



THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON ACCOMPANIMENT

ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANIMENT
PROGRAMME IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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A workshop organised by the
ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAMME
IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL OF THE

COMMISSION OF THE CHURCHES
ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

in partnership with Faith and Order of the
World Council of Churches

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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

*“Even though I walk
through the valley of
the shadow of death, I
fear no evil; for thou
art with me; thy rod
and thy staff, they
comfort me”.*

(Psalm 23: 4)



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FOREWORD

BY RIFAT ODEH KASSIS

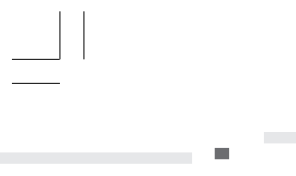
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EAPPI stands for Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. It is an initiative of the World Council of Churches (WCC) under the Ecumenical Campaign to End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine: Support a Just Peace in the Middle East. Its mission is to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation. Participants of the programme monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, support acts of non-violent resistance alongside local Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, offer protection through non-violent presence, engage in public policy advocacy and, in general, stand in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation.

In September 2005, over 30 participants from different parts of the world, consisting of former Ecumenical Accompaniers, partners from Palestine and Israel, EAPPI national co-ordinators and WCC staff, came together to reflect on their experiences with EAPPI and what it meant to them spiritually. The seminar, which was organised by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), a body of the WCC, in co-operation with the Faith and Order department, aimed at discussing the theological and spiritual insights gained so far in order to sharpen the vision of the programme.

EAPPI is a special programme, with a special history. It all began with a cry for help. Some years ago, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem launched an appeal to not only the WCC, but also the UN, governments, politicians and the people of the world to do something to end the all-encompassing Israeli occupation of Palestinian people and lands. This cry, unfortunately, did not evoke a response from politicians and decision makers but touched the hearts and minds of churches, church agencies, NGOs and civil society. Civilians around the world responded and continue to respond to this cry. Civilians are the ones who are ready to go to the Occupied Palestinian Territories and plant themselves firmly at checkpoints, wall gates, roadblocks and other vulnerable places to show solidarity and provide symbolic protection with their presence. Civilians are the ones who are ready to stand in solidarity with Israeli peace activists who are struggling, just like Palestinians, to end the occupation, because they believe it is not only strangling the Palestinian people but is also corrupting and damaging their own society. Civilians are the ones ready to try to prevent violence and lessen the suffering of people, to try to make the Israeli army feel accountable by their presence as accompaniers. Civilians are the ones ready to try to stop settler aggression and to listen to the pain, hopes and dreams of Palestinians.

These are unarmed civilians equipped only with their faith, will and aspiration for a better world; unarmed civilians who are ready to put themselves at risk to show the victims and the oppressed that they are not alone and that the whole world is watching. In short, civilians are the ones to don the characteristic EAPPI jacket and intensively engage with the situation on the ground for a period of three months. Parliamentarians or policy-makers, however, who are in a better position to really make a structural change, and hence would benefit from such an experience, have not been participating



in EAPPI. Accompaniers try to address this gap with advocacy work, aimed at changing the attitudes and policies of these parliamentarians and policy-makers.

The three-day seminar provided a space to hear the voice of these concerned and determined civilians, as well as those who host and welcome them and coordinate their stay in Palestine and Israel.

This booklet documents the highlights and outcomes of this seminar. In it you will find an introduction and background to the EAPPI written by Peter Weiderud, Director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) of the WCC, a theological intervention written by Bishop Munib Younan, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the seminar report, edited by Deenabandhu Manchala of the WCC Faith and Order department. You will also find testimonies written by twenty-one previous Ecumenical Accompaniers, as well as testimonies from the 'accompanied'; our partners and friends, Rima Tarazi, Angela Godfrey-Goldstein, Nidal Abu Zuluf and Shareef Omar Khaled.

Thank you to those who participated in the seminar, and to those of you who have contributed to this collection. We sincerely hope that it offers a valuable incite into the spiritual and theological perspectives of those who have stood side by side one another in the search for a just and lasting peace.

INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION OF EAPPI THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION


BY PETER WEIDERUD
CCIA Director, WCC

Dear Bishop, dear sisters and brothers,
dear friends and colleagues.

Welcome to Geneva and to a WCC consultation!

I am grateful for the opportunity to be with you this evening and to participate in the dialogue on how to deepen and further our theological reflection on accompaniment. I sincerely regret that my duties will not allow me to be with you for the whole period but I am very much looking forward to reading all your testimonies and hearing the deliberations of this consultation and see how they will shape the EAPPI.

We are in an intensive period at the WCC as we prepare for WCC's next General Assembly in February 2006, where our members will celebrate the mid term of the Decade to Overcome Violence, take stock of its learnings so far, prepare for the next 5 years of the decade, and of course review the WCC's agenda for the next 8 years. In this context, the EAPPI has a lot to offer to the churches in terms of challenge and responsibility.



The CCIA developed the Ecumenical Accompaniment programme in Palestine and Israel with some very committed ecumenical partners and member churches based on its longstanding experience in human rights work as well as the theological basis developed by the churches for WCC's work on human rights since 1948.

The EAPPI was developed in a unique and dynamic way as a response of the WCC and its members and ecumenical partners who came together committed to show solidarity with the victims of human rights violations, the occupied and all those who oppose unjust structures and work for the end of the occupation of Palestine.

The EAPPI was developed out of an intensive consultation process with partners and members from 2001 to 2002 but it used a plethora of CCIA's rich history of work against human rights violations, as well as a deep theological basis for Christian responsibility in this work since 1937.

With all partners WCC accepted to take a risk to launch the programme already in August 2002 even though the programme was not fully established or even properly funded, only to respond in a timely manner to a human rights crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). The understanding was that WCC with a group of national coordinators from participating countries and the local churches would continue the reflection process while deeply involved in action.

The clarity of language used, the methodology and the reflection process as well as the funds and partners that evolved from 2001 to early 2002 demonstrate that when the churches come together; when the WCC responds at the right time and facilitates a process, we can be prophetic and dynamic.

However, as we had said then when we took the risk to respond to the call of our member churches, CCIA needs to continue to review, clarify and perfect - among other things - the EAPPI's management structures, programmatic agenda and its basis and understanding.

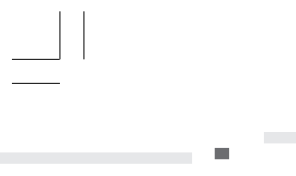
Almost three years later, while we are still in the midst of 'doing'; I am happy that we are able to take quiet time for joint reflection to guide our common action, deepen our existing theological reflection and further our understanding.

In this regard I welcome the valuable cooperation of our colleagues in the WCC Faith and Order department and thank the EAPPI staff for taking this initiative and each and every one of you for making the time to be here with us for this consultation.

In CCIA we believe it is extremely important that we provide theological and biblical resources to aid the Ecumenical Accompaniers and their sending churches and organisations in their efforts to end the occupation. I would also challenge us to see how we can address the biblical and theological rationale offered by Christian Zionists as we look for better ways to equip the EAs and our sending churches.

The theological basis for any political response by the WCC to any crisis is outlined in the by-laws of the Council and its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs or CCIA. I quote,

The World Council of Churches is a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. It seeks to advance towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers, "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21).



WCC member churches engage in Christian service by serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation, so that all may experience the fullness of life.

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, CCIA, is to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over human beings and history by serving people in the field of international relations and promoting reconciliation and oneness of human beings by creation; to God's gracious and redemptive action in history; and to the assurance of the coming kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

The Commission will call the attention of churches and councils to problems which are especially claimant upon the Christian conscience at any particular time and to suggest ways in which Christians may act effectively upon those problems in their respective countries and internationally and to respond to issues raised by churches and national and regional ecumenical organizations.

In the 1970's and 80's human rights occupied a high priority on the ecumenical agenda. The deep concerns that were brought into the EAPPI grew out of the experience and advocacy of the churches in many parts of the world in their struggle against the effects and root causes of human rights violations.

Redressing the pain and the suffering of the victims and providing pastoral care and concern has been an important part of the ecumenical agenda on human rights. WCC member churches have worked thoroughly to draw the attention of the world to large-scale violations that had become part of a system of governance, particularly in countries of the developing world.

