

# SPECIAL EDITION GAZA!

## Woodstock International



*Acts of conscience...  
make a difference.*



International, National, and Community News – From a Left Perspective

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# Cairo Meets the Movement With Tears and Chaos and Exaltation

*Woodstock International* is a voice for upholding freedom and democracy through the written word. Communication and critical thinking are key components to knowledge and understanding. Critical thinking requires access to information.

Corporate-owned newspapers ignore important news items... and much of the news is reported from a capitalist oriented point of view. An alternative news source, *Woodstock International* intends to give greater coverage of news that reflects the reality of our times.

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International activists hold a Palestinian flag at the pyramids in Cairo. (Dana Elborno)

by Philip Weiss (December 31, 2009)

Today the Gaza Freedom March fragmented slightly when in the face of stern opposition from their fellows about 80 people headed off to Gaza on buses, the rest staying in Cairo.

But wait, weren't you trying to go to Gaza? Yes, but it

has been quite a drama. How to state this clearly...

Over the last week, as the international marchers arrived in Egypt, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry made it very clear that it did not want them going into Gaza, and it would arrest them short of that goal. But these 1362 are not tourists or milquetoasts, they are activists;

they were not going to be stopped by any old Ministry, even the ministry of a police state. Many set out by bus and taxi to the Sinai desert, while the 300 members of the French group camped out in front of the French Embassy across from the Cairo Zoo, demanding to go even as they were ringed by riot police.

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# An Odyssey for Justice

by Ramzy Baroud

**T**he recent actions of people from around the world in support of the Palestinian people in Gaza have arguably represented the closest manifestation of international solidarity since the International Brigades against fascism during the Spanish Civil War. A bold assertion?

Admittedly, I may not be as in tune with reality as I should be. Born and raised in a Gaza refugee camp where most refugees felt that no one cared about their plight, it was easy to believe that nothing could possibly break away from the ever tenuous and redundant stances by Arab and other countries — whose acts of solidarity went no further than hollow words of condemnation. The recent noble stances by activists from all over the world therefore seem like an unprecedented act of solidarity, which, dare I believe, indicates the direct mass involvement of civil society as a real party in the ongoing Palestinian struggle for political and human rights.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), when various European powers were turning blind eye to the atrocities committed in Spain, almost 40,000 men and women, representing 52 countries, made the decision to fight fascism. The global consciousness culminating in such a direct, unprecedented action was absolutely baffling considering the lack of powerful communication technology available at the time.

“The 2,800 American volunteers included a black man — Canute Frankson — who was a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He wrote to a friend from Madrid in 1937: “Why am I, a Negro who has fought through these years for the rights of my people, here in Spain today? Because we are no longer an isolated minority group fighting hopelessly against an immense giant. Because...we have joined with, and become an active part of, a great progressive force, on whose shoulders rest the responsibility of saving human civilization from the planned destruction of a small group of degenerates ... Because if we crush fascism here we'll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world from the vicious persecution, wholesale imprisonment, and slaughter which the Jewish people suffered and are suffering under Hitler's fascist heels.”

How pertinent these words are, as one reads with anxiousness, pride and exhilaration the notes and messages that have come in from



Mohammed Baroud — Freedom Fighter

Cairo, El Arish, and Gaza. They convey the support of countless people, who have demonstrated with blood and tears their commitment to humanity in Palestine, and indeed everywhere.

The Gaza Freedom March, a coalition of several groups, consisted of 1,362 activists from more than 40 countries who were on a mission to cross to Gaza and, along with Israeli, Palestinian and international peace activists, to march simultaneously to the Israeli Erez checkpoint. That border point, along with a few others, has completely cut off Palestinians in Gaza from the outside world, leaving 1.5 million people in a frightening state of siege. Gaza has been embroiled in the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe for years due to the Palestinian people's exercise of their democratic rights. The people of Gaza have endured one-sided wars, and have been left to exist in a state of near starvation.

The valiant peace warriors of Viva Palestina have truly set new standards for how far a peace and justice activist is willing to go to back up his/her words with actions. Many millions around the world watched — despite the mainstream media's shameless disregard of the unfolding drama — as nearly 500 activists and their 200 vehicles, laden with badly needed medical supplies for besieged Gaza, took off on a historic odyssey to break the siege. Just as they neared Gaza, they were forced by the Egyptian government to backtrack due to a technicality, and then began an arduous journey across the desert and sea and several countries. And as they approached Gaza again, in the Egyptian

port of El Arish, they were blocked and dozens were left injured.

The Gaza Freedom March was similarly met with intimidation, assaults, and violence.

These are not Palestinians, but internationals. From Malaysia to South Africa, from the UK to the U.S., men, women, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, people of different cultural and political backgrounds showed themselves as unified in their belief in justice and human rights. While Palestine has always enjoyed universal solidarity, with many fearless activists — who can forget Rachel Corrie? — a collective action of this magnitude and of this level of commitment is a new addition to a conflict that has been reduced over time to that of beleaguered Palestinians and a militarily powerful Israel.

The Gaza Freedom March, Viva Palestina, the Free Gaza Movement, and others are redefining the conventional discourse pertaining to the Middle East's most intricate and protracted conflict. Civil society is not a group of NGOs to be strategically funded and manipulated by Western governments, but encompasses powerful, self-assured and truly representative communities from all over the world; people can be united beyond religion and ideology, and collectively cross continents, seas and deserts to put their beliefs into action.

The activists' ability to overcome the shameful silence of the mainstream media also highlights the importance of alternative media as the sin-

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## BOOK REVIEW

### My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: *Gaza's Untold Story*

by Mamoon Alabbasi — London

**O**ne year on since Israel's criminally-insane war on Gaza, many are still unaware of the roots of the 'conflict' and the plight of the Palestinian people. Israel would like to have us believe that its latest onslaught was a direct response to resistance rockets or even Hamas's democratic accession to power, forgetting that both of which came into existence as a response to Israeli policies.

But even those of us who have seen the true light, and are no longer deceived by the barrage of 'flat earth news', sometimes forget - if we were ever aware of - the depth and complexity of the tragedy.

And that is the gap in understanding that veteran American-Palestinian author Ramzy Baroud seeks to fill in his latest book “My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story.”

In our preoccupation with the Goldstone report (among other UN probes), human rights groups assessments, war crimes allegations, high civilian casualties, UNRWA statistics, official statements here and there, we become overwhelmed with information that makes many of us lose sight of context.

And many of those who do take a step back to get a clearer picture of why such things are happening tend to stop at 1967; Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories. Yet for Palestinians, and for those in Gaza in particular, the tragedy goes back to 1948; dispossession.

For those who are serious about achieving peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, the issue of Palestinian refugees must be duly addressed.

Baroud's book provides an exceptional understanding of that very topic, beautifully combining the personal experiences of Palestinians (his family as one example, with a special focus on his father) with that of their collective history - in English.

The book shows us an example of the human face to that suffering at a time we have grown accustomed to debating cold facts and figures, and interpretations of humanitarian and international law.

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***“It would behoove the world to become used to this fact: that without a just solution to the Palestine tragedy, there can be no stable peace in the Middle East.” – King Hussein I***

# Palestine Vivra! The French Heroes of the Gaza Freedom March

By Emily Ratner

**A** great many heroes have emerged from the Gaza Freedom March's efforts in Cairo, 1,362 internationals from 43 countries have come to demand an end to the Israeli siege on Gaza. The South African delegation has inspired us all by facilitating the drafting of the Cairo Declaration to End Israeli Apartheid, a document that reaffirms our commitment to the struggle for Palestinian liberation and self-determination and offers a concrete plan for moving forward. Small groups have flown the Palestinian flag from atop the Cairo Tower and one of the pyramids.



Many delegates refused the 100 seats on two buses to Gaza that painted our historic political efforts here as yet another token humanitarian aid trip. We will all leave Cairo with far more hope, wisdom, and collective power than we had when we arrived.

Of all of the inspiring stories I have witnessed in the days I have spent in Egypt, the story of the French delegation remains a beacon in the darkening sky over the Sinai that separates us from Gaza. We tell their story again and again, engraving it into our hearts as a sign of how much we can accomplish when we stand together.

Organized by Euro Palestine, the French delegation numbers over 300. Their members are from all over France, and they have been preparing for the March for months. Euro Palestine and their partners held regional meetings every week to ensure that delegates would have plenty of time to discuss their plans for the trip to Gaza, how to bring their humanitarian aid to Cairo, and what the group would do if they were denied passage at the Rafah border. Some of their members have told me that in all of their strategizing, they never considered the possibility of being barred from leaving Cairo.

While the rest of us planned to meet our border-bound buses on January 28th, the French arrived to their embassy the night before, where their buses were expected at 7pm. They waited on

the sidewalk of the busy Giza/Charles de Gaulle Street, their bags and tents in tow, but the buses never showed. All of a sudden one of the main organizers shouted "Onn'yva!" ("Here we go!") and, grabbing the hand of a woman next to him, ran straight into the heavy traffic of Giza Street. Without even thinking, hundreds of delegates dashed into the street, followed by Egyptian cats and dogs caught up in the excitement. Moroccan French activist Hamid Rabhi, a Muslim from Beaune, recalls these moments with a shine in his eyes, pausing to pull smoke from his shisha. "And then I understand," he says, "This is the beginning of the adventure."

The traffic on Giza Street was truly terrifying, but the French refused to move, holding the street for over an hour. Finally the police convinced them to move to the sidewalk, promising their buses would arrive soon if the hundreds would only allow traffic to pass. The French moved to the curb and soon began pulling sleeping bags and tents from their luggage, forming the camp we would come to call the "Giza Strip." Three rows of riot police guarded the narrow encampment of 300 on all sides, and more than 40 military trucks waited across the street, perhaps to bring the police back to their stations, or maybe to arrest the protesters and deport them back to France. "That first night was the worst," Hamid says, "We were forbidden to come and go. I think they were testing us, to see if we were serious." Over the coming days, the French would prove just how serious they were.

As negotiations between the Gaza Freedom March and the Egyptian Foreign Ministry continued to deteriorate, a growing number of us looked to the French as a beautiful vision of what our movement can be. The French delegation reached all decisions by consensus and with remarkable speed; yet, they remained flexible enough to consider new ideas in smaller groups, and to take on smaller-scale actions while still honoring the vision of the whole. Upon hearing that four activists had raced an enormous Palestinian flag up the side of one of the pyramids, a group of about twenty-five French quickly planned their own action at the pyramid, this time bringing a little street theater to passersby.

On a cool, beautiful afternoon at Egypt's top tourist attraction, two dozen French "tourists" encircle the unexpected pyramid, dancing and prancing as they close in on their prey. And then, disaster! An elderly French woman collapses to Giza's sand. As

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## Cairo from the Inside Out: a Visceral Experience

**F**ear and adrenalin coursed through my system — my legs grew weak, my stomach uneasy. Throughout our time in Cairo, my system did not rest. There was no question that we were in a police state. Everywhere I turned, I saw soldiers with rifles. And, as my eyes grew accustomed to this landscape of 20 million people, I noted the undercover cops and thugs. They were stationed everywhere: inside our hotels; in our meetings; outside our hotels; and on the streets. When convenient, they barricaded many of us in our hotels.

They watched our every move. They asked cab drivers where we were going. They followed many of us around. As one man on the street told me, "I know where you are going. I am part of secret service. We have been watching you. I know everything that goes on in my city."

Repression was in the air. I saw fear in the eyes of the people, and in their silence, I heard their unwillingness to speak about their government. At every demonstration I attended, my system froze with the arrival of the wired-windowed, imposing, evergreen paddy wagons that carried the riot police with their visored-helmets, shields, and batons. The only question in my mind was if, and when, their higher-ups were going to give the command to use their force.

