWA, last modified 2 November 2012, <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1488>.

10 For a discussion of statelessness and protection gaps that impact the condition of Palestinian refugees and IDPs, see Supra note 1, pages 32-45.

Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights is an independent, community-based non-profit human rights organization mandated to defend and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. Our vision, missions, programs and relationships are defined by our Palestinian identity and the principles of international law, in particular international human rights law. We seek to advance the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people in this basis.

To learn more, please visit www.badil.org

“Refugees”

It is great to wake up in this season and enjoy the birds singing on my olive tree in the court yard. They call other birds to share with them the food, and the whole community of these birds is celebrating. These birds reminded me with their positive energy of Mary mother of Jesus.

Mary, our lady of Palestine, looks unblinkingly at the realities of life daily experienced under empire... the rich oppress the poor, the powerful lord it over the weaker ones, seen and unseen walls of exclusion are erected, homes are stolen or demolished, lands are confiscated, water rights are violated, freedom of movement is restricted, access to holy sites is forbidden.

Palestinian refugees are still living in refugee camps since the Nakba in 1948 and some in 1967, and many have been refugees more than once. Refugee status should be temporary, but it has become permanent. Many refugees are in exile in their own homeland.

All this Mary sees and bears witness to. Mary was a refugee when she, Joseph and Jesus went to Egypt, but they were able to come back to their homeland.

Written by Jean Zaru

Mary understands the right of return for refugees. Standing in the shadow of empire, Mary sees and still bears witness, sings to God the Savior. She sings her full-throated confidence in God's deliverance for the captives, release for those living under lawless oppression. God will, Mary sings, turn the world upside down, bring down mountains, and raise valleys – God will, where and in ways we do not yet see, bring down empire and raise up a new human community of all God's people. (Adapted from Magnificat, Luke 1: 46-43).

After 46 years of occupation and denial of all basic rights, can I continue joyfully witnessing and singing like Mary?

In Luke's account, the unwed Mary does not remain alone with her anxieties, but seeks support from another woman, Elizabeth. Filled with the Holy Spirit who exalts the violated, the two women rejoice in God's liberating action. In the Magnificat, the pregnant Mary enunciates God's salvation and well-being to the humiliated and downtrodden. The future of God's well-being for all without exception is not to be awaited passively. It is being born in us today, from our flesh and blood, from our commitments and struggles for justice. It becomes the hope for those who do not have hope... Jesus opened his public ministry in another program of hope (Luke 4:18). Christian hope is a resistance movement for life and not against it; a hope is not something relegated for the future. It is for now, the present moment. To hope for justice means we have to work for justice, to hope for peace means we have to work for peace.

It was addressed to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the broken victims. Yes, friends, how then can I keep from singing?

May this Christmas season be a time of renewal of our commitment and hope!

Friends, your gift of friendship is one of the greatest gifts I received. You brightened my days by joining me to light candles of joy, despite all sadness, candles of hope where despair keeps watch and candles of love to inspire all my living.

I will light the candle of fellowship this season; I know that the experiences of unity in human relations are more compelling than the concepts and prejudices, which divide.

Life keeps going on; life fulfills itself, and affirms the possibility of hope.

Jean Zaru is the Presiding clerk of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ramallah and one of the founding members of Sabeel. She served on the Executive Committee of the World YWCA, Jerusalem YWCA, and on the Central Committee of WCC. Jean Zaru is the author of "Occupied by Non-violence, a Palestinian Woman Speaks"; and many other articles that have been published. She received the Anna Lindt prize for non-violence in Sweden.

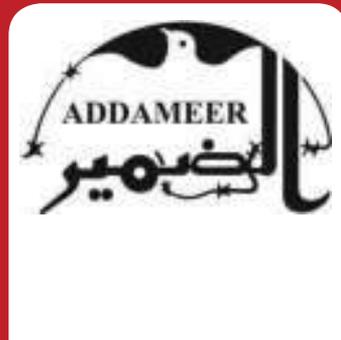
2nd Sunday in Advent: Prisoners Detention of Palestinians

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The Israeli continued colonization of Palestine relies on its ability to suppress the indigenous Palestinian population. One consistent strategy Israel has used in this suppression is the mass detention and imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in an attempt to “criminalize” any perceived resistance to this colonization and occupation. To date, over 800,000 Palestinians have been detained by Israel since 1967, including over 8,000 children since the year 2000. Given its scale, detention has served as an effective tool in controlling the Palestinian population, as well as destroying Palestinian society and its ability to build a normal society, necessary to achieve their political sovereignty and self-determination.

“

Written by Addameer



Currently there are 4,979 Palestinian political prisoners, of whom 156 are administrative detainees, held indefinitely without charge or trial on a secret file, 236 children, of which 44 are under the age of 16, 16 women, and 13 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Imprisoned Palestinians are subjected to harsh conditions from the moment of their arrest. They are often arrested from their homes in the middle

of the night during large military raids, subjected to long interrogation sessions that usually include physical and psychological torture and isolation, undergo court hearings in a military court that has a 99% conviction rate, and are held in deteriorated, unsanitary and poor conditions. These harsh conditions have led to the death of 203 Palestinians since 1967: 71 as a result of torture, 51 from deliberate medical negligence on behalf of the prison administration, 74 from injuries sustained during their arrest and 7 from being shot by the “special forces” in prison.