At one of the key CCIA consultations on human rights that took place in 1974, in St Pölten, a group of 50 people from 34 countries reached a clear consensus on the basis for Christian involvement in human rights. The consultation noted the emphasis of the Gospel on the value of all human beings in the sight of God, on the atoning and redeeming work of Christ that has given to the human person true dignity, on love as motive for action, and on love for one's neighbour as the practical expression of an active faith in Christ. With this biblical underpinning of faith, the participants were able to clarify what constitutes human rights for the Christian Churches as well as Christian responsibility.

The 5th WCC General Assembly in Nairobi, a year after St Pölten, was called to draw up WCC's human rights agenda. In laying down the basis for its work, the Assembly observed that, and I quote, "the struggle of Christians for human rights is a fundamental response to Jesus Christ. The gospel leads us to become ever more active in identifying and rectifying violations of human rights in our own societies, and to enter into new forms of ecumenical solidarity with Christians elsewhere who are similarly engaged. It leads us into the struggle of the poor and the oppressed both within and outside the church as they seek to achieve their full human rights and frees us to work together with people of other faiths and ideologies who share with us common concerns for human dignity.

Our predecessors in the CCIA were guided by these theological principles when they were confronted with intensified violence in Palestine and Israel. They knew that they had to act; when our member churches in Jerusalem were calling for WCC to stand by them and when member churches and ecumenical partners from Europe and North America were reaching out their hand to the WCC to develop a response.

We are created in the image and likeness of God and deserve protection and care. Human rights remain a continuing concern of Christian churches and rightly so because the concept of human freedom and dignity lie at the core of our Christian faith as it is in other religious persuasions. Politics is an inescapable reality and involvement in it is a Christian responsibility. The biblical promise of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21, 1), where love will prevail, invites us as Christians to engage in the world.

The contrast of that vision with the reality makes that invitation compulsory and urgent.

The urgency for the international ecumenical family to be involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict did not come as a result of the Second Palestinian Intifada alone.

Since the first visit in 1996 of the then General Secretary of the WCC, the CCIA had launched an intensive study and reflection process on those issues that were left for the final status negotiations within the Declaration of Principles (DOP). The primary focus was to be on the Status of Jerusalem. WCC member churches were guided to develop and adopt their policies on all those elements which would develop a common mind and guide their actions. WCC had managed to adopt and develop a programme on the Status of Jerusalem and had started its implementation when the second uprising broke out.

The WCC Central Committee in 2001 in Potsdam in its comment on the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising, stated very boldly and unanimously:

“ the Church believes that it is the right as much as duty of an occupied people to struggle against injustice in order to gain freedom, although it also believes that non-violent means of struggle remain stronger and far more efficient. In this sense,

both parties must show the necessary fortitude, both in their hearts and in their minds, to look at the core of the conflict so that the Palestinian people can gain at long last its full freedom within its own sustainable state. It is imperative now to implement principles of international legitimacy by enforcing the binding UN resolutions. Such fortitude is a wise sign of foresight and an indispensable pre-requisite for long-lasting peace."

In addition they called the churches worldwide to accompany the churches of Jerusalem and their communities with prayers, statements, advocacy and actual presence.

The then WCC General Secretary, following the call of the 2001 Central Committee and responding to the request of the 13 Eastern and Oriental, Catholic and Protestant Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, calling on the churches to come and accompany them, sent a delegation in June 2001, headed by CCIA to consult the Heads of Churches and propose WCC's response.

The report of the delegation which was confidential in nature, was discussed by WCC member churches and partners at a high level consultation CCIA organised in August 2001, where all Heads of Churches of Jerusalem were invited and was moderated by the WCC General Secretary, Rev Dr Konrad Raiser and HH Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Orthodox Church, Moderator of the WCC Central and Executive Committee. Apart from WCC member churches, the Vatican had sent its Apostolic Delegate to the UN. The UN was represented by its office on Human Rights and there were two members of the Independent Inquiry Commission. The consultation received the report of the General Secretary's delegation and reflected on the theological basis, human needs

and political implications of the situation in Palestine and Israel. Among others, it recommended the establishment of a working group on accompaniment in order to study and develop such a response.

The WCC governing body that received these recommendations and reports in September 2001, not only welcomed and endorsed them, they even advised the CCIA to:

- “Develop an accompaniment programme that would include an international ecumenical presence based on the experience of the Christian Peacemaker’s Team”
- Call on WCC member churches and ecumenical partners to focus the year 2002 of the DOV on ending the occupation of Palestine and to participate actively in coordinated ecumenical efforts in this connection.
- “Consider the organisation of an International Conference on the Illegal Occupation of Palestine as part of the ecumenical efforts to end the Occupation of Palestine”
- “Call for international boycott of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT”
- Call on member churches to:
“join in non-violent acts of resistance to the destruction of Palestinian properties and to forced evictions of people from their homes and lands” and to “join in international prayer vigils to strengthen the chain of solidarity with the Palestinian people”

The CCIA launched the year 2002 with prayers from the 13 Heads of Churches of Jerusalem. A political campaign to end the occupation was based on prayers from the churches of the Holy Land itself. An educational video highlighting the voice of the churches in Jerusalem, leaflets and posters were made to raise awareness among churches and provide them with

material to focus their attention on the occupation and work towards its end. In the meantime, the CCIA worked tirelessly with the support of a small group of ecumenical partners with experts, theologians, human rights activists and local groups to develop the EAPPI.

The main call to churches in political crisis is to seek a united witness. Our response to conflicts can be credible, powerful and prophetic when the church is united and able to work with integrity.

We all know the result of the churches struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Before and during the war on Iraq the ecumenical family was able to stay together in a clear and prophetic critic against the pre-emptive strike, naming it immoral, illegal and ill-advised. We were not able to stop the war. But by staying together, the churches were able to clearly communicate to the Muslim world that this was not a Christian war against Islam, but an action taken by some governments. We also contributed to the discussion that is particularly in focus at the UN right now, about the legality of this action.

It is much more difficult when the churches are not united or even part of the problem.

In Rwanda before the Genocide in 1994 the WCC was unable to respond adequately and in time. In Zimbabwe, at this moment, our focus is engagement with the Churches, assisting them in the search for unity. In totalitarian states, it is much more costly and difficult for churches to act with integrity. This gives again another role to the WCC and the Ecumenical movement.

A very important instrument for searching, developing and consolidating a common mind and united response by the churches, is public statements by the governing bodies of the WCC. The Arab-Israeli conflict has been addressed by WCC General Assemblies, Central Committees, Executive Committees, more than any other political conflict.

The first statement, primarily concerned with Palestinian refugees in the 1948 war, was made at the very first General Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948. The number of statements increased after the 1967 war, again after the outbreak of the first Intifada at the end of 1980's and significantly after the breakdown of the so-called Oslo-process 10 years later.

All those statements are based on theological and political insights and are developed after an intensive consultation process. They have all had relevance and were used as a basis when developing the EAPPI. Only at its last meeting in Harare, 1998, the WCC General Assembly adopted two statements which have been extremely relevant to what later became the EAPPI - The statement on the Status of Jerusalem and the Statement on Human Rights.

This high level of involvement with the conflict has continued also after Harare. Altogether, there are more public statements by the governing bodies of the WCC the last 15 years, compared to the first 40.

The whole process of developing public statements in itself brings churches together and tries to build a common mind on issues of international relations based on our Christian teachings and our theological understandings.

While consistent, as mentioned earlier, with the WCC policy and position guidelines, the EAPPI is different from how we have done international affairs and peace work in the Middle East.

The EAPPI adds another form of action in our efforts to prevent wars, overcome violence, resolve conflicts and advocate for justice and peace; where the global church does not only analyze, reflect, make statements, lobby, send humanitarian assistance or pastoral delegations to express its solidarity with its sisters and brothers in the struggle for freedom and justice, but it shows its solidarity through physical presence and its advocacy with engagement.

It's not only about condemning human rights violations but actually witnessing them, speaking out against them or trying to prevent them from happening.

The EAPPI clearly shows the churches' important role in peace building. The EAPPI challenges the perception that the role of the church and civil society in the Middle East is only in the humanitarian field and clearing the mess of the wars and providing charity and assistance. The EAPPI has added a dimension that the church in Jerusalem as well as churches from around the world can be in the forefront of addressing root causes of human rights violations and violence, preventing wars and building peace.