Would it be on us, the internationals? When I asked an officer this question, he saw my fear, and answered honestly, with compassion, "I don't know. It's 50-50." Or, would they reserve their force for Galloway and Viva Palestina—which they did. It felt like only a matter of time. And, when would they turn their force on their own Egyptian citizens? Would they haunt those who silently gave us the peace sign? Would they punish those who bravely came near us and said, "*Shukron, thank you, for doing what you are doing?*"

To avoid causing harm, I quickly learned how to lock eyes with people on the street, smile, and nod to say, "*Hello. I understand your situation; I am sorry. And, afwan, you are so welcome.*"

Helaine Meisler was part of the Gaza Freedom March and one of the Hunger Strikers. She went from Woodstock, NY to the West Bank and then to Cairo with her son Jesse, her sister-in-law Hope and her husband Nic. Helaine is a learning specialist and a college counselor. You can reach her at [helainemeisler@yahoo.com](mailto:helainemeisler@yahoo.com)

*"We must expel Arabs and take their places." – David Ben Gurion, 1937*

## Cairo Nights And Daze

by Hope Brustein

Cairo nights and daze swirl into one  
Smoke curling from hookah bars  
With scents of cherry

There is no up or down  
In elevators stuck between floors  
Of a world off of its axis

A world of Walls, Checkpoints  
Passports, Stamps, Guard towers  
Barbed wire, Lists, Borders

And the air sings Free Gaza  
The Nile will not see candles tonight  
They smolder and burn close to the feluccas  
And the air sings Free Gaza  
Floating up and catching just-washed sheets  
Drying from balconies  
Viva Palestina making sail

Oh Gaza  
They will not let us come to you  
Oh Gaza

They bomb tunnels and threaten salt water floods  
Our tears mix with desert  
And the air sings Free Gaza  
And the air sings Free Gaza

Three deep, Six deep  
Young men with black batons and helmets  
Scenery in a country silenced  
Young women in buses  
Illegal smiles and contraband peace signs  
Veiled and covered but not blinded  
By the dust storms blowing to the north

Oh Gaza  
They will not let us come to you  
Oh Gaza

The lamb cooks on spits  
Simmers in stews, scented with saffron  
Flavored with onion  
The smoke acrid and sweet  
How many will go hungry  
In Gaza tonight?

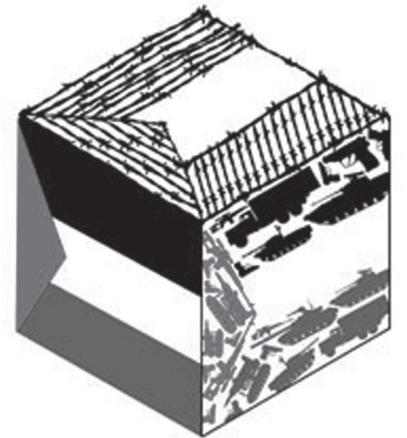
And the air sings Free Gaza  
1360 voices in a cacophony of sounds  
An international traffic jam  
Along the road to Al Arish  
At the Rafah border crossing  
Heralding a day when the coral pink museum  
Houses relics from the 21st century  
Tears preserved in cement settlements  
Eyes shrouded in cloth that swaddled babies  
killed in Cast Lead

Hands lifting signs made before sunrise in  
Lotus Hotel rooms  
Free Gaza Free Gaza Freedom March  
Free Gaza Free Gaza Free Gaza Free

## What You Don't Know About Gaza

by Rashid Khalidi

**NEARLY** everything you've been led to believe about Gaza is wrong. Below are a few essential points that seem to be missing from the conversation, much of which has taken place in the press, about Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip.



**THE GAZANS** Most of the people living in Gaza are not there by choice. The majority of the 1.5 million people crammed into the roughly 140 square miles of the Gaza Strip belong to families that came from towns and villages outside Gaza like Ashkelon and Beersheba. They were driven to Gaza by the Israeli Army in 1948.

**THE OCCUPATION** The Gazans have lived under Israeli occupation since the Six-Day War in 1967. Israel is still widely considered to be an occupying power, even though it removed its troops and settlers from the Strip in 2005. Israel still controls access to the area, imports and exports, and the movement of people in and out. Israel has control over Gaza's air space and sea coast, and its forces enter the area at will. As the occupying power, Israel has the responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to see to the welfare of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip.

**THE BLOCKADE** Israel's blockade of the Strip, with the support of the United States and the European Union, has grown increasingly stringent since Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006. Fuel, electricity, imports, exports, and the movement of people in and out of the Strip have been slowly choked off, leading to life-threatening problems of sanitation, health, water supply, and transportation.

The blockade has subjected many to unemployment, penury and malnutrition. This amounts to the collective punishment — with the tacit support of the United States — of a civilian population for exercising its democratic rights.

**THE CEASE-FIRE** Lifting the blockade, along with a cessation of rocket fire, was one of the key terms of the June cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. This accord led to a reduction in rockets fired from Gaza from hundreds in May and June to a total of less than 20 in the subsequent four months (according to Israeli government figures). The cease-fire broke down when Israeli forces launched major air and ground attacks in early November; six Hamas operatives were reported killed.

**WAR CRIMES** The targeting of civilians, whether by Hamas or by Israel, is potentially a war crime. Every human life is precious. But the numbers speak for themselves: Nearly 700 Palestinians, most of them civilians, have been killed since the conflict broke out at the end of last year. In contrast, there have been around a dozen Israelis killed, many of them soldiers. Negotiation is a much more effective way to deal with rockets and other forms of violence. This might have been able to happen had Israel fulfilled the terms of the June cease-fire and lifted its blockade of the Gaza Strip.

This war on the people of Gaza isn't really about rockets. Nor is it about "restoring Israel's deterrence," as the Israeli press might have you believe. Far more revealing are the words of Moshe Yaalon, then the Israeli Defense Forces chief of staff, in 2002: "The Palestinians must be made to understand in the deepest recesses of their consciousness that they are a defeated people."

**Rashid Khalidi, a professor of Arab studies at Columbia, is the author of the forthcoming. *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East.***

*"Remember the solidarity shown to Palestine here and everywhere... and remember also that there is a cause to which many people have committed themselves, difficulties and terrible obstacles notwithstanding. Why? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights."*

— Edward Said

# The Boy in the Rubble and Gaza's Tour of Horror

## Eyewitness report from Gaza

**S**ome of the Gaza Freedom Marchers entered Gaza a few days ago. Australian Donna Mulhern was one of them and here's her moving report of life in Gaza:

He wasn't like the other boys I met here in Gaza today. This boy, balanced on a piece of concrete jutting out of a high mound of rubble, had his arms folded and just looked at us.

Other boys run towards you and cry, "Hallo mister," and they laugh, make funny poses for the camera, and carry on. But the boy on the rubble was still. He stared in silence. His face defiant. His large, dark eyes piercing. He stood as though he was waiting. Waiting for us to do something perhaps, to say something. Just waiting.

The boy, perhaps nine or ten years old, was standing on wreckage where his house used to be. Now his family camps in a tent in the midst of the smashed concrete and tangled iron. He is no doubt waiting for his home to be rebuilt, but the siege of Gaza means his family cannot access the raw materials required to do so. "How can we rebuild when we haven't had a sack of cement in four years?" one head of an NGO asked us.

Our group, a contingent of the Gaza Freedom March, was on a tour of Gaza's neighborhoods devastated by the Israel Defence Forces attack on Gaza this time last year. Operation Cast Lead killed about 1400 people, 288 of them children and destroyed more than 3,500 homes.

This was unlike your average city tour; today the commentary was chilling, the scenes raising more questions, creating even more tears. "You can see where three houses used to be," our guide says pointing to a large empty space along a busy street.

"Here is the Schiffo Hospital where 700 victims were brought on the first night of the attack. Those factories over there are closed because of the siege. And up ahead a school." He points to a massive mess of concrete and steel where 1000 children used to go to learn. "And on your right a tall apartment tower ripped in two by an Israeli missile, 15 innocents dead at this spot, and in this sports gym 50 dead, and here you can see more tents where the families are sleeping where their houses used to be, and in this neighborhood there were 200 killed." And so it goes, on and on.

As we walked through the remains of a bombed out sports/entertainment complex right on Gaza's beachfront, Ahmed, our guide – a smartly dressed, well spoken young man – wanted to tell us the story of Houda Ralia. A girl of nine, she was swimming at the beach when missiles struck, Houda rushed back to her family who was on the beach. She saw them killed right in front of her. Mother, father, and four brothers.

After an hour of proving this detailed account of last year's attack, Ahmed sighed, "However long we talk about the suffering, it will never be long enough."

It's rainy, windy, and cold here; the families in tents have a winter to endure and, because of the siege, no prospect to be in a home by next winter.

Hours after I saw him, I still feel the stare of the boy on the rubble – the boy who is not playful with us because he's angry, he's tired, and he's homeless. His stare haunts me because I know that he knows.

He knows the reason he won't have a home by next winter is because the international community has allowed the siege of Gaza,

**"How can we rebuild when we haven't had a sack of cement in four years?" one head of an NGO asked us.**

an illegal and morally reprehensible blockade to continue with barely a comment from our political leaders. UN Human Rights Rapporteur for Palestine, Richard Falk, says that because there has been no meaningful international pressure coming from governments it is up to civil society, you and me, to step in.

There are many reasons we should step in, because of the 288 children killed last year, the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe caused by the siege, the physical and mental trauma of the population, but also for the boy in the rubble.

The boy in the rubble is waiting. Until he feels some hope, he will maintain his defiant stance, his challenging stare.

He wants to be playful again, but he's waiting for us to end the silence that has left his community in a state of constant struggle.

This little boy from Gaza city, living in a tent surrounded by the rubble where his house used to be, folds his arms and stares in our direction because he is waiting for us to act.

May his eyes haunt us until we do.





## The Orchard

by Linda Morselli

The prologue of deceit  
now holds us captive  
within borders of greed.

How cruel to be punished  
for such quenchless thirst!

Wandering often with no direction.

Trying to sow the seeds of change,

Yet ... all too often  
they fall upon  
detached soil.

Longing for a gust of wind  
to carry just one to fertile ground.

Hoping to bear witness  
to the light that shall nourish it.

Maybe ...  
the epitaph of the present  
will give birth to a  
new humanity.

Then you and I will embrace  
in the orchard of peace.

# My Husband Jailed for Protesting Israel's Wall

by Majida Abu Rahmah

**O**n International Human Rights Day in 2008, my husband Abdallah Abu Rahmah was in Berlin receiving a medal from the World Association for Human Rights. Last year on the same day, 10 December, Abdallah was taken away at 2 AM by Israeli soldiers who broke into our West Bank home. Abdallah was arrested for the same reasons he received the prize -- his nonviolent struggle for justice, equality, and peace in Palestine/Israel.

My husband is a school teacher and farmer from the Palestinian village of Bilin. When Israel built its apartheid wall here, it separated Bilin from more than half of its land, in order to facilitate the expansion of the illegal settlement Mattityahu East. In response, Abdallah and fellow villagers began a campaign of nonviolent resistance. Every Friday for the past five years, we've marched, with Israeli and international supporters, to protest the theft of our land and livelihoods.

In September, 2007, Israel's Supreme Court ruled that the route of the wall in Bilin was illegal and should be changed. Over two years later, the wall remains, unmoved. Many were discouraged, but Abdallah told them that the pressure of our campaign and international support could bring down the wall.

As the grassroots struggle grows here, the efforts to end our actions have intensified. The army has been instructed to use weapons against the protesters and arrest participants. Our beloved friend, Bassem Abu Rahmah, was murdered by Israeli soldiers as

he tried to talk with them, while participating in a demonstration. Seventy-seven others have been arrested in violent night raids.

Among the other arrestees is Abdallah's cousin, Adeeb Abu Rahmah, who, like Abdallah, never missed a demonstration and was never violent. Adeeb, a father of nine, has been in prison for five months, with no end in sight. Since the first time our home was invaded, our seven-year-old daughter Luma has been waking up screaming, and five-year-old Layan has been wetting her bed. Only our nine-month-old son Laith still smiles and giggles; but I cry when he calls for his father.

Leaders like former President Jimmy Carter and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of the leaders of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, have visited our village. They stood with Abdallah at Bassem's grave last August. Tutu told us, "Just as a simple man named Gandhi led the successful nonviolent struggle in India and simple people such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King led the struggle for civil rights in the United States, simple people here in Bilin are leading a nonviolent struggle that will bring them their freedom."

The afternoon before his arrest, Abdallah prepared a speech to be read on his behalf to the World Association for Human Rights since Israel would not allow him to travel to Germany for the ceremony. Abdallah wrote:

"I wish I could be with you to share in the joy of our colleagues receiving this year's prize and to cel-

brate with you the 20th anniversary of the removal of the Berlin Wall. But the occupation not only robs us of statehood, land, and so often of our lives, it also deprives us of many beautiful moments."

"My mother passed away in a hospital in occupied East Jerusalem, our historic capital, in August, but the Israeli occupation refused me a permit to be with her. An Israeli friend held a mobile phone to my mother's ear so that I could say goodbye to her and thank her for all the love she has given me. In the darkness of all these difficulties the occupation imposes on us, the solidarity of justice-seeking people like you all over the world gives us strength."

"Unlike Israel, we have no nuclear weapons, and no army, but we do not want or need those things. With your support and the justice of our cause, we will bring down Israel's apartheid wall."