There can never be justice and peace in Palestine without the unconditional release of all Palestinian political prisoners, and their release should be before and as a pre- condition to any future negotiations.

Bethlehem suffers from regular and severe arrest campaigns by the Israeli Occupying Forces

Like other Palestinian cities, Bethlehem suffers from regular and severe arrest campaigns by the Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF). Currently, there are 453 prisoners from Bethlehem, including 4 females, 10 children under the age of 16 and 23 children between 16 and 18 years.

Manar Zawarha a university student, was arrested at the age of 19 years when she was going through Bethlehem Checkpoint. A bright and promising student, Manar endured 30 days of lengthy interrogation at the Moscobiyyeh Interrogation Center in Jerusalem. During her interrogation, Manar was subjected to psychological torture, such as intimidation and threats against her and her family, a practice widely used against Palestinian prisoners to try to coerce information from them. Ultimately, Manar was sentenced to 12-months and a 3,000 shekel fine, but her sentence was commuted and she was released in mid-May.

The IOF does not differentiate between males and females during the arrest process, nor afford female prisoners special privileged in regard to their social conditions or needs. Hiba Bdeer from Doha village near Bethlehem city is mother to Malak, 7 years old, and Yara, 5 years old. She was arrested in front of her husband and two young daughters when the IOF raided her home in the early hours of the morning, ransacked it and took her away, blindfolded and shackled. Hiba was transferred to Asqalan Detention Center and interrogated for 8 days. Hiba, who was arrested on 2 April 2013, is still detained without charges and denied family visits. She does not know when she will see Malak and Yara next.



Denial of family visits is a routine policy practiced by the prison administration. The family of An'am Hasanat, from Dheisheh Refugee Camp faces difficulty obtaining permits to visit her. Since most of the prisoners where Palestinians are held are in Israel-proper, in direct contravention of international law, families must obtain special permits to enter Israel, as well as permission for a visit. This is a systematic way that the prison administration has effectively unraveled the fabric of Palestinian society.

**Palestinian
Child
Prisoners:
Deleterious
impact of
solitary
confinement
on children**

Since the start of the second Intifada in September 2000, the Israeli authorities intensified the arrest campaigns against Palestinian children. In the last 12 years, more than 8,000 children as young as **12** years have been arrested, interrogated and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system.

Written by
Defense for Children International
(DCI)



Total number of Palestinian children in Israeli detention at the end of each month since Jan 2009

Note: These figures are not cumulative

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | .Aver |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| 2009 | 389 | 423 | 420 | 391 | 346 | 355 | 342 | 339 | 326 | 325 | 306 | 305 | 355 |
| 2010 | 318 | 343 | 342 | 335 | 305 | 291 | 284 | 286 | 269 | 256 | 228 | 213 | 289 |
| 2011 | 222 | 221 | 226 | 220 | 211 | 209 | 202 | 180 | 164 | 150 | 161 | 135 | 192 |
| 2012 | 170 | 187 | 206 | 220 | 234 | 221 | 211 | 195 | 189 | 164 | 178 | 195 | 198 |
| 2013 | 223 | 236 | 238 | 238 | 223 | 193 | | | | | | | 233 |

Number of young (12-15) Palestinians in Israeli detention at the end of each month since January 2009

Note: These figures are not cumulative

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | .Aver |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| 2009 | 50 | 54 | 53 | 47 | 39 | 47 | 42 | 39 | 40 | 44 | 41 | 42 | 44 |
| 2010 | 44 | 41 | 39 | 32 | 25 | 23 | 18 | 20 | 32 | 34 | 32 | 30 | 31 |
| 2011 | 34 | 45 | 45 | 37 | 38 | 38 | 40 | 34 | 35 | 30 | 33 | 19 | 36 |
| 2012 | 26 | 24 | 31 | 33 | 39 | 35 | 34 | 30 | 28 | 21 | 21 | 23 | 29 |
| 2013 | 31 | 39 | 39 | 44 | 48 | 41 | | | | | | | 38 |

Ill-treatment and torture within the Israeli military court system are common and persistent. Children are blind-folded and hand-cuffed, beaten or kicked, exposed to position abuse, subject to threats and inducements, and placed in solitary confinement.

These violations are not the result of new measures that Israel implemented in response to the second Intifada. Rather, they are the result of Israel's intensification of pre-existing policies implemented in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) that are aimed towards effectively regulating every aspect of Palestinian life. It is an ongoing attempt to suppress the Palestinian peoples' aspiration for self-determination and their struggle for peace, justice and equality.

The systematic policy of abuse that Palestinian child prisoners are subjected to is discriminatory and violates the best interest of the child principle, which is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Palestinian children from the West Bank are bound by military orders and are prosecuted before Israeli military courts, which lack the minimum legal guarantees for a fair trial.

The most detrimental practice used against Palestinian children who come across the Israeli military court system is the practice of psychological interrogation techniques, among these is the use of solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time.