With EAPPI it is knowing that the task of the church is to demonstrate that an alternative, non-violent way is possible and to prove that despite the growing public disbelief in dialogue as an option to end wars and build peace, it is still relevant.

The EAPPI is a message of hope for both nations telling them that, there is no way to peace, peace is the way.

In a conflict where intergovernmental bodies have failed so far to provide an official human rights protection force and the perpetrators of human rights abuses and their victims have been left to themselves, the church through the Ecumenical Accompaniers physical presence, sheds light on human rights abuses that would otherwise have been happening in the dark.

The EAPPI is meant to be a clear counter witness to the loud silence; an active solidarity in the face of the passive bystanders. Its strength lies with the fact that it has a solid theological basis and the fact that it has developed out of a common developed policy and a united mind within the churches. We owe it to the churches and the people we are accompanying to build on these.

This consultation convened by CCIA and EAPPI with the support of Faith and Order, will look at the theology of accompaniment and once again I would like to reiterate that we look forward to its fruits for the wider reflection process to guide the programme and WCC in general.

Thank you once again for taking the time to be with us and for all your good work. All the best for a successful and enriching meeting. I am confident that you are in very good hands with Rifat and Anne-Marie as your hosts. I hope you will have time to also enjoy your stay here, maybe even to visit the Ecumenical Center and pray that you will all return safely to your loved ones.

Thank you for allowing me this time and for your attention. God Bless.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND TESTIMONY

BY BISHOP DR. MUNIB YOUNAN
Head of the Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Jordan and the Holy Land
Chair of the EAPPI Local Reference Group

INTRODUCTION

It is an honor for me to attend this theological workshop on the theological basis for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). I think such an experience is very significant to understand the involvement of the Church in the quest for peace and justice in the Middle East.

In the season of Easter, 2002, the Heads of the local Churches in Jerusalem called out to the world for help, to go beyond issuing statements to taking action. The re-occupation of Palestinian lands by the Israeli army had become so violent and oppressive that we asked our fellow brothers and sisters to follow the example of Philip's call to Nathanael: "Come and see" (John 1: 46). This call from the depth of the hearts of the Christian leaders in Jerusalem (Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical) is like the vision that St. Paul had of a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16: 9). The local Christian Churches in Jerusalem were pleading to the world, "Come to Jerusalem and help us." We searched for words to embody the notion of "come and see." We began with "monitoring,"

but monitoring is a more political term and does not mean involvement and walking together with the Churches. We were talking about “accompaniment.”

The World Council of Churches (WCC) sent Ms. Salpy Eskidjian to the Churches in Jerusalem to explore exactly how to move from statements to action. Through consultation, we agreed to establish the EAPPI, a program that is owned by the local churches in Jerusalem but administered by the WCC. We were happy that from that time on there has been a continuous unbroken presence of Accompaniers from several parts of the world.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF ACCOMPANIMENT

Accompaniment in the Middle East is not a new notion. It goes back to the Old Testament. When the Hebrews left Egypt to Sinai, God accompanied them by cloud by day and by a fire that lit up the night (Exodus 14). It is this accompaniment as solidarity with the other that the Bible teaches us. Accompaniment took root in the flesh in God’s incarnation, when God became one of us. In Jesus Christ, God engaged with our brokenness and sin. He accompanied groaning humanity in order that it might regain the image of God through the salvation of the cross. So this accompaniment that God calls us to do as companions with the global Church is an accompaniment with groaning humanity that seeks forgiveness and the justice of God in order that all may be brokers of justice, instruments of peace, ministers of reconciliation, and defenders of human rights.

Such accompaniment can be seen in the story of the walk to Emmaus in St. Luke 24:13-43. Two frustrated men who had experienced the horrible week of suffering and the cross, returned back to their village, Emmaus. Their hopes were

shattered. In their depressing situation, Jesus accompanied them. He heard their stories and contributed to their understanding of the Scriptures. He accompanied them, giving them encouragement. So accompaniment is walking together with Jesus Christ in companionship and in service to God's mission. In walking together on the road to Emmaus, as the Lord revealed himself to his two companions, their three stories became intertwined. As their stories came together, God's plan in Jesus' resurrection became clearer. A new community, the Church, began to emerge in Jerusalem. In sharing a meal and breaking the bread the companions recognized the presence of Jesus with them. Accompaniment is valued for its own sake as well as for its results. It is open-ended with no foregone conclusions. The companions learn together through the journey the peace, justice and hope that God intends for humanity. Accompaniment binds companions more closely to their Lord and one another as they seek to live out this mission.

ACCOMPANIMENT IN JUSTICE

Dr. Ishmael Noko, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, explains the relationship between justice and justification. Being justified by grace through faith returns us to the real meaning of biblical justice. It describes the ambiguity in which we human beings find ourselves. We are at the same time sinners and saints, always in need of justice and liberation, which God graciously gives us. We are simultaneously being judged and freed. Those of us experiencing injustice in this world have the promise of the wonderful hope of justice from the cross and resurrection of Christ. Yes, we are victims of injustice, but as we are saved by God's grace, the triune God will never allow injustice to have the final word. The gift of justification that we are given in Christ is an affirmation that we are all made in God's image, that we are each of value as individuals. Because we are justified by God and not by our

own qualities or actions, we should all receive each other as God receives us. This is a call to all those who are baptized into Christ to take part in building community across the barriers that exist between nations, ethnic groups, genders and generations and accompany the humanity that is suffering.

As we look back in the Old Testament, we find that justice is grounded in God's divine nature. This has far-reaching implications for righteous living, righteous judging and righteous rejoicing. The worship expected of the righteous, the one who practices justice and righteousness, stems from obedience to the Covenant. Professor von Rad says that there is no concept more important in the Hebrew Scriptures than justice. When Isaiah called the people of Israel to repent and come back to their covenant relationship with God, they were reminded that it would mean seeking justice and correcting oppression (1:17), letting the oppressed go free, and breaking every yoke (58:6). The Prophet Micah spells out what God is really looking for, what God requires or expects from those who have covenanted to be a blessing: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God?" (6:8).

The story witness of accompaniment for justice is the story of Naboth the Jezreelite in 1 Kings 21. It was King Ahab in Samaria that asked Naboth to give him his vineyard. "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house" (1 Kings 21:2). Naboth refused the request of King Ahab, saying: "The Lord forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance" (1 Kings 21:3). Ahab went home resentful, depressed and sullen. But his wife Jezebel plotted a conspiracy in which the claim was that Naboth had cursed God and the King (1 Kings 21:13). So he was stoned to death and the dogs licked his blood. As a consequence of his death,

Naboth's vineyard was confiscated and grabbed by the royal family. This story is still repeated in more subtle ways in our unjust world. The poor Naboth found no one among his countrymen or the international community to advocate his case. The shame is that an accusation based on lies caused him his life and his ancestors' vineyard.

The only one who accompanied Naboth for justice was the prophet Elijah the Tishbite. The God of justice did not accept these mean ways of grabbing land for the excuses of injustice. He sent his prophet to witness for justice. Thus says the Lord: "Have you killed, and also taken possession?" Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood" (1 Kings 21: 19). This strange story calls the Church of God to be prophetic for justice.

The New Testament perspective of justice is rooted in the proclamation and inauguration of the reign of God in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus sets out His program, His purpose and His message of salvation. It includes the mission of Justice. "The Spirit has sent me to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18). In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus reminds the religious leaders that they have given too much attention to ritual purity and neglected the weightier matter of justice (Matt. 23:23). As we gather as a community of Christ in the Holy Land, the church contributes to earthly peace and justice in a public role. In recalling an identity in baptism, celebrating the Lord's Supper, telling the biblical narrative and in teaching faith, hope and love in Christ, the Church in the Middle East provides the basis of prophetic peace making. For this reason, accompaniment is for justice.

The Church is to be bold in accompanying the people who are victims of oppressive political structures or occupation. The

Church is called to be prophetic not for its own sake but for the sake of humanity that God has created in his image and Christ has redeemed on his cross.

For Palestinian Christians, we believe that speaking with a prophetic voice means:

1. condemning every kind of injustice, oppression, occupation, terrorism or violence of any kind no matter who is the perpetrator. The Church locally and globally should always speak against any kind of racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, or any kind of discrimination in economic or social practices. To explore and denounce these sins is to proclaim the law of God but also to respect the image of God in the other.