Twelve hours after Abdallah was taken to a military jail from our home, I listened as President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize and spoke of "the men and women around the world who have been jailed and beaten in the pursuit of justice." I thought of Bassem, Adeeb, and my husband, and wondered if President Obama will take action to support our struggle for freedom.

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**Majida Abu Rahmah is a schoolteacher for children with special needs from the village of Bilin in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. This article originally appeared in The Huffington Post.**



# No Army, No Prison and No Wall Can Stop Us

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah,  
The Electronic Intifada, January 7, 2010**

To all our friends,

I mark the beginning of the new decade imprisoned in a military detention camp. Nevertheless, from within the occupation's holding cell I meet the New Year with determination and hope.

I know that Israel's military campaign to imprison the leadership of the Palestinian popular struggle shows that our nonviolent struggle is effective. The occupation is threatened by our growing movement and is therefore trying to shut us down. What Israel's leaders do not understand is that popular struggle cannot be stopped by our imprisonment.

Whether we are confined in the open-air prison that Gaza has been transformed into, in military prisons in the West Bank, or in our own villages surrounded by the apartheid wall, arrests and persecution do not weaken us. They only strengthen our commitment to turning 2010 into a year of liberation through unarmed grassroots resistance to the occupation.

The price I and many others pay in freedom does not deter us. I wish that my two young daughters and baby son would not have to pay this price together with me. But for my son and daughters, for their future, we must continue our struggle for freedom.

This year, the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee will expand on the achievements of 2009, a year in which you amplified our popular demonstrations in Palestine with international boycott campaigns and international legal actions under universal jurisdiction.

In my village, Bilin, Israeli tycoon, Lev Leviev and Africa-Israel, the corporation he controls, are implicated in illegal construction of settlements on our stolen land, as well as the lands of many other Palestinian villages and cities. Adalah-NY is leading an international campaign to show Leviev that war crimes have their price.

Our village has sued two Canadian companies for their role in the construction and marketing of new settlement units on village land cut off by Israel's Apartheid Wall. The legal proceedings in this precedent-setting case began in the Canadian courts last summer and are ongoing.

Bilin has become the graveyard of Israeli real estate empires. One after another, these companies are approaching bankruptcy



**Abdallah Abu Rahmah being arrested by Israeli soldiers at a demonstration in Bilin in 2005.**  
(Oren Ziv/ActiveStills)

as the costs of building on stolen Palestinian land are driven higher than the profits.

Unlike Israel, we have no nuclear weapons or army, but we do not need them. The justness of our cause earns us your support. No army, no prison, and no wall can stop us.

Yours,

Abdallah Abu Rahmah

From the Ofer Military Detention Camp

**Abdallah Abu Rahmah is a schoolteacher and nonviolent activist from Bilin. He is currently being held in an Israeli prison after he was arrested on International Human Rights Day, at 2AM on 10 December 2009, by Israeli occupation forces.**

## Palestine Vivra!... *continued from page 3*

Egyptian police rush to her aid, the pyramid becomes a stage as eight activists race up its four faces, converging on one side as they spread a twelve-foot by six-foot Palestinian flag, proudly displayed before a cheering crowd of hundreds. After fifteen full minutes, the police finally notice the cause of the excitement and rapidly climb the pyramid, becoming complicit in the highly illegal act of trespassing on one of the seven wonders of the world. Our French heroes know they cannot hold their stage for long, and so they bundle the flag into a ball and launch it into the sky, and then follow the flag as it drops to the ground, diving to the sand where they link arms and sit in a circle atop the flag, insistent that the red, black, green, and white will return with them to their camp at the French Embassy. When they do return to Giza Strip, not a single one has been arrested for their act, and the flag has come back with them as well. A few hours later a video of the entire action is posted to their website, [www.europalestine.fr](http://www.europalestine.fr), which has been hacked repeatedly by pro-Israeli techies (another sign of how powerful the French's efforts have been!). By the next day, delegation members are distributing posters and postcards featuring an image of their comrades on the pyramid, the Palestinian flag between them, with the title "Gaza Freedom March in Cairo" in both English and Arabic. The same image has since run on the front page of newspapers in Egypt, Kuwait, Yemen, and throughout the Arab world.

The French have brought a much-needed sense of levity to our difficult situation here in Cairo. Their creativity is endless: When non-French campers were denied the use of the embassy's bathrooms, the French began to chant "Toilet pour tous!" (Toilets for all!). Our French friends have also proved to be some of our bravest members: As dozens rushed to the aid of protesters being beaten and dragged by Egyptian police during our December 31st protest, the French, and particularly the French Muslims, were some of the strongest in their defiance of police violence. These same French Muslim brothers reminded us all of the honor and beauty in this struggle when they knelt in front of lines of riot police to pray at noon during the same demonstration. The next day, hundreds of activists followed the lead of the French when their delegation called for a protest at the Israeli Embassy, demanding that we keep our focus on the government that truly holds the power over the people of Gaza.

We were all sad to see the end of the French camp on January 1st. Their encampment had become a place of tremendous comfort for the rest of the Gaza Freedom Marchers, despite the hundreds of riot police that never left the borders of the Giza Strip. Many of us would visit in the night to feel the remarkable solidarity that reverberated from the most famous pavement in the world. And as more than 100 French delegates departed for Paris on January 2nd,

*continued on page 15 ...*

*"I should much rather see Jews living together with the Arabs on the basis of living together in peace than the creation of a Jewish state . . . . my awareness of the essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state, with borders, an army, and a measure of temporal power, no matter how modest. I am afraid of the inner damage Judaism will sustain—especially from the development of a narrow nationalism within our own ranks . . . . we are no longer the Jews of the Maccabee period. A return to a nation in the political sense of the word, would be equivalent to turning away from the spiritualization of our community, which we owe to the genius of our prophets."*

*— Albert Einstein in Ideas and Opinions, 1954*

# Cairo Blog Entries

The story of the Gaza Freedom March is best told by those who were in it and wrote about it while it was unfolding. These accounts have been excerpted from: <http://www.hudsonogaza.blogspot.com>.

## Dog Tired and Still in Cairo (Fred Nagel):

We have arrived to a total clampdown on all travel out of Cairo towards Gaza. Lots of police and intimidating tactics. They do not want us to demonstrate. But Code Pink will not be stopped and we have had two rallies. The one last night just grew and grew, with people from all over the world joining in. The authorities stop every plan that is made, but we have learned to improvise. We were stopped from taking boats on the Nile for a candlelight vigil. Instead, we held a rally, one of the most moving I have been in for some time. People from around the world, different languages, all chanting the same thing: "Break the siege of Gaza."

The French are now camped outside their embassy with thousands of troops surrounding them. We bought coffee and food and handed it to the people encamped there, about 250. Really a wonderful action. I doubt that it has been reported in the US.

## A Love Letter to Gaza (Hope Brustein):

It is hard to see far into the future from the smog that covers Cairo. On the ground it looks like a traffic jam of humanity and sounds like a mad symphony of horns. At the end of the day, I cannot wash Cairo off my skin.

Simply, I DO NOT WANT TO BE IN CAIRO. I want to be in Gaza. I am not alone. The 1,362 Internationals from 43 countries should be in Gaza. We came to Cairo only because it is our transit point to the Rafah boarder crossing into Gaza. We stay in Cairo only because the Egyptian government has denied us entry, first in Gaza, then even to the crossing, then also to the town of Al Arish near the border crossing, and now even outside of Cairo...

Did you know that you are not allowed to bring love letters to Gaza? You can not deliver your heart, or computers, or children's crayons, or supplies. You cannot walk side-by-side with Gazans to speak to the world about ending the siege. You are not allowed to tell why you came all this way from France, the U.S., South Africa, Australia, Spain.

No, in the world of Obama, Netanyahu, and Mubarek, you cannot deliver love letters to Gaza! So we write our love letter in Cairo and send it to you with hopes you will spread it everywhere.

## Not Quite in Gaza (Fred Nagel):

Today's action was really hard to pull off. The Lotus Hotel was blockaded by police, and groups of three or more were not allowed on the sidewalks. Communications were terrible and plans kept changing. But at 10:00 AM about 250 took to the street in a large square by the National Museum, stopping all traffic. Very soon, things got tense and the pressure of people crowded together caused some to fall. We were forced ahead, over the people who were sitting. Arms, legs, screams. There was a woman who couldn't get up after she had been stepped on. She was screaming for her life...

I talked to some Muslim protesters afterwards, and they thought they had been targeted for bad treatment. But the scene in the road was tough for everyone. Anyone infirm to start with faced some real danger. Not what most of the GFM had really signed up for. There were about 5 who needed and got medical attention.

## Endorsement from Congressman Hinchey



**Congressman Maurice D. Hinchey**  
Representing New York's 22nd Congressional District

December 22, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is in support of the peace delegation that is leading the Freedom March, some of whom are constituents of mine. I understand that the delegation is seeking approval to enter into Palestine.

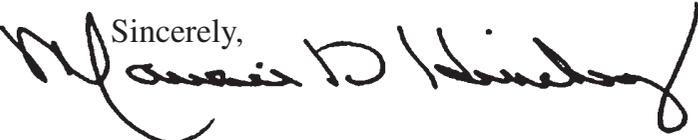
The purpose of the delegation is to help resolve the disputes between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. The delegation aims to facilitate a meaningful process that will result in a resolution that will establish a framework for peace in the Middle East. Such a resolution will take into consideration both the needs of Israel and Palestine while adhering to the protection of natural rights endowed to all people and all nations.

One of the means the delegation will use to help develop a resolution is through humanitarian aid. The delegation plans to deliver much-needed medical aid, school supplies, and winter jackets for children in Palestine.

I respectfully ask that you consider allowing the delegation to pass into Palestinian borders in order to promote a peaceful resolution between Israel and Palestine in addition providing humanitarian aid.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards.

Sincerely,  
  
Maurice D. Hinchey

## Hunger Strikers in Cairo (Nic Abramson):

Hedy Epstein, 85, a Holocaust survivor, and a Gaza Freedom Marcher, announced on December 26 that she would begin a hunger strike in solidarity with the people of Gaza. Of the approximately 25-30 people who have joined her, are nine of our own Hudson to Gaza affinity group: Helaine, Cheryl, Pia, Tarak, Laurie, Jen, Linda, Maurizio, and Nic. Today, January 1, is the fifth day of our fasts. On December 28, we gathered, along with 200 other GFM'ers, on the steps of the Society of Journalists to announce our Hunger strike with the following statement:

We are doing this hunger strike in solidarity with the Palestinian

People of Gaza who are hungry for food, shelter, and, most of all, for their freedom. We call upon people everywhere to join us in short fasts and other non violent actions to help end the siege of Gaza.

## United, We Will Never Be Defeated (Fred Nagel):

In the beginning, when we arrived in Egypt and couldn't go to Gaza, we all thought that the US interests had won. We had spent a lot of energy and money to make this trip, all for nothing. But sometimes the best laid imperial plans backfire. Instead of sending us to Gaza where we would be in small groups touring the war torn areas, we were concentrated and angry, 1,362 anti-apartheid activist; with nothing to do in Cairo.

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## Cairo Meets

... continued from page 2

After hunger strikes and demos and international press, and supposedly too the intervention of the president's clement wife Suzanne Mubarak, the Egyptians relented yesterday and said, "Well 100 of you can go in, two busfuls." I heard about this first as a rumor last night at an Egyptian-led rally at the Journalists Syndicate building in opposition to Bibi Netanyahu's visit to Hosni Mubarak (*Down Down Hosni Mubarak!*), and already many of us were wondering, who would get the call? Code Pink, the antiwar group that has led the organizing, claimed victory and sent out a bulletin to delegations to select the two or three members who could go. Some delegations duly nominated representatives. But the decision set off an angry and wrenching round of all-night meetings, some of them in hotel stairwells, with many coming out against the deal. Even the Gaza Freedom March steering committee voted against the slice of bread that was being offered, instead of the whole loaf.

Then, I gather, the Egyptians made the deal even more problematic by issuing a statement saying that the 100 peaceful people were being allowed to go to Gaza, implying that the rest of us were hooligans.

Still, Code Pink went forward with its plan, and at 6:30 this morning the lucky few gathered on a sidewalk on Ramses Street near the bus station. Over the next 4 hours, I witnessed agony and torment, and said a secret blessing that I had not tried to get on the buses last night. A crowd of those opposed to the 100 stood outside barricades set up around the buses and shouted "All or none!" and "Get off the Bus!" It turned out that they had many confederates among the 100 who boarded the buses—confederates who at a signal marched off the buses, some giving heroic speeches.