Since 2008, DCI-Palestine has documented 73 cases where Palestinian children have been held in solitary confinement, sometimes for periods up to 29 days. They are repeatedly subjected to coercive interrogations and are denied access to their parents and legal counsel. According to DCI-Palestine evidence, confessions or statements obtained by coercion or force, and in some cases written in Hebrew, are rarely excluded in the Israeli military courts. The conviction rate in the military courts sits around 98 per cent.

The children taken to the Al Jalame interrogation and detention centre describe being held in solitary confinement in a small cell measuring approximately two by three metres. The children report either sleeping on a concrete bed, on the floor, or on a thin mattress which is often described as "dirty" and "foul smelling". Meals are passed to the children through a flap in the door, depriving them of human contact. The walls of these cells are reported to be grey in colour with sharp protrusions which are painful to lean against. There are no windows and the only source of illumination comes from a dim yellow light that is

reported to be kept on 24 hours each day. Some children complain of suffering pain behind their eyes and adverse psychological effects after being detained in these cells.

Testimonies provided by children held in solitary confinement suggest that the primary purpose for its use is to break their spirit in order to obtain a confession. Many children report being kept in solitary confinement between lengthy interrogation sessions in which prohibited techniques are frequently used, such as excessive shackling of the legs and hands, position abuse, physical violence, threats and intimidation. Most children detained and questioned in these facilities end up providing a confession. Once the children confess they are prosecuted in a military court and transferred to a regular prison.

The detrimental psychological and physical effects of detaining persons in solitary confinement are well documented. Symptoms include panic attacks, fear of impending death, depression, including clinical depression, social withdrawal, a sense of hopelessness, unprovoked anger, short attention span, disorientation, paranoia, psychotic episodes, self-mutilation and attempted suicide.

In 2011 the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Mr Juan Méndez, called for a complete ban on the use of solitary confinement for children. To date, this call has not been implemented by Israel.

Defence for Children International - Palestine Section is a national section of the international non-governmental child rights organisation and movement, Defence for Children International (DCI), established in 1979, with consultative status with ECOSOC. DCI-Palestine was established in 1991, and is dedicated to defending, promoting and protecting the rights of Palestinian children in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), as well as other international, regional and local standards. As part of its on-going work to uphold the rights of Palestinian children, DCI-Palestine provides free legal assistance, collects evidence, researches and drafts reports and conducts general advocacy targeting various duty-bearers.

To learn more, please visit <http://www.dci-palestine.org/>

Power of love in prison

In Psalms 69:33, the psalmist David once wrote, For the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners. The Lord is still faithful to His words and to His people, especially to those who suffer and accept reality and remain faithful to God's promises and to the people they love. And because of their fidelity, they continue to resist evil and work to obtain their rights and freedom.

Abu Naji is one of these people. Abu Naji was imprisoned during the first Intifada. He is from Beit Sahour, the Shepherd's Field - a simple young man from a modest family, a teenager who refused to live under an unjust occupation and a boy who loved his family. He would grow into a man who found the love of his life; he took care of her and promised to always be with her and to live together with safety and dignity in their homeland. Before he was able to complete his high school education, what he would later call his own private "evil" came into his house and broke down the doors of his heart. This was the day that Abu Naji was arrested by Israeli authorities as he was deemed a "danger". Abu Naji's only crime was standing up and speaking out against the illegal Israeli occupation.

Written by Dr. Charlie Abou Saada

He was imprisoned in what would become his first of many prisons near Nablus and then moved to the desert where he stayed for ten years. In the midst of what seemed to be an impossible struggle, his heart always beat for his beloved Lamees.

Lamees was a young lady from the same town who knew and loved Abu Naji for years. She was shocked by the news of Abu Naji's arrest. "What should I do now, my Lord?" she prayed. Our amazing Lord gave her this answer: "Trust me, and keep Abu Naji in your heart." And she was faithful to God and to Abu Naji.

Three months following Abu Naji's arrest, Lamees, her mother and their priest went to visit Abu Naji. They were officially engaged in prison under the eyes of Abu Naji's prison wardens and fellow prisoners. Lamees stood strong in her faith and continued to visit Abu Naji, modeling her life after the Bible verse, Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated. (Hebrews 13:3). Lamees felt Satan was trying to weaken her faith and determination, and many times she was confused, but the Lord was always with her through His Holy Spirit and Lamees persevered with His love and the guidance and assistance of her parents and friends. The day that Abu Naji was released was the answer to all her prayers.

It is not easy these days to be faithful in our life, but our friends Lamees and Abu Naji are excellent examples to us and to our younger generation.

When I meet my aunt Lamees and my uncle Abu Naji, I can see Saint Paul, who never gave up and always had hope in the future for his first Christian communities. God is Love, and He is there to support us, and be with us during our difficult times. What we need is to simply address our needs to Him, trust in Him and wait for His mercy which will ultimately arrive. The gift of the Lord to this faithful couple was three children, and a life full of happiness and success within their small family. Lamees and Abu Naji will always remember what God spoke to them through the Bible in Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Dear God our Lord, please send each of our 5,000 Palestinian prisoners a Lamees, and let all of them follow the example of Abu Naji. Let the spirit of love and courage prevail and spread through the hearts of small evils. Remember all those who have been imprisoned for their struggle towards social justice and freedom.