In our context, we have clearly stated our status confessionis that occupation is a sin against God and against humanity. It deprives people of their human rights and dignity. It demoralizes first the occupier and then the occupied. Last week, as I met the Jewish and Protestant leaders of the USA, I told them that Israel is obsessed by the mentality of occupation. When we demand an end of the illegal occupation, we demand liberation for both Israelis and Palestinians and create the necessary foundation for just peace.

2. holding up a vision for just peace. We believe just peace means:
 - ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land
 - a two-state solution, which means having the state of Israel and the state of Palestine along 1967 borders, living side by side in peace, equality, justice, and reconciliation
 - a shared Jerusalem that secures the five essential elements of the city: being Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Palestinian and Israeli. West Jerusalem can be the capital of Israel and East

Jerusalem of Palestine

- a just solution for the right of return for Palestinian refugees
- a political solution to the illegal Israeli settlements built on confiscated Palestinian land
- sharing the water and other valuable resources

3. establishing a democratic, modern, civil Palestinian society.

The Church also calls for justice within our society in a way that will guarantee everyone's human and civil rights. The three areas of government, executive, legislative, and judicial, must be independent. There must be equality and freedom of religion for every human being. The Church continues to be critical when it calls for justice both for and by the Palestinians, because justice must begin at home.

Often, when the church speaks boldly and truthfully for peace and justice, it is criticized for being one-sided and imbalanced. Justice is imbalanced, for it stands on the side of the weak and the oppressed. The Church has no other intent than to care for humanity and justice. For this reason, justice is not political but biblical and spiritual. When the Church is prophetic that means it is balanced in its call for both justice and healing.

The Church and EAPPI accompany others who work for a just peace, for there are many Israelis who speak for justice.

Avraham Burg, the famous speaker of the Israeli Knesset wrote: "A state lacking justice cannot survive."

"It is very comfortable to be a Zionist in West Bank settlements such as Beit EL and Ofra. The biblical landscape is charming. From the window you can gaze through the geraniums and bougainvilleas and not see the occupation. Traveling on the fast highway takes you from Ramot on Jerusalem's northern

edge to Gilo on the southern edge, a 12 minute trip that skirts barely a half-mile west of the Palestinian roadblock. It's hard to comprehend the humiliating experience of the despised Arab who must creep for hours along the pocked, blockaded roads assigned to him. One road for the occupier, one road for the occupied."

"This cannot work. Even if the Arabs lower their heads and swallow their shame and anger forever, it won't work."
Burg goes on to plead for people to speak out about the terrible problems of Israeli injustice - something that could be different, could be changed. He states that crying out is a moral imperative and that the time for illusions is over.

Avraham Burg, *A Failed Israeli Society Collapses While Its Leaders Remain Silent*, 2003

We think Burg is right: "Israel cannot survive without justice." And I would add: neither can Palestinians survive without justice. The Palestinian Church believes that the security of Israel is dependent on freedom and justice for Palestinians, and, simultaneously, freedom and justice for Palestinians is dependent on the security of Israel. This is a symbiotic relationship and is the key for any just peace and reconciliation in our Land. This formula is the key that seeks true peace and healing for both peoples, but at the same time, allows both peoples to live in their own viable, contiguous states according to international standards of justice, equality and equitable sharing of resources.

And so I call also upon my people, the Palestinians, to continue the strategies of non-violence and the rule of law in order to activate our national rights in our democratic, viable state. Then, as the Psalmist sings: "Justice and peace will kiss each other" (Ps 85: 10).

ACCOMPANIMENT IN TRUTH-TELLING

We are living in a world where the more loudly people shout, the more they promote themselves. This does not necessarily drive justice nor present the truth. For this reason, people in our Holy Land are paralyzed by fear, oppression, hatred, violence and occupation. Healing must begin with truth-telling and with healing the silence that hides the suffering of those who are vulnerable and violated. Any truth-telling will allow the possibility of healing with justice and forgiveness. Only when the light of truth exposes the lies that have been used to inflict suffering on innocent people can the seeds of reconciliation take root.

How many wars and conflicts have been launched in the last years for the sake of ideology or narrow partisan politics, masquerading as security concerns, or using eschatological visions and Holy writings to justify killing or occupation! How many people read the Bible and develop scenarios for occupation and Armageddon war, adding to oppression and injustice! All of that is far from the reality that Israelis and Palestinians live and none of it is built on the truth. As a Christian I believe that truth liberates and does not burden. Politicians and governments need to free themselves and liberate their peoples by telling them the truth. The conflicts in the Middle East show us how sick ideologies, lies and propaganda can demonize and create hatred, a spiral of violence and destructive extremes. Truth-telling must be the basis for healing and justice in our broken societies and conflicts.

This of course begs the question: where is truth? In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the two peoples each have their own histories and none among us will relinquish our collective memories easily, as they are such a part of who we are. However, we must not allow ourselves to be so rooted in our

stories of pain and suffering that we cannot or will not understand the suffering of others. We each must acknowledge the validity of the other's truth. It is far easier to show respect for the history of others when they are showing respect for yours. It is acknowledging the reality of another's history, even when you view the past through different lenses, that forms the basis for a kind of solidarity embodying a fundamental respect for differences. But this in turn requires people to face the flaws on their part and to acknowledge the reality of the grief of the others. To begin to realize that the old division between "us" and "them", "good" and "evil" is fundamentally flawed. It requires us to interpret our own past and create new memories. We should never allow our history of pain and suffering to become our future of hopelessness and injustice.

For this reason, accompaniment is truth telling. It is to tell the world what is really happening. As an example, the Wall is unnecessary. Our position has been that if Israel really needed a wall, it should have built it on 1967 borders. The truth is that the Wall is built within Palestinian territories. It is not separating Palestinians from Israelis only, but Palestinians from Palestinians within the occupied territories. It is separating Palestinians from their own farms. We can take Jayyous as an example, where the Wall has separated the villagers and farmers from their farms and from 75% of their water resources. Our fear is that Wall is not for security but for grabbing more land and setting the borders of the future Palestinian state. Some Israeli officials are saying that it is a temporary wall. We tell them, "If it is a temporary wall, do not build it, for the Holy Land does not need walls but it needs bridges." We also tell them that the security of Israel is not in this separating wall but in justified Palestinians. We take that from Ephesians 2:14, "For Christ is our peace. In His flesh, He has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us."

I admire the late Pope John Paul II when he gave the world a beautiful example. He confessed the sins of some members of the Church in the persecution of the Jewish people. Nations, politicians, governments and faith leaders need to learn from him and to act with his courage. We need to confess the sins of hate, non-truth and injustice that divide us. I admire the late Pope because he dared to say what others have not. Yes, we have also to confess that the church in Europe has maltreated the Jewish people in the past. This fear is still alive in the depth of every Jew. And for the sake of truth, we (including Palestinians) are to see that underlying fear, although we Palestinians have lived with the Jews for many centuries and did not treat them as Europe did. My late father used to tell me that we have to accept the Jews because they are an oppressed people like us. But for the sake of truth, the world should be courageous enough to confess that injustice has been done to the Palestinian people. Do not make us victims of the victims. The time has come for hearing one another's truth because it is essential for justice, healing, and reconciliation.

Accompaniment is truth telling. As local Churches in the Holy Land, we do not demand more than telling the truth, even if that truth hurts. Since the EAPPI is a human chain for truth-telling, EAPPI has to say what the Palestinian and mass media ignore. EAPPI is to build a human chain for truth, justice, peace, and reconciliation in the world. Accompaniment, then, becomes hope for the oppressed.

Some ask me, what change does this make? Modern Church history teaches us the strength of the human chain that is non violent, tells the truth, and works for just peace and reconciliation. Take for example the human chain that was built in El-Salvador, Guatemala and South Africa. The members of the Church, the grassroots, are the ones that dared to make

a paradigm shift by telling the truth. In Palestine and Israel, we need that human chain from the South and North, East and West to accompany the fears of both, to address the injustice and to establish a hope for real justice and true peace. The church in Jerusalem asks you to be part in this human chain. This human chain urges Israelis to see God in the Palestinians and urges Palestinians to see God in the Israelis and then accept each other's humanity. Once one accepts the humanity of the other, then there is mutual recognition of each other's human, civil, religious, national and political rights. Only then will the Holy Land become the Promised Land for both Palestinians and Israelis.

THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Palestinian Christians belong to Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic (Roman and Oriental), and Evangelical (Lutheran and Anglican) traditions. We are less than 2% of the total population. Palestinian Christians see that they have a role in the Middle East. Their role is as instruments of peace, brokers of justice, defenders of human rights, including women's rights, ministers of reconciliation, and apostles of love. However, sometimes we feel we are abandoned in our struggle for just peace and reconciliation. Accompaniment revives a hope in us that we are not forgotten, that we are part of the Church of God. We are the local expansion of the global Church. Thus, accompaniment makes us part of a "living Church." Christians coming from around the world make us feel that we are really part of the Church of God and that the world cares for our well being and health.

Accompaniment then becomes a two-way track. You come and accompany us and thus give a living response to the call from the Churches in Jerusalem "to come and see and be with us". But we also accompany you in our long experience of

living with the other, especially with Islam. We believe that in a world where Islam is misunderstood, we continue to be the voice of Islam to the West and the Western voice to the Muslims and Arab World. Accompaniment even changes the mentality and prejudice against Islam. It brings a different impression of Western Christianity to Muslim communities. Take for example the village of Jayyous, a Muslim town, where Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims, are highly appreciated and hard at work as people of justice and peace. This accompaniment through the local Church becomes a bridge-builder between Islam and Western Christianity. This is a role that we Palestinian Christians continue actively to play.

However, Palestinian Christians are dwindling in number due to the unstable political situation and the difficulties it produces. Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Anglican Bishop Abu El-Assal, and I wrote a letter to the whole world, asking people to:

1. support community-based education through Christian schools and educational institutions,
2. stop emigration of Christians through job creation,
3. provide low-cost housing (housing is a social right not a luxury), and
4. strengthen Christian social institutions. These organizations provide needed services to all in Palestinian society regardless of religion, gender or political affiliation.

We trust that you will join your hands with ours so that together we can realize the dream for a just peace and reconciliation. A just peace will guarantee the presence and witness of Palestinian Christians who are Living Stones in God's land.

We believe that the churches can and must do more to recognize their duty towards the Holy Land and act together

to sensitize their governments, their people, and the international community. Our communities ask your help so that justice will prevail and so that Palestinian Christians will flourish in the Holy Land and be strengthened to carry out our mission in the power of the Resurrection.

With St. Paul we affirm: “That if one member suffers all suffer with it. If one member is honored all rejoice together with it” 1 Cor.12:26. It is this theology of accompaniment that calls the global church to accompany their sisters and brothers who are living in distress and under occupation. Your accompaniment is similar to the road of Emmaus. We walk together as equals in humanity, and as equals in salvation. We walk together bowed in head, seeking the truth, comforting the Church of God. We accompany each other, trusting that in our wonder and uncertainty, God will inform us of our mission and our witness in a broken Holy Land. For this reason, accompaniment is an instrument and tool of the Holy Communion through which we are commissioned to be God’s witnesses for justice, peace, and reconciliation. It makes both companions witnesses of hope in a hopeless situation, witnesses of love in a world of hatred and retaliation, witnesses of faith in a world that ignores God, witnesses of truth in a world of propaganda and lies.

We thank you who dare to be our companions on the road.

God Bless You.

Bishop Munib Younan

REPORT OF THE THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION

by Deenabadhu Manchala
Faith and Order, WCC

EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel) has been an initiative of the World Council of Churches as part of its Ecumenical Campaign to End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine: Support a Just Peace in the Middle East since 2002. A number of concerned people from many parts of Europe, North America and Africa, some representing churches and organisations, and others as concerned individuals lived in Israel and Palestine for short periods of time ranging from 3 to 9 months in an effort to accompany and learn from the Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the illegal occupation. This co-ordinated engagement of the churches and Christians with the lives and realities of the people, communities and churches in Israel and Palestine, besides enabling solidarity and partnership in the struggle for justice and peace, has also opened new possibilities to understand the meaning and implications of Christian faith, of being church and the ecumenical movement.

About 25 people, former companions and some representing the accompanied, participated in this first ever attempt to discern the theological implications of the experience of accompaniment during the past three years (2002-2005) as part of the WCC's EAPPI. Some of its national coordinators as well as some WCC staff also joined this exploration. The participants, mostly non-academic theologians, attempted to do theology by using their own personal experiences of encounter in one of the most violence-ridden contexts in the world as their primary subject matter. They shared their moving stories and personal testimonies, faith and ideological motivations, questions and anxieties, concerns about the safety and well-being of the people they met, etc. in an intensely violent context. It may be helpful to understand the life-world of the accompanied through Rima Tarazi's (Palestine) attempt to describe the predicament of her people:

It is not easy to understand what it means to spend a lifetime surrounded by oppressive walls and military barriers and to have one's life reduced to trying to provide the next meal for one's starving children.

It is not easy to feel what it means to watch one's child succumbing to random fire and one's home, orchard, and life savings and memories completely destroyed.

It is not easy to imagine life with no horizon, with no hope, with no dreams, except those of the ever after.

Above all, it is not easy to live with injustice forever and ever, for there is no pain worse than being punished for the ills imposed on you. Punishing the victim is the gravest injustice of all and the perpetration of injustice is the gravest travesty of all, because injustice breeds hatred and violence and it drags human beings into a quagmire of eternal strife.

The following summary of their conclusions is based on their personal testimonies, work together and in groups at the workshop: their understanding of the Christian faith (conceptions of God, Christ and Christian discipleship, etc.); of Christian response to occupation (mission) and of being church in a violent context.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF FAITH THROUGH ACCOMPANIMENT

In situations of intense human suffering and misery caused by violence, God's intervention is often hoped for, sometimes even enacted by some in the name of God, in ways that are accompanied by ruthless and destructive power. Such images of God as a violent, destructive and limitless power (emerging out of theological formulations done under the patronage of monopolising powers) have often lent legitimacy to the violence of the powerful besides making religions complicit in such acts of violence. In contrast, accompaniment is based on a different understanding of the power and intervention of God in situations where the logic of violence overwhelms the commonsense of people. It affirms the inherent goodness of God's creation and the human capacity for goodness. It insists that violence is not a divine attribute and resists those attempts that seek to give violence religious legitimacy. It is based on the assertion that 'God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength' (I Cor. 1: 25).

God accompanies us towards transformation: God's intervention in human history does not negate or set aside God-ordained processes of change. God's power does not override human freedom and human capacity for transformation. God empowers and makes things happen and in that the beauty and wisdom of God's creation is affirmed. God intervenes

through a healing and assuring presence with the victims, enabling them to transform the hurt and indignation in ways that affirm life. Therefore, accompaniment is a process of healing and empowerment that effects lasting peace. In the words of Dieter Ziebarth from Germany:

“Presence in itself is a sign of hope and a way of strengthening. This was the first insight provided to the accompaniers by the accompanied. So I learnt more and more that accompaniment...primarily means to monitor, to listen... to comfort.... I learnt from the accompanied that visions need a long breath and a lot of patience, trust and hope. I learnt a lot from their courage and power of endurance. I came to bring a signal of hope but I was taught much more about what hope means and requires.”

Accompaniment is not merely a passive presence with the victims although it might seem that way. Nor is it about binding the wounds of the victims. It is about speaking truth to the powerful who violate and cause violence and holding them accountable. Accompaniment is a way of manifesting God’s transforming presence, an experience of being face to face with the forces and structures of oppression and injustice. Anna Seifert from UK had this to say: “I knew I had not physically changed anything and had been unable to help people get across to East Jerusalem, yet as an EA with the symbol of the dove of peace and the cross transcending barriers printed on my jacket, I had stood in the midst of Palestinian people, I had cried with them and I had taken photos for advocacy at home. I had also approached an Israeli officer with integrity and without fear, speaking ‘truth to power’ and in a place of intense hostility we had connected at a human level”. The Geneva participants said, “ There is a call to be with the oppressed since our mandate is to work for justice and liberation.... We

do not see Christianity as a weak or passive religion which simply stands in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. It is active and therefore we have to take action to speak out against the oppressor and to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor.” (Working Group I)

Accompaniment - a response to our faith in God’s incarnation in Christ: The incarnated “Word of God full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) dwelt among us. God entered into the human predicament with all its vulnerability and uncertainty as an expression of God’s solidarity with the suffering and the vulnerable humanity. Through incarnation, God exposes the shallowness of the powers that deny and abuse life. In other words, by siding with the victims God speaks the truth to the powerful and holds them accountable. Desmond Parsons from Canada wrote that Christ’s passion and suffering on the cross is an act of solidarity with all who are oppressed, particularly by illegitimate governance and occupation.