The people staying on the buses leaned out the doors to say that the Gazans wanted them to come so as to join their march to the Israeli border on the 31st. But they wavered. Indeed, you saw some of the most resolute activists on the planet—Bernardine Dohrn, the law professor and former member of the Weather Underground; Ali Abunimah of Electronic Intifada; and Donna Mulhearn, an Australian woman who was a human shield during the beginning of the Iraq war, board the bus and get it off it, and then board it again and get off it, and on and on.

Abunimah, who had been roughed up by security at the American Embassy yesterday, told me it was the hardest decision he'd ever had to make. It was an individual decision; he had no clarity on it, and no one could tell you what to do, and he respected the decisions of all parties. Mulhearn said that going to Iraq in 2003 had been easy

# Operation Cast Lead



Photo: Anne Paxton

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb at a demonstration outside the French Embassy in Cairo.

**O**peration Cast Lead made clear that the sixty year Israeli military siege of the people of Palestine has increased in brutality and ferocity. Sixty-years of evidence that includes eye-witness reports; analysis of video, satellite and photographic images; medical reports; forensic analysis of weapons and ammunition remnants; and the written observations and testimony of thousands of witnesses from Palestine, Israel, and the international community, reveal a continual pattern of continuous assault that has very little to do with Israel's claim of 'security'. Rather, the end game is creating 'facts on the ground' that establish a Jewish state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, which limits Palestinians to 20% of the national population. Israel employs forced displacement; blockade; air strike; land mines; rubber bullets; white phosphorous; dime bombs; torture, beating and sexual humiliation; arbitrary arrest and administrative detention of minors and adults; water and land theft; Jewish only roads; hundreds of military checkpoints; security fences; nightly incursions; human shields; collaborators;

compared to this; for that choice was in the face of physical danger and she would take that any day, this was in the face of moral doubt. As for the Egyptian statement that only hooligans were staying behind in Cairo, she said it was a lie, she would say so on her blog, and the people who were against anyone going on that basis were giving the Egyptian security state power. Dohrn said that the principle of "All or none" was a miserable one for activist politics. You always took what you could get and kept fighting for more. A European man

deportation; permit systems; denial of access to economic opportunity; health care; culture and education; targeting of sewage and electricity plants and water installations; uprooting of thousands of trees and the destruction of thousands of homes, to force the remaining Palestinian population into small enclosed areas that can only be described as open air prisons. Ariel Sharon described these enclaves designated as the future Palestinian State, as 'bantustans'. In short, all these tactics amount to what is considered the crime of apartheid for the sake of creating a state that awards national and civil privileges based on Jewish identity while confining the excess non-Jewish population to their own 'homeland'. This is the ugly truth that is so hard for Jewish people and millions of so-called Christian Zionists to face. Anyone who spends a day in Palestinian territories sees this truth immediately. The so-called two state solution which is based on this vision of reality is hardly viable or legal. People will not and cannot endure oppression forever. Our own history should teach us this lesson. The question is, how does an oppressed people change the situation on the ground and open history to new possibilities.

in a red keffiyeh screamed at her that she was serving the fascisti. Her partner Bill Ayers gently confronted him and asked him why he was so out of control. Between getting on and off the bus, Dohrn, who wore a flower in her hair, said that she didn't like the absolutist certainty of the people on the other side of the police barricades, and having been in the Weather Underground, she knew something about absolutist feeling.

In the end, Dohrn and Abunimah got off the bus. Mulhearn stayed on, I heard. A big reason for them

Those who both decry Palestinian armed resistance and the option of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) can't have it both ways. Once you accept the fact that Israel's behavior toward Palestinians falls into the category of the crime of apartheid, BDS is the logical and ethical non-violent response. If any other state was engaged in similar behavior, BDS would be an acceptable form of resistance, as it was in the case of South Africa. Forty years of dialogue and negotiation with Israelis and Jews clearly has not worked to advance the cause of self-determination for Palestinians. The situation on the ground is far worse than ever before. The two state solution and all the peace plans and road maps have been undermined by the systematic effort to enclose Palestinians in bantustans and deny them civil and national rights. In this context, further efforts at dialogue only benefit those with privilege, unless they are accompanied by strategies of resistance to the systematic inequality Palestinians face on a daily basis.

While J Street and associated partners are a much appreciated alternative voice within the Jewish community to the AIPAC machine, they have thus far failed to address the concerns nor have they partnered with Palestinians in their own struggle for human and equal rights. As Jews, we have to recognize that we are not going to be the ones who determine the direction of the Palestinian nonviolent struggle for freedom. What we can and should do, is find ways of acting in solidarity with that struggle by joining the Palestinian initiated international effort to use Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions to force Israel to comply with international law and end the siege of Gaza and the illegal occupation of Palestine. We can also support those within Israel who are resisting the oppressive actions of their own state. We cannot truly work on this issue without understanding the meaning of resistance in our lives. For Jews, I believe resistance requires serious study and practice of the Torah of Nonviolence. Nonviolence is the only way forward. Accepting the violence perpetrated against Palestinians will destroy our beautiful tradition.

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was a call that Abunimah had with leaders of civil society in Gaza, who said, "if this is going to hurt the movement, don't come. We will march without you." (The message, from Haidar Eid and Omar Barghouti, says, "After a lot of hesitation and deliberation, we are writing to call on you to reject the 'deal' reached with the Egyptian authorities. This deal is bad for us and, we deeply feel, terrible for the solidarity movement.") Abunimah abided by that call (and later told me he had no regrets; he

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## Cairo Blog Entries

... continued from page 8

A massive, week long anti-apartheid workshop ensued. We planned rallies and marches, we developed nonviolent resistance actions, and we earned our badges of courage on the streets of Cairo. That's 43 countries at last working together to learn from and support each other in the struggle.

Code Pink will be seen as the proud parent of a new movement ready to strike out on its own. The South African delegation will be seen as our mentor, in teaching us the aggressive, yet nonviolent tactics that finally brought down apartheid South Africa.

So, instead of thwarting our efforts by closing the Gaza border, the Egyptian government has given us worldwide momentum. We have been on CNN and on the front page of the NY Times. We have emerged with a seven point program that lays the groundwork for ending the criminal regime that is the Israeli government. And we have focused our attention on the origin of much of Israel's fascist agenda, the imperial empire of the United State. For it is this empire that controls both Egypt and Israel, and that enforces the blockade of 1.5 million people in Gaza.

The end of apartheid Israel will be a defeat for this empire, a threat to the war criminals that run the United States. But it will be accomplished. MLK said that the "arc of history is long but it bends toward justice." All of us on the Gaza Freedom March are privileged to be a small part of that long arc. It is a gift to each of us, the privilege to do the right thing.

### Gaza Freedom March - Yes!

(Cheryl Qamar):

While the Gaza Freedom March is getting much press, the story behind the scenes that you won't hear is how many of the people of Cairo are cheering us on. Women and men, young adults and older, stop to thank us in different ways. They flash the peace sign as they drive by our protests. They quietly say, "Thank you for all you are doing" as they pass on the streets. We get a thumbs up from college kids who admire what we are doing and want to learn more about our work. Our NY Group is hard to miss when out on the streets - all of us in black tee-shirts with some version of "We will not be silent" on our chests, we stand out like a family at a reunion in a park (and we are beginning to feel that kind of solidarity as well). When we were standing outside earlier tonight, a young man made a point of rushing back after he had passed us to say, "I am so proud of you!"

Just tonight, as Pia and I were walking home from dinner (well, sort of dinner in that we are slowly

breaking our fast), several people approached us to let us know how much they appreciate what we are doing. The sidewalks are incredibly crowded and the traffic so dense that walking down the street is an adventure in itself. As we navigated our way back to our hotel, several small groups of people stopped us to say, "Shukron", "Gaza Freedom March - yes!" ...

So, all of this is such a reminder that no matter what action one takes, the effects are broad and deep. This trip has served to intensify my resolve for peace in Palestine and for all people searching to make the world more just. And many of us are finding each other to share in this work even in the most unexpected places.

### Statement and Story of the French Embassy Encampment:

The story of our experience with the Gaza Freedom march, which is not over, but on the contrary will go on and widen in France and elsewhere. The main sanction against Israel will

remain the boycott, just as it was done against the South African regime of apartheid. Boycott in all its forms must be maintained as long as Israel will boycott Palestinians. It must be proclaimed proudly because it is just weapon against those who practice cruel treatments, concentration camps, and ghettos where men, women and children are imprisoned to be bombed, starved and humiliated...

We return to this adventure more determined than ever to lead the fight against the inhumanity of the siege of Gaza, imprisonment and deprivation of all the Palestinian people by Israeli occupation. Crimes against humanity may be committed with the consent of our leaders, including the Egyptian government that shows its true face collaboration by building a wall to strangle and starve even more the people of Gaza.

### The Last Hurrah (Fred Nagel):

Our last action was yesterday at the Israeli Consulate in NYC. About 40 of us, some Gaza

Freedom Marchers and some supporters were there in the cold with our great signs that Laurie had brought back from Cairo. "Free Gaza!"

We didn't get the massive response our demonstrations got in Cairo. No troops unloading from busses and erecting barricades. But the NYC police force told us something that the Cairo authorities had not: that we couldn't demonstrate on the sidewalk or they would arrest us. Yes, the irony of walking on the sidewalk outside the Israeli Embassy in Cairo and chanting for hours, and then facing arrest in the "Land of the Free" for doing exactly the same...

Yes, we should take back the street in front of the Israeli Consulate in NYC. We have a constitutional right to walk there carrying our signs. But more importantly, we must organize to take back US foreign policy from the Zionists and the war mongers who plan and commit war crimes in our name. War crimes like the siege of 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza.

<http://www.hudsonogaza.blogspot.com>.



*"Everything Israel has done, and I emphasize everything, in the past 23 years is either evil stupidity or stupidly evil."*

– Yeshayahu Leibowitz

# CAIRO DECLARATION

## *to End Israel Apartheid*

**We, international delegates meeting in Cairo during the Gaza Freedom March 2009 in collective response to an initiative from the South African delegation, state:**

**In view of:**

- Israel's ongoing collective punishment of Palestinians through the illegal occupation and siege of Gaza;
- the illegal occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the continued construction of the illegal Apartheid Wall and settlements;
- the new Wall under construction by Egypt and the US which will tighten even further the siege of Gaza;
- the contempt for Palestinian democracy shown by Israel, the US, Canada, the EU and others after the Palestinian elections of 2006;
- the war crimes committed by Israel during the invasion of Gaza one year ago;
- the continuing discrimination and repression faced by Palestinians within Israel;
- and the continuing exile of millions of Palestinian refugees;
- all of which oppressive acts are based ultimately on the Zionist ideology which underpins Israel;
- in the knowledge that our own governments have given Israel direct economic, financial, military, and diplomatic support and allowed it to behave with impunity;
- and mindful of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007)

**We reaffirm our commitment to:**

Palestinian Self-Determination

Ending the Occupation

Equal Rights for All within historic Palestine

The full Right of Return for Palestinian refugees

We therefore reaffirm our commitment to the United Palestinian call of July 2005 for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) to compel Israel to comply with international law.

To that end, we call for and wish to help initiate a global mass, democratic anti-apartheid movement to work in full consultation with Palestinian civil society to implement the Palestinian call for BDS.

**Mindful of the many strong similarities between apartheid Israel and the former apartheid regime in South Africa, we propose:**

- 1) An international speaking tour in the first 6 months of 2010 by Palestinian and South African trade unionists and civil society activists, to be joined by trade unionists and activists committed to this program within the countries toured, to take mass education on BDS directly to the trade union membership and wider public internationally.
- 2) Participation in the Israeli Apartheid Week in March 2010.
- 3) A systematic unified approach to the boycott of Israeli products, involving consumers, workers and their unions in the retail, warehousing, and transportation sectors.
- 4) Developing the Academic, Cultural and Sports boycott.
- 5) Campaigns to encourage divestment of trade union and other pension funds from companies directly implicated in the Occupation and/or the Israeli military industries.
- 6) Legal actions targeting the external recruitment of soldiers to serve in the Israeli military, and the prosecution of Israeli government war criminals; coordination of Citizen's Arrest Bureaus to identify, campaign, and seek to prosecute Israeli war criminals, support for the Goldstone Report, and the implementation of its recommendations.
- 7) Campaigns against charitable status of the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

**We appeal to organisations and individuals committed to this declaration to sign it and work with us to make it a reality.**

Please e-mail us at [cairodec@gmail.com](mailto:cairodec@gmail.com)

# Unbreakable in Cairo

Dana Elborno writing from Cairo, January 4, 2010

**T**hough I have lived most of my life in and around Chicago, it has never been my complete home. My sisters and I were born as first-generation Palestinian-Americans coming from Kuwait, and for this reason our lives in Chicago always felt temporary -- we were only supposed to stay until the Gulf War was over, we finished school, the occupation ended, the siege was broken, etc. The only accepted rhetoric about our presence in America was, and continues to be, "This is not our home, we are from Gaza." The semantics of a Gazan home are lovely, but the only sense of Gaza I have is as fleeting as gusts of dust that blow off of old pictures. These faded images of a time and place that no longer exist leave us with nostalgia for memories we never even lived. It is the most porous of identities, and I feel the gaps palpably.