We trust that God will be faithful to His Word: The Spirit of God is on me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovering of sight to the poor and to set at liberty those who are oppressed. (Luke 4:18).

Dr. Charlie Abou Saada

Dr. Charlie Abou Saada joined the World Vision Jerusalem office in February 2009 as the Church Relations Coordinator. Dr. Abou Saada holds a PhD degree in Canon Law from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome as well as a BA degree in Philosophy and Theology from the Pontifical University of St. Tommaso D'Acquino in Rome. He lives with his wife and three children in Bethlehem.

God of Justice: Hear our

” Cry “

“Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. Truly, O people in Zion, inhabitants of Jerusalem, you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you!” (Isaiah 30: 18-19)

Palestinians are still weeping: O Lord, when shall the weeping be no more? When will you be compassionate to us, O Lord? When will you show mercy to us, O Lord?! When will our captives be free, O Lord? O Lord, until when will the Palestinians eat the “bread of adversity” and drink the “water of affliction”? O Lord, until when should Palestinian captives go on hunger strikes so that their voice is heard? O Lord, we raise our voices to you. Please wait no more, show us your mercy and justice, and lead us to life abundant just as you promised!

This is the cry of frustration that is raised from behind the bars of the prisons that are full of youth and adults, of men and women, of those who seek justice and life; however, this cry of humanity is

Written by Imad Haddad

heard only by few humans. Humanity is being destroyed with every day that passes while Palestinian children, men and women are unjustly held prisoners “captives”, and, in so many cases, without even a trial, let alone a fair trial.

Year after year Advent season comes knocking at our doors and we gladly raise our voices, singing and in preaching: “Prepare the way of the Lord...” yet we only take hesitant steps in preparing this way, and we definitely speak with a very low voice, rather than raising a cry of comfort to the people of the Lord. (Isa. 40: 1-3)

The plight of Palestinian prisoners, “captives” in the prisons of Israel is worsening day by day. It is even more frightening when we realize the fact that what we know about this plight is only fractions of what the prisoners themselves are going through:

We hear of the daily inhuman treatment they suffer from, but we rarely hear of the punishment they have to endure if they object to these treatments.

We hear of child imprisonment but we don’t know of the trauma children have to go through, day in and day out.

We know that the Red Cross and/or Crescent help and sometimes fail to arrange family visits but we rarely know of the children who grow up without meeting one or both parents because of the parent being imprisoned.

We know that books may be available for the prisoners but we don't know of the difficulties and obstacles that are put before the prisoners who are pursuing their education in prison.

We may know of the imprisoned children through media, but media does not tell us of children whose names and photos were distributed throughout the village to frighten them and imprison them in their homes before they are actually held in prison.

"I have called you by name..." (Isa. 43:1), our names carry our personality through their letters; our names are the mark of our distinctiveness. God calls us by names because we are special and precious in the sight of the Lord; prisoners are robbed of this right, they are not called by their names but by a number. Human beings are not numbers nor are they statistics to be kept; they are persons who are called to live, to be free, and to practice their rights.

Unfortunately, the world community and even negotiations are dealing with Palestinian "captives" as numbers and statistics, ignoring the fact that these numbers are actual human beings.

"[Jesus] unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'" (Luke 4: 17b-19)

These are the words that Jesus read at the beginning of his ministry; these are the words that marked and shaped his ministry among the people; in a way these words are the agenda according to which Jesus embarked on his ministry. It was clear from the very beginning that Jesus will face problems preaching this agenda to the people and to the powers, however, he was determined to preach the “the Lord’s favor,” good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. The church today is called to be true to this agenda. We are called to proclaim the gospel of freedom, justice, equality, faith, hope and love.

As we celebrate advent this year, let us live this freedom that the Lord granted us. Moreover, let us act our belief out and call for freedom, not only on the spiritual level but on the daily life scheme as well. For if Christ set us free, freedom we shall proclaim.

It is time for the church to shake the dust of bondage, fear and partiality, and live in unity with Christ in words and deeds, for the Lord of the Church is the God of Justice and Mercy.

Imad Haddad is a pastor of the ELCJHL, serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope Ramallah. He studied in the Near East School of Theology Beirut Lebanon, and did another year of studies at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina USA. Imad Haddad was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in March 2008.

3rd Sunday in Advent: Family Unification

Family Unification in Jerusalem – Palestinian families under threat

Written by St. Yves



The family is recognized as the most natural and fundamental unit of society and therefore the right to marry and establish a family is protected in human rights law. Where spouses or parents and children are residing in different countries, states are obliged to facilitate contacts and deal with requests to enter or leave a state party for the purpose of unification in a humane and expeditious manner.¹¹

One Palestinian people, different legal statuses

After the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel illegally annexed the land of the city, but not its Palestinian residents. The Palestinians were granted permanent residency, treated as if they had migrated into the State of Israel, although the state actually came to them. As a result Palestinians in Jerusalem carry a so-called Jerusalem ID, while Palestinians in the West Bank hold a Palestinian West Bank ID.

11 E.g Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 16; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) Article 10; or International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) Article 23.