Accompaniment is a reiteration of the Biblical tradition. God is always accompanying people in their suffering and struggles. The Bible records many stories of accompaniment, starting with Abraham, continued by the prophets and Jesus and later by the apostles. Among them, St. Paul’s visit to the Christian congregations living under oppressive conditions, such as in Jerusalem despite the threats to his life (Acts 20,16), is a remarkable story of accompaniment. Max Surjadinata from USA testified to his spiritual experience: “As an accompanier, I had an opportunity to live my Christian faith alongside those who are struggling for freedom and justice, who face oppression and violence. In so doing, I believe that I follow Jesus, who is present in the lives of those who suffer. I seek to be an instrument and witness for peace and justice, joining the people in their joys and sorrows, working together with the God ‘Who Is With

Us' to build the beloved community where God's reign of peace, justice and love may come on earth as it is in heaven".

Encountering and experiencing life amidst hopelessness and despair: The gospels tell us that Jesus intervened whenever and wherever life was in danger, denied, stifled, distorted and abused and that he met people in their fears and uncertainties. The Risen Lord meets his bewildered disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13 -35). Accompaniment is an assertion of life in situations where it is in danger, when it is threatened by hatred, greed and arrogance. It is a spiritual pilgrimage of encounter beyond the safe precincts and narrow confines of religious practice. It is meeting God in the crucible of an intense struggle for life and justice. In a context where religious identities have been a major cause of conflict, accompaniment has made it possible to draw resources for justice and peace from the well-springs of those very religious traditions and to nurture partnerships for life and peace for all. From UK Vivienne Jackson illustrates this point through her personal feelings: "I was moved by some of the young people of Yanoun's acceptance of my Jewish background, given the terrible experience they have had with many Jewish people - usually only seeing the army or settlers who arrive from nowhere to threaten them. They did not reject me or hold me to account for these people. I have to remember that some of the first people to come to support Yanoun when the villagers left were Israeli Jewish activists. Yanoun residents could teach the world a lesson in global ethics on this front. They treated me with great hospitality and good humour, and in some cases genuine affection." The participants of the Geneva meeting said, "it has been our experience that Muslims welcomed the EAs as Christians and the Christian premise of the programme... [as] a religious motivation for justice and solidarity is immediately accepted by the Palestinians as these are the core values of the Quran and the Hebrew Bible". (Working Group I)

II. DISCERNING THE IMPLICATIONS OF FAITH IN ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Traditional Christian response to human suffering caused by violent conflicts and war has been to alleviate the suffering of the victims. Churches have often been silent or felt powerless in the face of the magnitude of the powers which wreak havoc in the lives of people. EAPPI has opened new possibilities to discern how the churches might use accompaniment as a way of responding. It reiterates that our 'struggle is not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities, against the world rulers of this present darkness and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness'. (Phil 6: 12) It calls for courageous actions to confront the powers and stand alongside the victims and those who are willing to be persecuted for the sake of justice. (Mt. 5: 10)

Accompaniment as a form of non-violent resistance: Accompaniment has taught that it is necessary to expose the futility of the logic of violence by nurturing the power of the disempowered towards acts of non-violent resistance. It is an act of kindling faith and hope in life-affirming ways of resistance to injustice and oppression. Angela Godfrey-Goldstein from Israel said,

"Their (EAs) presence, as living proof that oppression ends, that truth and reconciliation, non-violence and dialogue, negotiation, justice and respect of the other are all part of the way forward, was for me as an Israeli a source of spiritual comfort... The fact that a whole people are not being allowed basic human rights - are being denied anything like a decent life or future - and that something intrinsically evil is being carried out (sometimes in the name of religion, in a travesty thereof) - is something that keeps the spirit fighting. Thank God

for people such as Martin Luther King, who said: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”.

Dieter Ziebarth’s long story of the women’s initiative of prayer as a form of protest is another strong expression of this courage: “Close to our home in Bethlehem the wall reaches a height of 6.5 meters. On a hill, a small distance from the wall, the house of family H. was visibly covered by a lot of rubble and debris in front of the broken fence. In former times a garden with 300 olive trees stretched around the family’s home. For sake of the wall construction, the garden was confiscated and devastated, only 30 olive trees around the house were left. Mrs. H is a teacher and teaches the nurses of the nearby baby hospital of Caritas in Arabic. The nurses, together with Mrs. H. and her neighbour, started a peace prayer walk along the wall and the place of devastation. They continued this prayer weekly, every Friday in the evening. Our team of EAs accompanied them regularly. The scenery every Friday seemed to be extremely absurd. A small group of people gathered in powerless protest in front of the symbol of power and superiority. How can it help? For us, the EAs, it was a significant testimony, a kind of peaceful protest using the original means of faith, the prayer, the lamentation to God. It was a small sign of the power of the powerless. And indeed, our peace prayer was perceived by the other side. During one of our prayers, a military van of the IDF appeared, directed its floodlights at us and ordered us to leave the area immediately. We asked them if they felt threatened by prayers and declared that we would only leave after finishing the prayer. So we continued our prayer in front of the armoured car, interrupted from time to time by shouting from the car: “Go home!” We did so after asking saying the benediction of God, including to the IDF soldiers: “The Lord bless you and give peace to us”.”

Those present at the Geneva meeting, therefore, insisted: “It is not enough to espouse the idea of non-violent resistance as part of the programme, but it is also important to develop tools that make it a viable path towards peace. This includes training the EAs in non-violent approaches for peace and negotiations, advocating the issue of return of the refugees, lobbying with those in power, correcting disinformation that legitimises state violence, and exploring the possibility of economic sanctions as a critical form of action ensuring that it does not further aggravate the plight of the disempowered and the vulnerable.” (Working Group II) While talking about sanctions, the participants recalled the ways in which Jews were deprived of the fruits of their labour in Nazi Germany and in contrast the way the churches and communities grew rich on Jewish property.

Solidarity in suffering and struggle: Accompaniment is a way of saying that ‘when some suffer all suffer’. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”. It is not a paternalistic claim to put an end to the sufferings of the Palestinians at once. Hansruedi Guyer of Switzerland was frank: “So what was the use of my presence in the school bus? What difference did we make in the village of Zababdeh? I think the children felt more at ease when somebody was travelling with them and I think the soldiers had less freedom to delay the school bus wilfully. It is not a particular presence which made a difference but more the fact that the congregations and the village realised there was somebody here who cared. We were not present in Zababdeh to give protection to the people. They still had to cope with the problem of how they would manage to enter Jenin, or with the fact that for months they never had a chance to visit relatives in nearby Jenin. They did not expect us to give them protective accompaniment.” Valentina Maggiulli of Switzerland too

echoed the same feelings: “We heard a lot of stories that day...This afternoon I felt very close to those women. And again it was one of those moments that I realized I can’t really ‘do’ anything to change their situation but I can be there to share their pain. Of course there were moments when I asked myself if my presence makes a difference. It would be naive to think that our presence makes the lives of Palestinians easier.”

Accompaniment, therefore, is an assurance of love and care, an affirmation of the inter-relatedness of us all, in situations that are overwhelmed by forces that break and fragment lives and relationships. It is standing with the one who is suffering. Nidal Abu-Zuluf from Palestine said, “I need you to be next to me in difficult times but I also need you to share my dreams. For me, accompaniers are those who share with me dreams for a better future and a better world....Accompaniment is the power that gives hope to people in need and pushes them to look to the future in an optimistic way, developing their self-esteem and better human role and contribution to their community and the entire world.” Mechtild Kappetein from Germany spoke movingly about the suffering of Jews in Nazi Germany and of Palestinians now under occupation:

“We all knew that there were no Christian protests when the Jews suffered discrimination and lost all their rights. There were no crosses on the streets or at the train stations when the children, women and men were deported, and no accompaniment, monitoring or advocacy work by the official Christian Churches or their practising members. There were some individuals and small groups who did speak in public and helped Jewish people to survive while risking their own lives - thank God and thanks to them.... Now that I am back in Germany, I’m telling people what I’ve seen and what’s really going on in Palestine. I speak about the suffering of the

Palestinian people under the illegal occupation, the violations of human rights and international law, and all the daily humiliations. And I speak about those Israelis who are committed to justice and peace and about their non-violent actions in order to end the occupation; I also talk about the fear and the trauma of the Jewish people and about their longing for true security. I have already experienced that talk about Palestine and the Palestinian people has been misused, namely as anti-Semitism.”