For this reason -- and maybe more so, for our political agenda -- my older sister and I signed up for the Gaza Freedom March. Aside from the family history that draws us to Gaza, we are unwavering in our belief that the siege must end, that humanity of Palestinians in Gaza has been grossly disregarded throughout this whole catastrophe that began more than 60 years ago, and especially during Israel's assault on Gaza last winter. The Gaza Freedom March gave us an outlet to voice these beliefs and mobilize with a global community of like-minded activists -- 1,362 of them from over 43 countries.

When we made our way to Cairo, the march that was planned to take place side by side with Palestinians in Gaza, quickly turned into a round of protests against the Egyptian government after they canceled our permits to travel to and enter, the besieged territory. Our personal narrative quickly became overpowered by the political situation between Egypt, Israel, the Arab World and the "West." We protested for four days straight. In contexts like these, all of us fighting for the freeing of Palestine, are Palestinians. There was a beautiful strength in our numbers and diversity. We were empowered and united, fighting to go to Gaza together.

Then Suzanne Mubarak, wife of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, so "graciously" offered to send only 100 of us to Gaza to deliver our small amounts of humanitarian aid. The GFM organizers only had a couple of hours to respond and eventually agreed under these pressing conditions. That night, we stayed up late in the Lotus Hotel with organizers, passionately debating whether the decision made was the right one, and if we were to accept it, who should go. By the time we left the Lotus, the GFM steering committee in Gaza wanted 100 to come and join their march. They believed international presence was crucial to keeping the march an effort of civil society and ultimately protecting the 50,000 Gazans who had mobilized to fill the streets and march towards the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing. So, in spite of all the controversy, a list of 100 persons was made to fill the seats on the two buses and priority was given to internationals of Palestinian descent, who have never seen Gaza, people just like me and my sister.

Six hours later, it was Thursday morning and we showed up to the bus loading zone in downtown Cairo. The GFM's steering committee in Cairo announced that organizers in Gaza had reversed their decision late in the night; they no longer supported the deal reached with the Egyptian government. Hedy Epstein, a Holocaust survivor on hunger strike to protest the Egyptian government's refusal to let

us travel to Gaza, chose not to board the bus and gave a beautiful, emotional and painful speech explaining her decision. Not even the organizers in Cairo endorsed these buses anymore, but they left it up to us to decide whether or not we would board them. Immediately, internal tensions escalated and there seemed to be no right decision; we found ourselves in the belly of a directionless beast and our personal momentum to go home for the first time was directly conflicting with the political priorities for Gaza.

Accepting these buses and boarding them was in effect changing our political goal to a weak humanitarian goal. The Gaza Freedom March was supposed to stand as a testament of a global voice yelling, "Enough is enough, break the siege." These buses turned us into a small delegation of people carrying humanitarian aid into a land under siege. This is simply not who we are. Or even worse, these buses had turned us into a disconnected group of people with individual reasons for going to Gaza. Again, this is not at all who we were. Of course I am not saying that I was not ambivalent about wanting to go as an individual; all I have ever wanted to do is go to Gaza and walk into the pictures of our home that hang on walls and sit on mantles in our house in Chicago. But as a part of a political group, neither my sister nor I could board that bus with a clear conscience.

It was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made, but in the end I was sure: it was either all of us go or none of us. If only 100 went, the news story would have changed from 1,400 protest against the siege in Gaza to Egypt allows 100 activists into Gaza. I did not want to be used as a pawn by the Egyptian government to save their face in the Arab world, nor did I want to weaken the political message of the Gaza Freedom March. The work we were doing in Cairo had been effective and I wanted to continue being a part of it. Our protests were on the front page of every Egyptian newspaper and our efforts were actively discussed on late-night talk shows in the Middle East.

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***"It was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made, but in the end I was sure: it was either all of us go or none of us."***

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Suddenly everyone had something to say about these foreigners in Egypt protesting for Gaza. Political pundits were asking all over Egypt's airwaves, "Why do foreigners care more about the plight of Palestinians than the Arab World?" and "Why isn't Egypt opening the borders?"



The next day I woke up in Cairo, feeling even more empowered. All of the confusion had really put us in a position to define who we were, what our goals were, what we wanted, and the risks we were willing to take to get it. We pulled up to the next protest in front of the Egyptian National Museum at 10 am, entrenched in this renewed clarity, and uniquely hopeful. As I crossed the street to get to the mass of protesters and police, I saw the police building their barricade around protesters who were trying to stage a symbolic march to Gaza. A woman about 60 years old was resisting the police, who were forcibly trying to barricade her. I saw Egyptian police forces

drag and beat her in the street, and at the time, my reflex was to photograph the abuse. While pressing up against the commotion and shooting countless pictures, I made eye contact with one of the officers. Immediately, four men jumped on me and held me down. One of the officers covered my eyes with his hands, while other officers beat me and pried my camera out of the cage I was creating around it with my body. They told me they were going to

shatter my camera in the street and I started a desperate plea with the officers to return it to me and let me leave. As I tried to get up, my hair was pulled and I was back on the ground. The officers eventually returned my camera after taking my memory card, and threw

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# Israel, Gaza: Holocaust Survivor Explains Why She Became Palestinian Rights Activist

by Daniel Siegal

Hedy Epstein is what some might see as a contradiction in terms: a survivor of the Holocaust and also a staunch advocate for the Palestinian people. Born in 1924 in Freiburg, Germany, Epstein was 14 when she escaped from Nazi persecution via the Kindertransport to England. Since her 1948 arrival in the U.S., Epstein has been an advocate for peace and human rights.

In 2001 she founded the St. Louis chapter of the Women in Black anti-war group that originated in Israel, and has actively advocated for Palestinian rights since visiting the West Bank in 2003. As the last decade came to a close, Epstein continued her advocacy by traveling with the women's peace advocacy group Code Pink to the Gaza Freedom March. The Dec. 31 march was a planned nonviolent demonstration to protest Israel's blockade of Gaza, with 1,000 advocates from abroad joining Palestinians in a march to the Gaza-Israel border checkpoint.

Although Egyptian authorities refused to let the full contingent of protesters into Gaza, the 100 activists that were permitted to enter carried on the anti-blockade message. Prior to the planned Gaza march, Epstein spoke with Babylon and Beyond about her past experiences in Israel, dealing with the controversy of being a Holocaust survivor who criticizes Israel, and the Gaza Freedom March.

**How did you get interested in the Israel/Palestine issue?**

I was born in Germany, I'm Jewish -- after Hitler came to power, my parents realized very quickly that Germany was not a good place to raise a family. They were willing to go anywhere in the world, but one place they were not willing to go to was Palestine -- they were anti-Zionists. As a child I didn't quite understand this, but if my parents were anti-Zionist, I was anti-Zionist. I came to the U.S. in 1948, around the same time Israel became a state, about which I had mixed feelings. On the one hand it was a place for Holocaust survivors to go to, those who could not or did not want to return to their homes, but on the other, I considered my parents' ardent anti-Zionism. While I was new in the U.S., Israel and Palestine remained on the back burner of my interests. In 1982, I heard about the massacres in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon -- I wanted to know who was responsible for this, what had happened between 1948 and 1982. As I learned more, I became

increasingly disturbed by the policies of Israel and its military. Fast forward to 2003 -- I was in the West Bank for the first time, and have been there five times since then.

This will be my third try to go to Gaza. The first try was with the Free Gaza Movement when they tried to take boats through Israel's naval blockade, but right before, in Cypress, I became ill -- it was 120 degrees, with matching humidity. The second try, the Free Gaza Movement members were worried what about might happen to me, so in deference I didn't go with them. I was to go again in June 2009, but the day before I was to go, I was assaulted. I don't know whether I was targeted or if it was a random act of violence -- I was coming back from the airport, but my suitcase and pocketbook, neither were touched -- it was not theft

**Why did you decide to go with Code Pink and participate in the group's Gaza Freedom March?**

I've known about Code Pink for quite some time and when I found out they were planning a march to Gaza, I decided I would go. I tried twice and didn't succeed, and so maybe the third time is the charm. The Egyptian government recently told the group they could not go through the Rafah border. Other times groups were told they could not go, but then were permitted to go with restrictions. So we will go forward, and we'll take it one day, one minute at a time.

And if we don't get in, that too will make a huge statement.

**How have people reacted to your decision to be an advocate for Palestinians?**

It depends whom you're talking to or whom you're talking about. The mainstream, organized Jewish community, both locally and in other places, have called me anti-Semitic, a self-hating Jew. I'm not anti-Israel, but you're not allowed to criticize Israel or else you're anti-Semitic, and if you're Jewish you're a self-hating Jew. I don't hate myself. You're allowed to criticize every other country, including the U.S., but not Israel, why is that?

**How do you think Israel will respond to nonviolence/direct action?**

I don't know. I hope they will be nonviolent. When I was in the West Bank, before I went, I was told that the Palestinians are

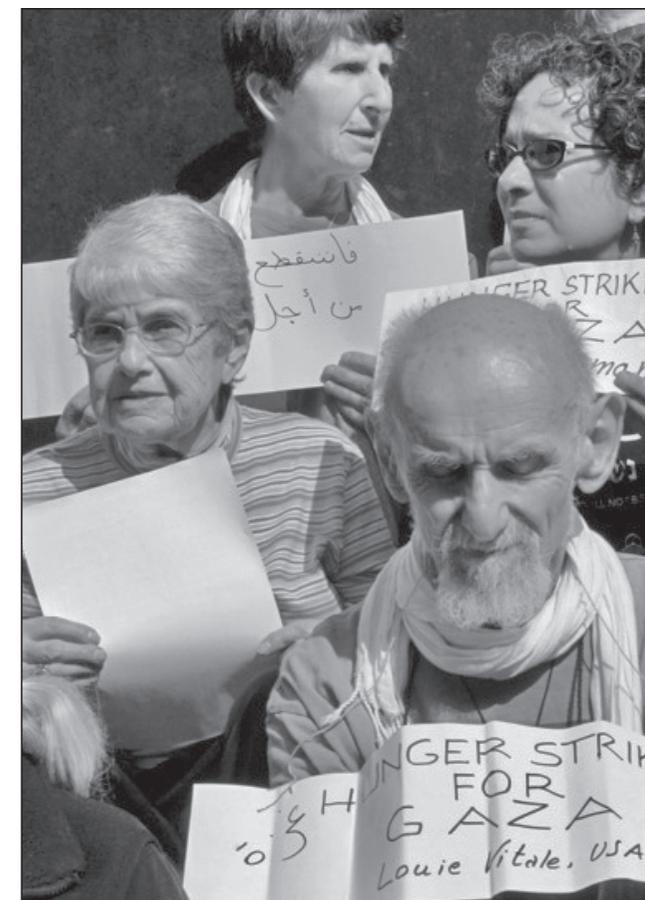
going to hurt me, they are going to do awful things to me. But they were the ones that protected me. In one demonstration, in 2006, near Ramallah, I lost some of my hearing because an Israeli sound bomb went off very close to me. The Palestinians near me were very concerned. I was strip-searched, internally searched at Israel's David Ben Gurion airport, I was told that "I was a terrorist, I'm a security risk." An 80-year-old woman is a terrorist? What, do I have a bomb in my vagina?

**Do you think there can be peace in Israel in the near future?**

In the near future, no. I'm an inveterate optimist, so someday there will be peace, but a lot of things have to change before that happens. If the occupation were to stop overnight, it would make all the difference in the world. Israel is the fourth-largest military entity in the world. They have the newest equipment, and it's used on the Palestinians. Also, if the U.S. stopped funding Israel, that would be another way of bringing about peace. We have humongous problems in this country, people are unemployed, losing their homes, we could use that money instead of overseas in a destructive way. Let's use it constructively. I think we should let the people decide what they want instead of telling them what they should do.



**Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein, center, and Gaza Freedom Marchers activists shout slogans during a Dec. 29 protest in Cairo to mark the one-year anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Gaza. Credit: Amr Nabil / Associated Press**



**Hedy Epstein, Father Louis Vitale and Cheryl Qamar - Hunger Strikers in Cairo**

*"The so-called 'Palestinian autonomous areas' are bantustans. These are restricted entities within the power structure of the Israeli apartheid system." – Nelson Mandela*

# Tinpot Tyrant Ain't Seen Nothing Yet

by George Galloway on Jan 11, 2010

I have been in a few dangerous places in my life. In the mid 80s along with an ITN news crew I was bombed by the Ethiopian air force.

My face pressing into the dirt, with no cover around, I saw the shrapnel tear and kill small children and watched others die on a wooden table in a grass hut after they bombers had gone.

I have been bombed by Israel in Beirut and held with an Israeli machine gun at my chest in Nablus during the first Iraq war.

Involuntarily, I put my hands up and the blue-eyed blonde "Israeli" said that if I didn't put my hands down he would kill me.

I've never, however, been in a more dangerous situation than last week in the tiny Sinai port of Al Arish to which the Egyptian dictatorship had insisted we bring our convoy.

Five hundred foreigners from 17 different nationalities with 200 vehicles were crammed into a compound without water, food or toilet facilities. They included 10 Turkish MPs one of whom was the chairman of Turkey's foreign relations committee.

We captured on film from a third floor office the thugs of the Mukhabarat (Intelligence) piling stones and sharpening their sticks behind the backs of several ranks of riot police with helmets, batons and shields. Then mayhem.

We may have complaints about our police, but I tell you, when you see policemen hurling half-



George Galloway

bricks into a crowd of women and men who'd come to deliver medicine to desperate people under siege, you thank your lucky stars we don't live in such a state. Fifty five of our 500 were wounded and, but for the shocking effect on Arab public opinion (our own media didn't give a damn) of the live footage (all on Youtube now), we might still be there yet.

Next day, the dictatorship wanted us on our way. We refused to leave without our wounded comrades and the seven of our number who had been taken prisoner. After another stand-off our demands were met and we proceeded to a tumultuous welcome in Gaza our numbers com-

plete. Word came to me from inside the Egyptian tyranny that I was to be arrested when we came out. Had that happened while I was surrounded by 500 pumped up convoy members there would have been serious trouble.

So I sent them the message that I would come out in the dead of the night before and face the music alone but for my old friend Scots journalist Ron McKay.

McKay is a thriller writer these days but what happened next would have taxed even his imagination.

We emerged into the hands of a grim phalanx of mainly plain clothed secret policemen, none of whom could speak English. They tried to keep our passports but we refused to budge without them - even though there was menace in the air, or perhaps because of it.

They bundled us into an unmarked van which they refused to let us climb out of, at one stage man-handling us.

An Egyptian gumshoe journalist from the Daily News tried to interview us but he was battered away.

We were driven off at speed. I knew we were not going to be killed as we were able to make the necessary calls - well at least the call to the Press Association which makes all the difference in these situations.

We made the formal call to the British Foreign Office but it wasn't worth the money. During the

five-hour journey to Cairo the British diplomats did nothing but tell us to co-operate.

That co-operation was difficult as the police could speak no English and were saying nothing.

Word came from London that Nile News, a mouthpiece of the dictatorship, were reporting in the morning the seven convoy prisoners we had released at al Arish were to be re-arrested on emerging from Gaza.

Thus the bloodbath we sought to avoid now looked inevitable. We demanded to return to the Gaza-Egypt border but were refused. At Cairo airport we refused to enter the terminal and tried to hail a taxi to take us back.

Security forces goons pushed us physically into the airport building and gave close quarter attention to both of us, even in the toilet. They followed us everywhere and when McKay took a picture there was nearly a serious incident. They ushered us up to the entrance of the BA plane and the first English speaker of the night stepped forward to declare me persona non grata in Egypt.

I made my own declaration to him which was that he and his fellow torturers would one day face the wrath of the Egyptian people, who had queued up at the airport in full view of the goons, to shake hands with us. Later, his department stated I had been banned from Egypt because I was "a trouble-maker". Mr Tinpot tyrant 99.99 of the vote Mubarak, you ain't seen nothing yet.

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*"It would behoove the world to become used to this fact: that without a just solution to the Palestine tragedy, there can be no stable peace in the Middle East. " – King Hussein I*

## Operation Cast Lead

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By struggling in solidarity with those who oppose militarism and support Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions we are also renewing the most sacred elements of our tradition that require us to protest in the street, pursue justice and peace and avoid violence. It is not an easy road.

Boycott is a strategy capable of being used for good and for bad. In this case, I believe that BDS is the only viable nonviolent method that can impact 'facts on the ground'. All of us who love freedom, justice, and peace, and all of us who love the people of Israel, and the people of Palestine have a profound responsibility to act in alignment with the people who are the actual victims in this situation. They are calling for BDS. That is why I went to Cairo and created the Interfaith Gaza Satyagraha, as an affinity group, within the Gaza Freedom March, to join my voice with theirs.

As the only rabbi present in Cairo for the entire GFM experience, I was honored to stand with hundreds of other activists from over forty nations, many of whom spoke to me of their commitment to oppose antisemitism wherever it emerged. I spent ten days planning actions, protesting in the streets, talking about next steps, networking and envisioning. At one point, American Jews organized a protest in front of the Israeli Embassy, which is fifteen stories above the street and visible only by the familiar blue and white flag. I was asked to lead a Sabbath service. Jews, Muslims, Christians, Egyptians and internationals of all persuasions, and stood around a simple kiddish cup, Egyptian flat bread and candles. I invited participants to envision a world where everyone could find a seat at the table and eat, unafraid. We sang and prayed in Hebrew in public and I saw tears flow. Standing among the crowd was a man with a Palestinian father and a Sephardic Israeli mother. He wept in joy because, for one instant, the worlds of conflict stretching across the borders of his soul could dissolve in a single vision of unification and peace. So may it be for all of us, Palestinian and Jew, living together on the same land in recognition of our common love for place and each other. Palestinians have the right to return to their own land, or receive just compensation.

Only a 'solution' which ensures 'the right to exist' and universal human rights of all people living on the historic land of Israel/Palestine will suffice. The children of the future will see the world very differently than those of us living now. They will face new challenges and inherit a new sense of globalism which hopefully strengthens the religious, cultural and national heritage of both Palestinians and Israelis in a renewed culture of peace. It is up to us to prepare the way.

**Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, cofounder of Shomer Shalom Network for Jewish Nonviolence and The Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center, NY**

## An Odyssey for Justice

... continued from page 2

gle most important tool in achieving camaraderie. "Throughout the Gaza Freedom March presence in Cairo, our brothers and sisters from the South African delegation dynamically articulated the connections between injuries that indigenous Africans suffered under the white supremacist regime in Pretoria and the inequalities that Palestinians now face at the hands of the Israeli government," wrote Joshua Brollier, a co-coordinator for Voices For Creative Non-Violence, in the Palestine Chronicle.

Many heroes and heroines emerged from the activists' action-packed journey to Gaza. Hedy Epstein, an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor whose parents both perished in Auschwitz, deserves a special mention. She went on a hunger strike when she, along with many others were blocked from entering Gaza. Epstein didn't stand in solidarity with the Palestinians despite the Holocaust, but because of the Holocaust. Similarly many activists drew their solidarity from their specific experiences and have fought for democracy and justice back at home.

Maybe I am in tune with reality after all. Maybe the words and actions of our African America hero Canute Frankson weren't in vain. Maybe the quest for justice, can in fact, cross all physical and psychological boundaries. One thing is for sure, though. Gaza is not alone; in fact, it never was.

**Ramzy Baroud (www.ramzybaroud.net) is an internationally-syndicated columnist and the editor of PalestineChronicle.com. His latest book is "My Father Was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story" (Pluto Press, London), now available on Amazon.com.**

## Palestine Viva!

... continued from page 7

they left Cairo with one more action to complete before returning to their homes: Upon arriving at Charles de Gaulle airport, where they were greeted by the cheers of dozens of supporters, the contingent immediately made their way to the Israeli Embassy in Paris, luggage and all, to stage yet another protest there. Israeli Embassies beware: Sooner or later we will all return to our home communities, and we have not forgotten our mission to continue the struggle there!

As we each make our own arrangements to continue on to Rafah in smaller groups, the French remain an inspiration, even though their numbers in Egypt are now diminished: On January 2nd, a group of about 15 French climbed into a bus bound for Rafah, but were removed from the bus at the first checkpoint. They sat in a circle in front of the bus, refusing to move until a checkpoint guard climbed onto the bus and explained to all passengers that these internationals had been removed for attempting to travel to Gaza. The people of Egypt will remember the Gaza Freedom March for a long time to come, and, I believe, they will remember the French most of all.

On January 4th, we said goodbye to the last contingent of French delegates, who left for Paris the next day. Among them were a couple who had spent their honeymoon in the Giza Strip, and several Muslim brothers who have developed strong relationships with Palestinian and Egyptian activists living here in Cairo. They are all determined to return to Cairo on December 31st of 2010, for the second Gaza Freedom March. Their solidarity and tireless efforts have inspired many people in Cairo, Gaza, and around the world, and next year they will return even stronger than they were when they began. And until that date, the streets of Cairo, Gaza, Paris, and all of our communities around the world will be inspired daily by the chant that still rings in our ears: Palestine Viva!

**Emily Ratner is an organizer and mediamaker based in New Orleans. In June she traveled to Gaza with a New Orleans delegation. This month she will be joining thousands of Palestinians and internationals for the Gaza Freedom March on December 31st. Help us get there. She can be reached at: [emily@nolahumanrights.org](mailto:emily@nolahumanrights.org).**



**EMBODY THE MESSAGE**

**TO ORDER A T-SHIRT VISIT:**

**[WWW.WEWILLNOTBESILENT.NET](http://WWW.WEWILLNOTBESILENT.NET)**

## Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)

For the past sixty-two years, people have been working to raise public awareness about the occupation of Palestine and the struggle of the Palestinian people. People from around the world are outraged at Israel's brutal war on Gaza. Our current numbers reflect the massive growth in support for Palestinian rights. We, therefore, support BDS, a mass boycott campaign as a tool to bring Israel into line with international law and to pressure Israel to comply with UN resolutions that encourage

justice and equality for the Palestinian people.

As people devoted to the promotion of a just peace and true democracy in this region, we, citizens around the world, join the Palestinian call for a BDS campaign against Israel. We are inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid. We call on others to do the same.

## Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)... here at home in Woodstock, NY

**TO:** Jean Turmo Cosmetics

**FROM:** Middle East Crisis Response (MECR)

**RE:** Boycotting Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories products

Dear Rebecca,

**Y**our store carries products made by Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories, an Israeli company that is currently the target of an international boycott because it profits from the illegal occupation of the Palestinian West Bank.

This letter is a request from Woodstock's Middle East Crisis Response (MECR) and Code Pink Women for Peace ([www.codepinkalert.org](http://www.codepinkalert.org)) that you stop stocking these products.

Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories ([www.ahava.com.il](http://www.ahava.com.il)) is a privately held Israeli cosmetics company that manufactures products using minerals and mud from the Dead Sea. The Hebrew word "Ahava" means love, but there is nothing loving about what the company is doing in the Occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank.

The company's main factory and its visitors' center are located in the illegal Israeli settlement of Mitzpe Shalem in the Occupied West Bank. Ahava products are labeled 'Israeli origin;' however, according to international law, including the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, the West Bank is not part of the State of Israel; it is Occupied Palestinian Territory. Furthermore, not only does Ahava profit from the occupation by locating its main plant and store in an illegal Israeli settlement, it also uses in its products' mud from the Dead Sea, excavated in an occupied area; thus, it exploits occupied natural resources for profit. The fourth Geneva Convention explicitly forbids an occupying power from removing the captured natural resources for its own use; we see this as another charge for which we need to hold this company accountable. To add insult to injury, Ahava's labels claim that the country of origin of its products is "The Dead Sea, Israel"—Oxfam, among other human rights



groups, has decried this type of labeling as blatantly misleading.

In July 2005, a broad range of Palestinian Civil Society organizations issued a call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel as part of a non-violent campaign to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Individual American consumers are showing their opposition to Israel's occupation by participating in a consumer boycott against Ahava products.

We hope that you will show your support for international law and human rights by choosing to no longer stock Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories products in your store.

Thank you so much for your attention and consideration.