When a Jerusalemite gets married to a Palestinian from the West Bank, he or she has to apply for family unification. Despite the fact that, for example Bethlehem is just 10km away from the old city of Jerusalem and that according to International Law both, Bethlehem and East Jerusalem, are occupied by Israel, a Palestinian from Bethlehem counts as a foreigner for the Israeli authorities.

Human and expeditious?

Under international law, Israel is obliged to deal with applications for family unification in a humane and expeditious manner. But the reality in Jerusalem tells a different story.

Until 2002, in most cases – following a gradual process and after long examination and periods of waiting – the Israeli Ministry of Interior, which is responsible to deal with these applications, granted Palestinians who applied for family unification a permanent residency status, enabling the spouse from the West Bank to live legally in East Jerusalem and Israel.

In May 2002 the Israeli Government released Order No. 1813 which froze the gradual family unification process. One year later the order was enacted into law – the “Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law”. This law was meant to be temporary and was initially introduced for one year. However, its validity has been extended periodically until today and its legality was confirmed by the Israeli High Court of Justice in January 2012.

Facts on the ground – permits for pure existence

Today, couples who apply for family unification can only apply for renewable permits. These permits, if issued, will be valid for one year. Each time – when the permit has to be renewed – the spouse has to present proofs of domicile in East Jerusalem or Israel and has to go through recurrent security checks.

The permits allow their holders only to legally stay in Jerusalem, without any rights or social benefits – not even basic services like health insurance. This policy affects in particular women as they especially need medical care during their pregnancies and after giving birth. Only recently the permits were altered to include permission for their holders to work.

The hurdles to even start the family unification process are high: The application can only be submitted if certain criteria are satisfied. The law allows family unification only for Palestinian male spouses above 35 years old, and for Palestinian female spouses above 25 years old. If the age restriction is not fulfilled the application is automatically rejected.

Further, the spouse who holds the Jerusalem ID has to prove that his center of life is actually in Jerusalem by submitting documents like rental contracts, electricity, water, phone and municipality tax (“Arnona”) bills. If he fails in proving his residency, not only will the family unification application be rejected, but his legal status as resident will also be in question.

Further, the couple must satisfy the Israeli security requirement, which means that the couple must not have any criminal or security records, nor should any of their respective families have any such records. The law defines families as “a spouse, a parent, a child, a brother or sister and their spouses”. This means that should any of the mentioned persons have any security record rather than an indictment through a due process of law (even without knowing, i.e. in cases of secret information) then the couple’s family unification application will be rejected even if the couple does not have any record. This constitutes a form of collective punishment which constitutes a war crime under the 4th Geneva Convention.¹²

As a result of the Israeli policies many Palestinians live illegally in Jerusalem, without social benefits, always afraid to be discovered and deported to the West Bank. The alternatives would be that the couples either

12 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), Article 33.

choose to live separately on different sides of the Wall or risk losing their residency rights in Jerusalem when they both move to the West Bank or abroad. All options are severely violating their basic human rights – Palestinians have for centuries resided in Jerusalem and have the right to stay in their city and to marry whom they choose, regardless of which ID paper the other is carrying.

Thousands of families affected

According to Adalah's Advocate Sawzan Zaher, who challenged the freeze of family unification in the Israeli High Court in 2012, only 33 out of 3,000 family unification applications were approved in 2011. Figures are generally hard to find. Estimations speak of 15,000 to 20,000 affected families where one of the spouses lacks legal status.

In general it is even unclear how many applications were submitted to the Ministry of interior since the Oslo Accords. It is unknown how many applications were approved and how many rejected. To have a better idea about how many families we actually are speaking about, St. Yves recently sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior requesting these numbers – so far without response.

The Society of St. Yves is the Catholic Center for Human Rights, working under the umbrella of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Through legal assistance and advocacy, the organization is countering human rights violations stemming out of the occupation. Main working fields are issues related to residency rights for Palestinians in Jerusalem, cases related to right to property and land in Jerusalem and the West Bank as well as cases which relate to freedom of movement for Palestinians.

To learn more, please visit <http://saintyves.org/>

Family Unification

We often compare our time of political unrest and the occupation of our land to the time when Jesus was born. In my attempt to make a theological reflection on family reunification, I think of the Holy Family when it fled to Egypt to protect Baby Jesus from the wrath and insanity of Herod, who ordered all children under two years old to be killed: "Arise and take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." (Matt. 2: 13) The Holy Family seeking to protect its Child stayed in Egypt for a period of time until they learned of Herod's death and decided to go back to their home land. They chose to stay in a small village called Nazareth, where Jesus lived as a young boy.

The Holy Family taking refuge in Egypt away from danger and death brings back memories of Palestinian families who sought a similar refuge in nearby villages and countries like Egypt away from the cruelty and destruction of war in 1948. Many stories are told of families who were forced to leave their homes or fled away from danger and could not come back to their homes after the war was over. Numerous families were separated from each other and were not allowed to reunite. I remember

Written by Abla Nasir

the story of the Habibi family from Haifa where the mother and her children left to Egypt in pursuit of safety, and stayed with friends and relatives until the war was over. When they wanted to come back and reunite with the father, they were not allowed. After strenuous attempts for family reunification, only the mother was allowed to come back but not the children; not to Haifa but to Jerusalem where the couple lived and were never allowed to reunite their family in their home land.