Accompaniment is responding to Jesus’ appeal to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me” (Mt.26: 38). It is an attempt to revive the dead and dry bones. It helps the victims to move out of the often debilitating state of victimhood in order that life may bloom despite death and destruction. The experience of the accompaniers has once again shown that unhealed trauma could lead to endless cycle of revenge and regression leaving a deeply brutalised society.

Building networks and coalitions: Accompaniment is witnessing to hope amidst turmoil. It is building coalitions for peace and justice in a context dominated by networks of hegemonic powers. It is not just a passive physical presence. Most of the accompaniers, after returning home, have been active advocates of the campaign to end the occupation. They see themselves as John’s disciples who were told by Jesus, “Go and tell what you have seen and heard”. Angela Godfrey-Goldstein from Israel said: “For Palestinians, the solidarity of foreigners is one of the few rays of hope they have on their grim horizon. For Christians particularly it must be somewhat of comfort to see that the Church internationally cares and is doing more than just praying at a safe distance for its brothers in faith in trouble elsewhere.”

Shareef Omar Khaled, a Muslim from Palestine, challenged the accompaniers: "We feel that we are humiliated daily because of the occupation; an occupation which is strongly backed by the U.S.A.. I think the same feeling is felt by the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. If no government dares to say 'no' to Bush, I think that the wider community of people and churches are able to say 'no' to the aggressive policies of the United States and to invite the international community to raise their voice loudly against humiliation and oppression everywhere. You have enough power to do it, even though you do not have the F16's and the tanks. You have your voices." Bishop Munib Younan exhorted: "Truth liberates when you tell the story." Hansruedi Guyer from Switzerland corroborated: "People would not ask me to help them in their difficulties, they would not ask for accompaniment. But they would always stress: 'Go back to your country and tell people about our situation here.' It was important for them to know there was somebody who listened to their stories and to feel they were not alone without anybody caring about their oppression."

Security through justice: Accompaniment is a way of asserting that the security and well-being of all -Palestinians and Israelis - is possible only through justice. It is an attempt to expose the logic of the powerful that seeks security through walls of concrete and military tanks. "Security is about recognising the dignity of those who feel threatened and about giving credibility to those feeling threatened" (Working Group II). "Social stigma or social locations often influence the accent on justice that the world places. Justice for the Dalits in India and for the Palestinians is not considered as important as those for the privileged." Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Palestine and the Holy Land said, and continued, "Justice to that extent is not a political concept but an essentially

biblical and spiritual virtue... only if the church is imbalanced for justice for the poor and disinherited, then only it can be called a church". Colin Watermeyer from South Africa saw accompaniment as a spiritual vocation: "As a Christian, I've made it my prerogative to raise my voice against injustices of any kind against my fellow human beings (Joel 1:2-3). The Israel/Palestine conflict has a special significance to me, because the injustice and human rights violations that are being inflicted upon the Palestinians are being 'biblically justified'."

Search for radical alternatives: Jesus proposes service as an alternative to the fascination of the power that dominates (Mark 10:45). It is not a glorification of servanthood, nor is it an option for passive forms of Christian presence. The seemingly passive form of accompaniment is in fact an alternative to those models of power that rely on the logic of violence for peace. It brings about real and genuine transformation by holding the aggressor and the wider society accountable and stressing the need for rehumanisation. It affirms the essential human capacity to nurture and to be good despite the human tendency to violate and abuse.

III. THE MEANING OF BEING CHURCH

EAPPI is an initiative that has brought the churches worldwide together to witness to the healing and transforming power of God in a context torn apart by violence and hatred. The participants of the Geneva meeting said, "The church is always in search of truth and life. Churches are communities on the way together to affirm the sanctity of life and to protect it from all forms of abuse. Institutional expressions do not necessarily give vivacity to the churches; it is their commitment to life which helps them to be relevant and credible. By participating in the longing for healing and transformation, the church participates in the mission of God." (Working Group III) It must,

of course, be emphasised that a good number of those who participated in EAPPI did so out of their own personal convictions and motivation, whether religious or otherwise, and not necessarily because of the commitment of the concerned churches. Their attempt to understand “being church” at the Geneva meeting, therefore, needs to be seen more as their articulation of expectations rather than of experiences with the empirical church.

Church as a wounded healer: The church in Palestine and Israel is a fragmented minority, frequently a victim and a politically powerless community. In spite of that predicament, it has been able to play the role of a wounded healer because of the initiative of accompaniment. Though small in number and found alongside two powerful rivals, the church has been able to move beyond the narrow interests of the survival of the Christian community. The church in Palestine and Israel sees itself as a healer and a bridge builder. Accompaniment has helped the accompaniers gain positive understanding of the Arab-Muslim communities, often demonised in the western media. It has also helped the local communities to discover churches and Christians as partners in the struggle. Shareef Omar Khaled from Palestine said: “Islam is not terrorism as President Bush seems to think, and in fact, even in Palestine where there has been armed resistance, it has not always been only the Muslims who have participated. We remember that Archbishop Hileran Kubotchi was arrested in May 1974, imprisoned and later expelled after Israel discovered he was a leader in the PLO of the armed resistance of Palestine. Maybe they will start calling Christians terrorists next.” Eva Rasmussen from Denmark presents her discovery: “I am a medical student from Denmark. My spiritual motivation has nothing to do with God or churches. I went as an Accompanier,... I felt the urge to go somewhere where I could use my expertise as a medically

educated person for a good cause. ... People ask you to eat with them even though they have nothing fancy to offer. The western world can learn a lot from these people. The way they welcomed me and other EAs into their homes was just amazing”.

As a coalition for justice: Accompaniment has brought together many people’s movements and concerned individuals - Christians, people of other faiths and even some without any religious affiliation - from many parts of the world to be in solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli peace activists and to struggle together for justice and human rights. Hansruedi Guyer from Switzerland echoes with hope: “To experience how many highly qualified people on both sides of the conflict are engaging themselves peacefully against the oppression has filled me with great hope that a peaceful solution can be found in the future.” In a remarkable way, accompaniment has been effecting the formation of a vibrant global coalition for justice and the end the occupation of Palestine. This, together with similar coalitions or networks for justice, may need to be viewed as instruments of God’s mission of transformation in the world and therefore as signs of the kingdom. This is perhaps where accompaniment challenges the churches and the ecumenical movement in the 21st century to witness to the liberating and transforming power of God in the world, by discerning the signs of the Spirit in these initiatives and joining them in speaking words of healing and of life to the deprived and the disempowered: “Rise up and walk” (Acts 3: 6).

Church on pilgrimage: Accompaniment is an expression of the church on the pilgrimage for truth and justice in situations where life is denied and abused. It asserts the movement nature of the church despite its stagnation and hesitation on account of its historical and institutional obligations. Dieter Ziebarth from

Germany said that accompanying is God's way of reaching out to people. 'The Bible tells us that God accompanied God's people through the desert in the shape of fire and cloud, as a protecting and comforting God ("Comfort, comfort my people", Isaiah 40,1), and Jesus himself calls upon Peter: "strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22: 32)'. At the Geneva meeting the participants said, "The living church can never be stagnant but is in need of invigoration and transformation by the Holy Spirit" (Working Group III).

Being there where life is threatened: Accompaniment is an assertion of the church's presence right there where life is constantly threatened. It is different from the traditional response of churches and humanitarian organizations which tend to reach out after the occurrence of tragedies and disasters. Through accompaniment, the church finds itself vulnerable and exposed to danger and destruction. The situation in Palestine-Israel calls for the church to be inspired in its woundedness (I Cor 12: 26) to be and to become an agent of healing and transformation of a deeply injured society." (Working Group III)

Some specific recommendations:

1. The ecumenical movement has the urgent responsibility to support and promote education for peace based on justice. This education is especially important for children traumatised and growing up under the occupation.
2. It is crucial for the churches to address the misuse of the scriptures in relation to the Israel - Palestine conflict. (Colonisation, occupation, anti-Judaism, Christian Zionism, anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, etc.)
3. This programme may be considered as a model in response to other situations of violent conflicts.
4. EAs need to be fully conscious of the needs and feelings of the local communities.