**Helaine Meisler, Jane Toby, and Pia Alexander,  
Representatives of MECR**

**For more information on our boycott campaign, go to  
"Stolen Beauty" [www.stolenbeauty.org](http://www.stolenbeauty.org)**

**For more information on the manufacturer and its involvement  
in the occupation, go to "Who Profits from the Occupation?"  
(A project of The Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace)**

**[www.whoprofits.org/Company%20Info.php?id=575](http://www.whoprofits.org/Company%20Info.php?id=575)**

**For more information on the international Boycott, Divestment  
and Sanctions Campaign, go to Global BDS Movement for  
Palestine: [www.bdsmovement.net/](http://www.bdsmovement.net/)**

## Freedom Fighter

... continued from page 2

These laws are meant to protect real people, and these statistics correspond to human beings - flesh and blood - who have their own dreams, aspirations, fears and even shortcomings.

And these Palestinians are not demons (as some would like to have us believe) but nor are they angels who are above feeling human pain and hardship.

As some of the book's pages cause you to burst into laughter, others would lead you to flood in tears as you interact with the true stories of his family, but Baroud's words of reason frequently resurface to the text to provide you with context and relevant collective history and background.

This parallel of facts and feelings keeps you aware that these moving (sometimes comic but mainly tragic) stories are not meant for entertainment, but are part of history. Yet you could never understand the impact of this history if you did not try to relate to the book's real-life characters.

Baroud relies on context to explain the moral superiority of the plight of Palestinians, but the book's characters invite everyone - even, no, especially Israelis - to step into their shoes to understand their legitimate grievances and systematic suffering.

The book is a must-read for even those who are extremely familiar with the Palestinian question. But such narrative should not be confined to educated readers. Its universal message must reach a wider audience via film.

Palestinians who died suffering in poverty and under oppression should not exit this world without having the last word - even if that last word is only heard after their death.

Mohammed Baroud - of Beit Daras - can now rest in peace.

There are millions more who are dying - or have already died - to be heard, in their struggle for freedom. Who will step forward to tell their stories? Let history begin and maybe someday Palestinians too would have their own 'Never Again' moment in the not-too-distant future.

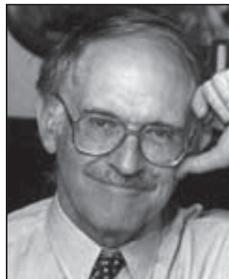
The book is available at Amazon.com and also through the publisher, Pluto Press.

**- Mamoon Alabbasi contributed this article to PalestineChronicle.com. Contact him at: [alabbasi@writing.com](mailto:alabbasi@writing.com).**

*"Despite the media blackout, which is a disgrace, this is turning out to be a really spectacular triumph, I think, and it's hard to express properly my admiration and respect for those who are directly engaged." – Noam Chomsky on the Gaza Freedom March*

# The Stakes in Gaza

By Joel Kovel



Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi, who has been inscribed in the annals of Jihadist heroism by blowing up seven CIA/Blackwater agents and his Jordanian handler at a remote outpost in Afghanistan, was according to his family, a conscientious young man and never an extremist. By all accounts a brilliant doctor, the 32 year old was said by his brother to have been “changed” by last year’s Israeli annihilation of Gaza, and went to the devastated land to serve the people. From that point he was recruited by Jordanian intelligence and made into a double agent against Al-Qaida. So well did al-Balawi perform that he was taken by the Jordanians to their American bosses and allowed to pass through to his fatal meeting without a body check.

A similar story emerges about Umar Faruk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian/Yemeni would-be bomber, who came very close to bringing down an airliner heading for Detroit. No doubt Abdulmutallab was agitated about United States policy toward Yemen; but that is not all that agitated the quiet young man. Evidently he went to Yemen last August to study Arabic. He began frequenting a mosque in the ancient part of San’a and hanging out with people remote from his comfortable upper-class Nigerian background. As the Associated Press reported: “Students and administrators at the institute said Abdulmutallab was gregarious, had many Yemeni friends and was not overtly extremist. They noted, however, he was open about his sympathies toward the Palestinians and his anger over Israel’s actions in Gaza.”

Such nice young men. Whatever could have gotten into their heads? Is it mere coincidence that these shocking developments

took place so close to the anniversary of the assault on Gaza?

I was unable to go on the Gaza Freedom March, but I know many of those who did. Some of these, like Ali Abunimah and Mick Napier (from Edinburgh), are veteran stalwarts in the struggle; many others are newcomers awakened by exposure to Israeli aggression and the unspeakable impunity granted to it by the United States. If one had foretold for them, say, late in 2005, that four years later they would be fighting the Egyptian police state in Cairo for the right to cross over in solidarity with the people of Gaza, they would have taken this as the wild prophecy of a madman. Yet there they were, swept along by the tide of events and changed into fighters for Palestinian freedom, furious with Israel and the United States and led by conscience into doing radical deeds in a place very remote from their comfortable habitats.

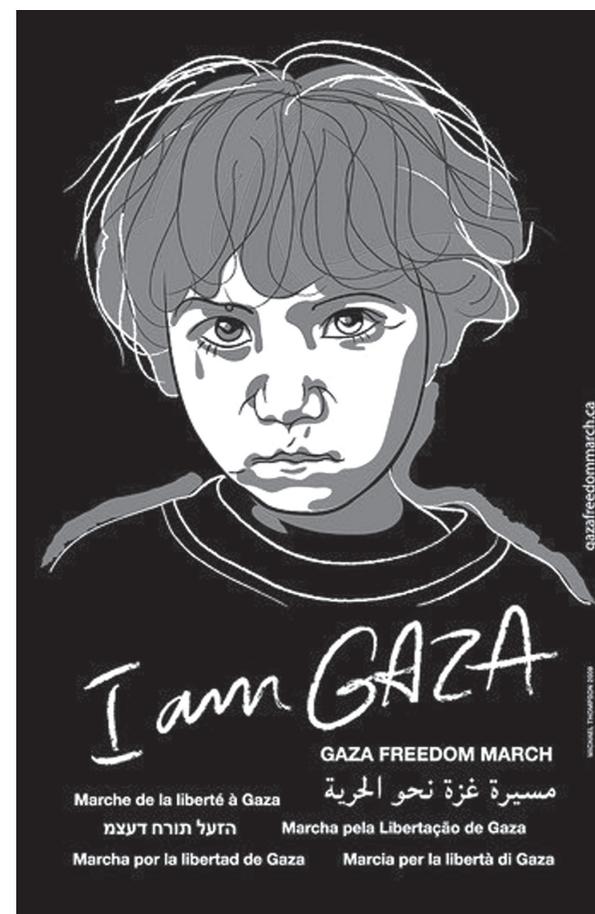
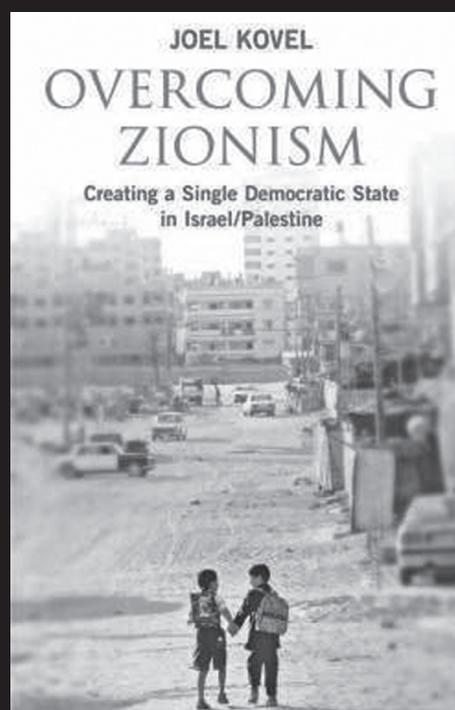
Combine these narratives, some for violence, some for non-violence, and set them against the Israeli-American death machine as it grinds onward, unable to stop itself and clanking straight for the abyss. What do we see? The lines of history taking shape. What will it be? The breakdown of empire, for sure. How will it go? Partly by chance, no doubt, but how that chance will develop depends on the degree of non-violence amid violence, and on the growth of solidarity. The jihadists are going to multiply: that’s what the killing machine ensures, to secure its own existence. Can the non-violent solidarity movements match them? There’s more at stake here than we could have dreamed, not so long ago.

**Joel Kovel became an implacable antagonist of US militarism and imperialism while serving as a physician during the Vietnam War. His two most recent books are *The Enemy of Nature* and *Overcoming Zionism*.**

## OVERCOMING ZIONISM

**“This book is absolutely fundamental for those who reject the unfortunate confusion between Jews, Judaism, Zionism and the State of Israel — a confusion which is the basis for systematic manipulation by the imperialist power system. It convincingly argues in favour of a single secular state for Israelis and Palestinians as the only democratic solution for the region.”**

**Samir Amin, Director of the Third World Forum**



## Unbreakable in Cairo

... continued from page 12

me on to a pile of protesters inside the barricades.

That was the worst of it. Soon things calmed down and everyone was sitting. We fell back into our default chants, “Free Gaza! Free Gaza!”

Though chanting, I felt broken -- we didn’t get to Gaza, the siege continues and we had been publicly abused. Furthermore, the media focused on the 85 persons who went to Gaza, though they had disassociated themselves from Gaza Freedom March, and our efforts in Cairo became old news. I couldn’t help but wonder, “What’s it all worth?” Ultimately though, I realize that this is exactly how politics of activism can break a political activist and I won’t let that happen. On a personal level, I fervently hope that someday the strangers on the streets of Gaza City will look familiar and my relatives in Gaza will no longer appear only in photographs -- but that isn’t the priority. My priorities are political. The humanity of Palestinians in Gaza must be validated and this will never happen while Gaza is under siege. At this point, my sisters and I are in the third generation of activists to march, stand, sit and protest for Palestine. The persistence of Palestine as a humanitarian crisis can be wildly disheartening, but the persistence of the resistance movement is equally -- if not more so -- heartening. That’s what it’s all worth. The spirit of the resistance movement has not yet been broken, despite everything that has let us down or disappointed us. We are a people united for Palestine and we embrace this struggle. It is at times emotionally exhausting, but we aren’t broken and we will break the siege of Gaza.

**Dana Elborno is a 20-year-old journalism student in Chicago.**

**“It is unacceptable and we have refused this ... It is completely unconscionable that 25% of our convoy should go to Israel and never arrive in Gaza. Because nothing that ever goes to Israel ever arrives in Gaza.” – George Galloway**

# Fanning the Flames of Freedom from Cairo to Gaza and Beyond

**“The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class — it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of freedom.”**

— Anna Julia Cooper, page 27, my US passport

by Emily Ratner / January 3rd, 2010

**T**he Gaza Freedom March announced the Cairo Declaration to End Israeli Apartheid on January 1st, and so yesterday hundreds of Marchers smuggled freedom's smoke signals in our luggage as we climbed into buses, vans, and taxis and made a mad dash for the Rafah border crossing. My own van was pulled over at the first checkpoint on the way out of Cairo, where we sat on a dusty curb for two hours before being forced to turn back. As we waited for guards to run our passport numbers and strategized about next steps, a small bus filled with our French friends sped by on the other side of the road, headed back to Cairo. Their hands formed peace signs through the windows as they shouted at border guards, and we were reminded once again of the historic nature of these days, when more than 1,300 people have come to Egypt from 43 different countries to support our sisters and brothers in Gaza. When we were first pulled over I felt silly for thinking our small van, filled with aging activists and suitcases overflowing with medicine and other forms of aid, would be permitted to pass to Rafah. As we drove away from the checkpoint, where we picked up two stragglers who had been pulled from buses and told they must return as well, my thinking began to change: Even if none of us arrive in Gaza (an impossibility given the resourcefulness of this remarkable group), our global solidarity community has accomplished something amazing here in Cairo, and in countries around the world. We will now leave Egypt, either for Gaza or for our homes, with a unified call to action, and a concrete plan to continue this crucial work.

We have seen so many victories here in Cairo in the crazy days since the Egyptian Foreign Minister announced we would not be permitted to cross the Rafah border. There are some moments when the haze of Cairo clouds our eyes with dust and disappointment, but we sing our successes into the smog of this city, reminding ourselves and our allies around the world that our efforts will not be deterred by Egyptian guards at checkpoints and the Israeli politicians who are calling the shots:

On December 27, the French group of over 300 allies and mentors took over Giza/Charles de Gaulle St, a terrifyingly busy thoroughfare, when their Rafah-bound buses did not arrive at the French Embassy. They held the street for a full hour before agreeing to wait for the buses on the sidewalk in front of the Embassy. They camped in

“Giza Strip” for a full five days, guarded by three rows of riot police.