So many families in Palestine are dispersed in different parts of the world even within the boundaries of our occupied land, where they are denied reunification. Walls are built and new rules are imposed to disperse families from each other under the pretext of “center of life”, which is defined for us by the occupying authorities. As a mother I ask myself: where is the center of my life? Isn't it the land in which I was born and with the family I belong to and the new family I have formed as part of a natural process? In this land where injustice reigns, natural process does not apply to us. We are governed by the injustice of a state that claims a divine right to my homeland, to bring together families from all over the world to unite in my home while my family is scattered here and there and our unification is not allowed.

Joseph fled to Egypt to protect his family away from danger and brought it back to safety in his homeland. This is the model of a family that we grew up in its liking, where we always seek to protect each other with love and we sacrifice for the well-being of one another. It is the natural bond that holds a family together. This natural bond faces daily attempts to break it and in many cases, although never touched the emotional strength of its adhesiveness, physically, it succeeded to rip us apart in the most brutal way.

Fadwa (Abla) Nasir is a retired Palestinian mother of three and grandmother of four and co-manages a family business in Ramallah. Educated in Developmental Psychology and Counselling, she serves on the boards of a number of local organizations including YWCA of Palestine, Sabeel Centre for Liberation Theology, Rawdat El Zuhour, The National Conservatory of Music and Tamer Institute for Community Education.

4th Sunday in Advent: Settler violence

Israeli Settler Violence

The Israeli settler attacks across the past decade in particular have definitely been upgraded from being violent attacks associated with severe hostility toward the Palestinian civilian population to organized orchestrated attacks that terrorize and imperil the lives and way of life of the Palestinian population. Spanning over 46 years of occupation, the Israeli settlers have been nibbling away the occupied territory to accommodate more than 650.000 settlers residing in 196 settlements and 232 outposts. Their existence and ever-growing numbers there has grounded any suspensions that the much debated two-state solution has been brought to a halt.

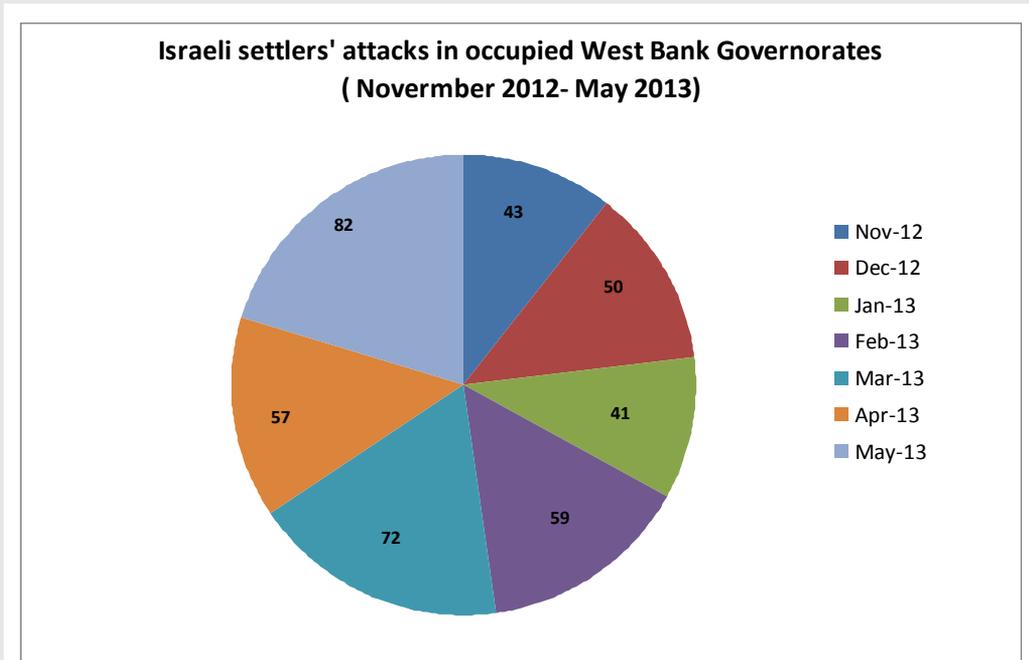
The Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian and their properties in the occupied Palestinian territory remain to be a main concern especially that such attacks are disregarded by the Israeli occupation Army; in fact much of such attacks are carried out under their protection and direct sight. The settlers premeditated attacks have grown over the past decade in numbers and also in types of attacks, which have grown more violently than even the Palestinians expected over years. The Israeli settlers stopped at nothing to turn the Palestinians' lives

Written by Applied
Research Institute
Jerusalem Society
(ARIJ)



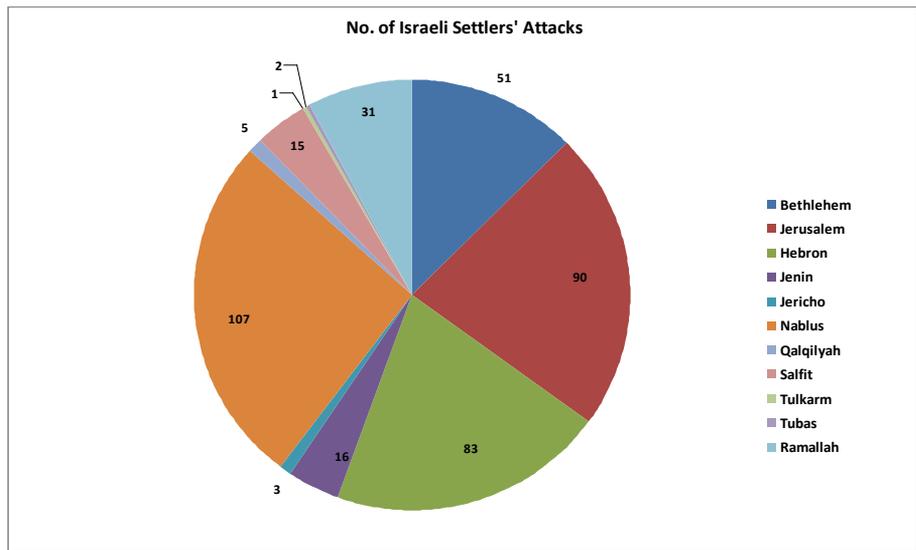
upside down, destroying agricultural lands, uprooting and burning trees and the contamination of cultivated fields and wells. Statistics show that settler violence against Palestinians and their property in the occupied Palestinian territory is on the rise. Since 2007 more than 2000 attacks were carried out by Israeli settlers including more than 311 attacks carried out by Israeli settlers between January and May 2013.

See pie chart 1:



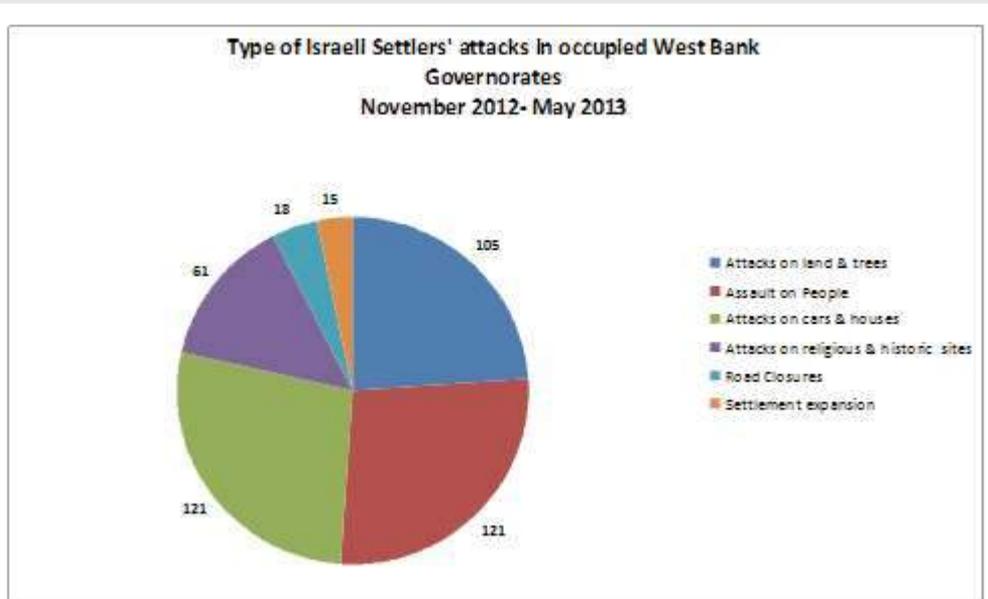
Even more; the attacks carried out by Israeli settlers included defacing religious sites including churches and mosques by burning and writing profane graffiti. It is without doubt that the Israeli settlers find their courage, support, and motivation to carry out their attacks on the Palestinians with the Israeli government and army as the latter spare no effort to protect them, in fact the Israeli army provides cover for their attacks, which are carried out throughout the West Bank governorate especially in Nablus, Jerusalem, Hebron and Bethlehem.

See pie chart 2:



While the figures for the number of attacks are not comprehensive, it reflects a worrying trend, particularly in recent years as such attacks are carried out under the “price tag” slogan, which is a reaction or retaliation on the Israeli settlers’ part against Palestinians for an act the Israeli army takes against settlers while supposedly enforcing the law. The Israeli attacks on Palestinians have varied in types and have perpetrated various forms against Palestinians.

See pie chart 3:



ARIJ (Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem Society) represents 20 years of combined organizational experience in the Palestinian Territory in the fields of economic, social, management of natural resources, water management, sustainable agriculture and political dynamics of development in the area. ARIJ plays an active role in the local community as an advocate for greater cooperation among local institutions as well as international and nongovernmental organizations.

To learn more, please visit www.ARIJ.org

Settlements:

**You will
know**

“the truth

Settlements in general are an expression of a “de facto” policy creating a new reality on the ground of occupied land that the occupying power establishes as residential gatherings for a specific human group, thus forcibly imposing a settler presence on the general human population structure of the area.