On December 29, Hedy Epstein, an 85 year-old Holocaust survivor, began a widely reported hunger strike with thirty activists, announcing that they will feast when all of Gaza feasts.

Later that night, hundreds of internationals stood alongside hundreds of Egyptians, who bravely protested Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Egypt and demanded an end to the siege.

On December 30, the Egyptian government sent two buses of marchers to Gaza in an effort to temper the terrible press Mubarak is receiving in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. So many of us refused to be satisfied by this token gesture that the buses were not full when they reached Gaza.

Later that day, hundreds protested at the American Embassy, where police managed to fracture them into small, highly guarded groups but could not divide the loud, unified voice with which they demanded an end to the siege, both from the streets in front of the Embassy and from negotiations inside.

Also on December 30, 25 French activists raced an enormous Palestinian flag to the top of one of the pyramids as hundreds of Egyptians and others cheered them on in this highly illegal act. This was the flag's second trip to the top of the pyramid since we've arrived.

On December 31, more than 500 internationals set out on a Freedom March to Gaza from the Egyptian Museum, where they stopped heavy traffic on Tahrir Square and fought fearlessly against guards who violently moved them to pedestrian areas. In Gaza, internationals joined Palestinian marchers in the trek to the Erez crossing, where hundreds upon hundreds protested the siege from the Israeli side of the border. Thousands more joined solidarity protests around the world.

On January 1, more than 500 protested at the Israeli Embassy, forcing global attention on the government that is desperately seeking to divert our efforts to the Egyptian government's role in the siege. We have proved that we will not be fooled.

Later that night, the South African delegation officially announced the Cairo Declaration that we have worked together to create in partnership with our sisters and brothers in Gaza. The Declaration demands an end to Israeli Apartheid, lists our renewed commitments, and provides an action plan as we move forward in this important work. In a week of historic events, this document proves we have accomplished the mission that brought us to Cairo: We are now united with the people in Gaza, and have a unified plan as we move forward in our crucial work.



While Egyptians turn us away from check points and borders, we remember that it is the Israeli government that has demanded we be kept out of Gaza. And the Israelis have made this demand because they are terrified of our movement. Their weapons and soldiers are no match for the ideas we carry with us, sparked in Palestine and now aflame in Egypt and throughout the world. Our global community join Palestinian civil society in some demands of our own, which the Israelis cannot quell by preventing our passage to Gaza. As the Cairo Declaration states, we demand Self-Determination for all Palestinians. We demand an End to the Occupation. We demand Equal Rights for All within historic Palestine. We demand the full Right of Return for all People of Palestine.

And we insist that as a global solidarity movement, we have the right to make these demands. Egyptian guards have been unable to stop us as we scream our demands from atop the pyramids, from the sidewalks of the U.S. and Israeli Embassies, and from the front pages of newspapers in Egypt, Kuwait, Yemen, and around the world. Allies have stamped these demands into the world's streets as they march for Palestine's freedom.

We must make these demands because our work is too important to wait for the governments of the world to acknowledge that the Israelis will never offer Palestin-

ians what they are owed. We can make these demands because we have the power of a global boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement that will some day be strong enough to cripple the Israeli economy, if we do the work we have promised here in Cairo. And, as Anna Julia Cooper so eloquently states in the US passport that was rejected by Egyptians working on behalf of Israelis yesterday, we will make these demands because freedom is the birthright of humankind.

We celebrate our sisters and brothers in Gaza and throughout Palestine, who have worked so hard to bring us to this historic moment. We celebrate allies here in Cairo and around the world, who are renewing their commitment to their crucial solidarity work by endorsing the Cairo Declaration. And we celebrate all of the travelers who slowly make their way to Rafah, whether they arrive or not. May the Egyptians run our passport numbers thousands of times as they turn us back. May the Israelis be reminded again and again that they have only encouraged us to work more tirelessly than we have so far. May the U.S. government be reminded of the wisdom of Cooper's words, spat on every time we are rejected at a checkpoint or border crossing. May we leave Cairo with more hope than when we arrived that the siege will end and Gaza and all of Palestine will be free.





## Cairo Meets

... continued from page 9

was clear now). I saw other friends sitting on the sidewalk crying, as they tried to figure out what to do.

No one had slept. Many were smoking (when in Rome...).

The argument for the majority went like this: We have come a long way with the support of an international community. We have come to march in Gaza to lift the siege against the people there. Many of us are walking our talk, by confronting the Egyptian power at the French Embassy. Now we are giving into the siege by accepting a piecemeal offering, when the core principle here is inarguable: The people of Gaza must have freedom of movement, freedom to come and go. We will show our power and solidarity not by acceding to the terms of a police state that is working with the U.S. and Israel, but by demanding our rights as a bloc here in Cairo. And by doing so, we will dramatize the Palestinian condition and serve the most important element of the struggle: Activating an international movement.

I could see the other side, too. There is nothing like an actual trip to Gaza to politicize people, and having had that experience myself, I had urged some young people to have it. But I can see that I am a lousy movement person, and that the overall sense of the movement was clear and emphatic. We will work from Cairo to gain publicity for Palestinian oppression. Big deal, we're not in Gaza; it's like being in Birmingham when the big march is going down in Selma.

By the way, the South African contingent, many of them veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle, were no-doubters on the question: We stay in Cairo.

I can see both sides, but it was a convulsive experience. People turned on one another, the Code Pink leadership was accused of being

all hat and no saddle. Young people I saw last night walking around biting their lips in the hope that they might be chosen to get a seat on the bus were today enraged and vituperative at the idea that anyone was getting on the bus—a transformation out of As You Like It.

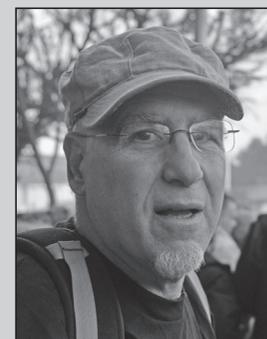
Yet I remind readers that good things are arising from this experience. The Americans, who are so conditioned to living with the Israel lobby, as an abused wife to her battering husband, are being exposed to a more adamant politics—we are having a rendezvous with the Freedom Riders. For another thing, our direct actions and demonstrations seem to be awaking Egypt, a little, and getting a lot of publicity. Helen Schiff told me that the front page of an official government newspaper today said, "Mubarak to Netanyahu: Lift the siege and end the suffering of the Palestinian people." We gave him that line! she said. A longtime civil rights activist, Helen told me it's "fabulous" what happened, we are achieving more in Cairo than we would if we had gotten into Gaza.

So there's a tumultuous and ascendant feeling here tonight, in the little hotels that we have to meet in to make our plans. I can feel the spirit of the Freedom Riders and of the abolitionists, who fought the limits on freedom of movement of black people for so long in my country. As for the divisions, and bitterness, I think they will go away. A European friend advised me tonight that those who take the Palestinian side will find that they share somewhat in the Palestinian experience. They will experience isolation, division, bitterness, failure, contempt, manipulation. Surely not on the scale of the Palestinians; still, they will experience some of those things, and they will grow from them.

Having weathered the storm, tomorrow this group has more action plans. I have to be quiet about them now, because I crunched into another stairwell tonight for a planning session. Still, it should be dramatic. The international street has come to the Arab street, and everyone is learning.

## West Bank Diary Entry: 12/23/09

by Nic Abramson



**W**ell, we are finally on our way. We crossed over into the West Bank this morning (no problem at all) and took a shared minibus into East Jerusalem. Sort of beautiful countryside, much like our southwest, but without the colors—mainly sandy tans with some greens thrown in for agricultural and aesthetic relief. We found our hotel easily, the Paulus Haus, a German religious girls' college in a gorgeous old building with 18-foot ceilings and marble floors. Very quiet and right opposite the Damascus

Gate, one of the few entrances into the old city. Ambled through the bazaar for an hour, which was at least one half-hour too long. Went back to hotel for a much-needed nap and to await our political tour of East Jerusalem with Abu Hassam, a long-term, passionate, Palestinian activist.

Abu is a resident of East Jerusalem, although not an Israeli citizen. He has a van with Israeli license plates, which enables him to drive on Israeli roads and not be automatically stopped at checkpoints. He is fascinating, and he shared many of his experiences dealing with Israeli regulations, which clearly are intended to punish Palestinians without adding to Israeli security. For example, people from West Bank are not allowed into East Jerusalem without permits, which are not normally handed out. He cannot drive with a person from the West Bank in his car, even if that person has a permit to be in East Jerusalem, or if that person is his parent, wife, or child. If caught, his car will be taken away and he will be jailed. He also said that in order to be considered a Jerusalem resident, when a child reaches 16, s/he has to prove that s/he went to school every year in Jerusalem, and if not, cannot be a Jerusalem resident and therefore cannot live in Jerusalem, even if his entire family is there. Many other examples of life under draconian Israeli rule. He also let us know that he had spent 7 1/2 years in an Israeli prison, where he experienced the same sort of torture that we handed out at Guantanamo and Bagram. He claimed that the IDF, in fact, had taught the US the tricks of the trade. We saw the wall from different vantage points: dividing Palestinian towns in half; forming an enclosure around Palestinian towns that only allowed one point of entry or egress through a checkpoint; dividing Palestinians from their farmlands; and, of course, dividing Palestinians from Israelis. We saw settlements, which he called colonies (think imperialism), that had replaced Palestinian towns and exiled the former residents into nearby refugee camps or nearby towns behind segregation walls.

Now, we mainly had known about the wall and its repercussions, but to see it firsthand was visceral, infuriating, emotionally beyond anything I had expected. That coupled with Abu Hassam's passion and anger left me almost speechless. I hope I convey some of that feeling. To see it is never to be able to forget it.

We ended up at the homes of three Palestinian families who had been kicked out of their homes and are now living on the street directly outside of them in tents, with nowhere to go. No heat, no water, no appliances; they are completely dependent on their neighbors. The new inhabitants, Jews from Brooklyn, living and laughing and strolling up the street, mainly oblivious to the pain of the Palestinians they displaced, and seemingly to the Palestinians themselves, so enraged me, that I felt I had to actively control myself from engaging with them. Only by talking to the Palestinians was I able to focus on their plight instead of my anger. What they asked is to let everyone know about this, and not to forget them.

Abu Hassam is clear about what needs to happen—change US policy, support the Palestinian call for BDS, and not go home and forget. I told him that I could never forget, and I hope that you won't either.

What an extraordinary day for me and what an ordinary day for them. Exhausting for me, for the moment, ordinary life for them. What more can I say. I am privileged to be here and to be able to stand with them.

# HELP END THE SIEGE OF GAZA!

*FreeGaza.org*

**“The Free Gaza Movement has succeeded in breaking the siege of Gaza... From the ground-breaking work of Gandhi and King to the ongoing example of the Free Gaza Movement, we can discern the transforming power of nonviolence at a crossroads in our history.”**

*H.E. Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly*

**“[The Free Gaza Movement carries] with you the hopes and wishes of many people around the world... The Siege of Gaza is a shameful act of collective punishment.”**

*Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and passenger on Free Gaza's 2nd boat trip in Oct. 2008*

**“We recognize that our boats are humble, but what we've accomplished is to show that average people from around the world can mobilize to create change.”**

*Huwaida Arraf, J.D.  
Free Gaza Organizer &  
Palestinian Human Rights  
Activist*

**This spring, the Free Gaza Movement is sending at least six boats to Gaza to break Israel's illegal blockade on 1.5 million Palestinians.**



**On August 23, 2008**, 44 ordinary people from 17 different countries sailed to Gaza on two small wooden boats, the **FREE GAZA** and the **LIBERTY**. We did what our governments would not do – we broke the Siege of Gaza. For the first time in over 40 years, International ships docked at Gaza Port. For the first time in over 60 years, Palestinians freely entered and exited their own country. Please help support this important work.

**Since August 2008**, the Free Gaza Movement has organized many further siege-breaking voyages to Gaza. We will go to Gaza again and again, until the Israeli siege is shattered once and for all, and the people of Gaza have free access to the rest of the world.

**We began this campaign in 2006 on hope alone.** Many thought it couldn't be done. We did it. We broke the siege. Now we need your help to keep going. Please give generously and help end the siege of Gaza forever.

**“This mission sent an open invitation to the human rights and international community to come to Gaza.”**

— *Dr. Mona El-Farra*  
*Director of the Red Crescent Society, Gaza and  
International Campaign Against the Siege*



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And Donate Today. Thank You (Shukron)**