In the Palestinian case, the Israeli Occupation has followed such a policy from the day it occupied the land, and managed, throughout the long occupation years, to build a multitude of Jewish housing units, in settlement enclaves, isolated from their spatial environment, and thus establishing Jewish housing units amongst the Palestinian housing areas, with no human connection amongst them, resulting in communities separated in a discriminatory manner.

Written by Fr. Ibrahim Nairouz

The Israeli occupation followed several policies to impose this fact on the ground through:

- Palestinian land confiscation by force and the exploitation of Green and national so called "imiri"¹³ lands.
- Practice of imposed pressure measures such as terrorizing the Palestinian inhabitants and other policies in order to force them to leave their areas for the benefit of Israeli settlement expansion.
- Under the pretext of allowing national settlement growth, several isolated land plots around these settlements were confiscated for such purposes.
- Under the pretext of building new roads to serve the settlers, huge areas of land were confiscated.
- Refusal to provide permits to Arabs to build on their own lands, as part of the settlement expansion plan.

As a result, we ended up with Jewish housing enclaves among the Arab residential areas in those empty available spots that were exploited to be used as Jewish settlements, neither compatible with the general environment nor conforming to the reality on the ground, thus establishing permanent Jewish settlements in constant conflict with the Arab communities.

The Occupation policy is clear to all. It aims and hopes to reach to a situation where the settlement territorial expansions and the growing number of its settler population at the expense of the Palestinian population in its surroundings, will make of the settlements the main sources of employment for Palestinian Labor. Palestinian communities will gradually be reduced into isolated and besieged cantons, surrounded by these settlers, and as such become poor and desperate enclaves/points characterized by ignorance,

13 'Miri'-land means state-land, suitable for agricultural use where the ultimate owner is the state but the usufruct belongs in most cases to individuals.

poverty and difficulty in securing a decent life. At this stage, the Palestinian is faced with two options: either to continue living on his/her land where his/her livelihood is entirely dependent on settlements, or feeling desperation and loss of hope for a life with dignity and decides to leave...

In the midst of this situation, human beings turn to the Almighty, the omnipotent, who is totally aware of the policy of "pulling the rug from under one's feet". Human beings take refuge in He who rejects all types of injustice, and wants humans to live in harmony and dignity, as created in the image and example of the Creator.

Settlements are a human being's sin against his fellow human being, through theft of land, of life, of dignity, of tranquility and of peace, and the imposition of an unjust policy to uproot the original inhabitants of the land and push them to undertake difficult decisions in their lives. Saying "no" to such policies is described as "terrorism" and the Palestinian finds himself/herself in a big dilemma, and lifts up prayers to the Almighty, hoping to find an answer and help.

Moreover, the Occupation chooses to name the settlement with biblical names as a means to create an illusion that these settlements are the return to a beautiful biblical past, reviving these old communities, whose existence is mandated by divine right, and these settlers are the descendants of those mentioned in the Holy Book.

This matter is an expression of stealing the land with a religious cover to convince mainly the Western world that settlements need to be supported using theological and religious explanations to such behavior. This is meant to turn a blind eye to the stealing and defiling of the land and its resources, the oppression of its inhabitants, and rendering the living conditions so harsh and difficult, in order to cause them to leave.

Here comes the role for those faithful in Christ's message, those who reject injustice, theft, abduction and humiliation and who seek to live a beautiful life, where humans live in dignity and whereas Christians knowing the truth behind the written texts, especially those reflected in the Old Testament, we are compelled, more than others to proclaim the Truth.

With the Peace on Earth that the Lord has chosen to prevail, I lift my prayers for His peace, and not the Peace of this World.

Fr. Ibrahim Nairouz

Jesus taught us: “You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free” (John 8:32). He also said: “If the Son has set you free then in truth you are freed.” (John 8:36). Salvation in essence is a message of liberation. The mission of the Church is more comprehensive than the call to believe in Christ, but is more of a holistic approach to spread the spirit of Truth, Justice, Equality, Peace and Reconciliation amongst all of God’s creatures.

It is a call that resonates from the depth of Palestinian suffering to all the Faithful in the World to lift up prayers for the sake of Truth, Justice and Compassion since injustice, land grab and confiscation of human resources under occupation, repression, ethnic cleansing, racial discrimination and isolation, and terrorizing the peaceful people in the land, are matters shunned away by Almighty as they go against the Lord’s Will, that calls upon the Faithful to abolish all forms of injustice in this world. The Church’s message has always been to tell the Truth in life.

Father Ibrahim Nairouz is an Anglican pastor serving in the Nablus area. He is a historian and author of several books about churches and towns among which Aboud. He is committed to interfaith relations and deeply involved in dialogue for life.



Kairos Palestine – *A moment of truth*

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Kairos Palestine is a group of Palestinian Christians who authored “A moment of Truth” – Christian Palestinian’s word to the world about the occupation of Palestine, an expression “of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”, and a call for solidarity in ending over six decades of oppression. The document was published in December 2009.

Kairos Palestine

A Moment of Truth

A word of faith,
hope and love
from the heart of
Palestinian suffering



We proclaim our word based on our Christian faith
and our sense of Palestinian belonging.

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for this is the only way you can help the two
peoples attain justice, peace, security and love.

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