5. EAs need to be made aware of the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims so that difficult discussion can be avoided (on topics such as Jesus, incarnation, crucifixion, etc.)
6. It should be constantly emphasised that the programme is a church initiative that is open to all who are opposed to occupation and committed to non-violent action even if they do not belong to the Christian faith or have no faith.
7. Churches need to condemn Christian Zionism, consider selective divestment from companies that support illegal occupation, and challenge church tourist groups visiting the Holy Land to develop a critical awareness of occupation and the plight of the Palestinians.
8. Churches need to be critical of the “divide and rule” tactics of the Israeli government, media and right wing Christians that mislead and perpetuate the phobia of Christian persecution in Palestine and Israel.
9. EAPPI, churches and ecumenical organisations may collect stories and initiatives of non-violent actions for peace and justice in order to nurture a culture of non-violent struggle for peace.
10. To be effective and consistent in speaking truth to power, an advocacy strategy against the occupation needs to be developed and used by EAPPI and the churches.
11. WCC needs to make a stronger and renewed commitment to end occupation at the forthcoming assembly in Porto Alegre.



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Andy Hall, UK
EA Group 10

Personal background

I have been a Quaker for over ten years during which my life-concerns and experiences have shifted towards excluded minorities including the homeless and criminal prisoners and reconciliation of communities. My interest in Palestine is an extension of this. During the previous four years I have completed a degree in history and religions, which provided an academic and historical context to my commitment to EAPPI. In 2004 at 52 years, the end of my full-time education provided the job-break opportunity the project demands.

Spiritual Motivation

My Christian faith has grown immeasurably since being out of full-time employment which has been a test of faith, yet provided the opportunity for development. I have mixed with people of different religions and denominations. I have walked on pilgrimage hundreds of miles and interviewed many levels of adherents. My own spiritual journey has progressed. My concern for marginalised and disadvantaged people focussed on Palestine after discovering that the kibbutz on which I worked in 1975, had been confiscated after the Israeli Defence Force ejected a whole village including elderly and infants.

I had been inspired by the commitment of many whites who could easily have remained neutral in the Black Civil Rights Movements of the 1960's. EAPPI gave me an opportunity to contribute and participate in the same way. As a long-term independent traveller, I was also encouraged by the wish for adventure and demand on my resources that EAPPI was likely to make.

Deeply Moving Experience

What to choose? So many. The words of an un-educated farmer in Jayyous whom I had never met before as I pruned his fruit trees on the 'Israeli' side of the barrier were:

'I'm glad'

'What for?'

'Because you are here'. His words and expression were deeply moving.

Lessons and Insights

- That when carrying out a job that is 'right' (a concern, holy, blessed, moved by G.), I carry a divine mission and that I must rely completely on my relationship with that power and need not worry.
- All people are human; just like anyone else, they can be touched.
- All people are good, but will be affected by their circumstances.
- The most effective teamwork knows no pride.
- The support of prayer is immeasurable.



Anna Seifert, UK

EA in Abu Dis/Sawahreh,
September - December 2004

Spiritual Motivation

An early experience as a little girl aged 7 in Germany was perhaps the beginning of a passion for justice and peace. Standing at our garden gate with my father on Christmas day 1944 and watching allied aeroplanes flying overhead, I remember asking: “why are the soldiers not at home playing with their children?” Later, aged 19 and living in Paris, I attended a concert with a famous Israeli musician and remember my intense upset at his remarks that he vowed never to play music in Germany. I so much wanted all of us, and especially ‘enlightened artists’ to create a better world beyond the Holocaust and the horrors of World War II. In 1969 I came to the UK with a Berlin Allied Airlift Scholarship, a fund which promoted a process of reconciliation between former enemies. Later on I joined The Religious Society of Friends and learned about the challenge of the Peace Testimony coming out of an experience of faith in action as I became involved in projects for social justice and reconciliation.

Increasingly I found myself drawn to engage with the Israel/Palestine conflict through reading, personal encounters with Palestinian people, hearing stories from returning EAs and by being part of the Quaker network for Peace and Social Justice. The more I learned about the programme, the more I felt called to apply. As part of my preparation I also read texts from the Jewish tradition and found common ground with God’s call for justice and peace between all his people. This was useful later on when engaging as an EA with soldiers at checkpoints and challenging the occupation.

The text 'God is urgent about justice, because upon justice the world depends' from the Talmud became a compass to which a South African Friend added '...let us then try what Love will do...', (William Penn, Quaker). We shared both texts with fellow Ecumenical Accompaniers before going out to our placements. My team also put the texts on a wall in our dining area. On my day of departure for the UK I walked to the Western Wall, a place of intense prayer on both the west and east side of the wall, and placed the above quotes into an open trunk filled with prayer books. I found strength and clarity from Christian faith and Quaker practice and when faced with confusing and difficult situations, I could test and rely on the challenge of George Fox to 'answer that of God in everyone, whereby in them you may be a blessing and witness of God in them', and that meant our Palestinian neighbours AND the Israeli Border Police.

Halfway into the placement in conversation with Israelis or Palestinians I could hear myself reflecting to each side the humanity of the other and trying to brake through the barrier of facile labelling. There was also an unexpected experience of 'holy communion' at a grey and ugly checkpoint when Israeli women from Machsom Watch offered and shared pita bread with us which had been freshly baked by an elderly Palestinian women in a nearby shed.

I can say that being an EA became a deeply spiritual experience during which I could feel at times both physically vulnerable and spiritually empowered.

Deeply Moving Experience

It was a Friday morning during Ramadan. The team went to Bawabe checkpoint early. We knew there would be many Palestinians trying to get to the Al Aqsa mosque for special Friday prayers; we had also heard that the Israeli government

was restricting access to East Jerusalem 'for security reasons'. The crowd at Bawabe was bigger than we had seen before. Bawabe or Bethany is a place steeped in Christian tradition, which had the house of Mary and Martha, next to a church and monastery. It is also the only pedestrian crossing for Palestinians from the Abu Dis/Al-Izariyyeh towns to Jerusalem. The checkpoint consisted of a 4 meter high concrete wall across the main road with a gap the width of a door and a two meter high passage made up of a pile of rubble with chunks of concrete and uneven stones over which people - children and adults, healthy and infirm, often with heavy loads had to climb, crawl and scramble. We came here most days, but today the crowd was larger and the atmosphere was very tense. There were a dozen soldiers, young men, each with a machine gun over his shoulder, people were pushing forwards, their arms stretched out with identity cards ready for inspection. Many were elderly men who had travelled from Bethlehem and Hebron for this special day of Ramadan prayer. Only a few of them were allowed through. Younger local men stood in the background and did not even try to get across. As the crowd became more restless an old man started shouting at the soldiers who blocked his passage and in between also pointed to heaven as if calling Allah to witness this unhappy situation.

A Palestinian man who stood next to me indicated we should move to the back, he warned me that the cannister in one of the soldiers hands contained tear gas that might be used for crowd control. I could feel a tightening in my body and choking in my throat, then I burst into tears. I was shocked by what I was witnessing. I could feel the pain and distress of Palestinian people next to me and with them I was helpless in the face of the overt abuse of power and control. Bawabe checkpoint became for me a holy place drenched in sorrow and pain and close to an experience of crucifixion of a whole people.

After some time and calmer breathing I walked across to the senior commander who stood at a distance observing the chaos. For a while we stood quietly side by side. I felt vulnerable and strong as I said: 'today Israel is creating more 'terrorists...this is bad for Palestinian people and it is bad for Israel'. We both stood in silence, then he said: 'Believe me, I know'. He turned and walked away slowly.

I knew I had not physically changed anything and had been unable to help people get across to East Jerusalem, yet as an EA with the symbol of the dove of peace and the cross transcending barriers printed on my jacket, I had stood in the midst of Palestinian people, I had cried tears with them and I had taken photos for advocacy at home. I had also approached an Israeli officer with integrity and without fear, speaking 'truth to power' and in a place of intense hostility we had connected at a human level.

Insights Gained

It is now a year since I have been part of an EA team in the West Bank, and it has been a life changing experience. Since my return to the UK more than half of my time is related to ongoing advocacy towards an end of the occupation and for a just peace through presentations, projects and information sharing. I believe there is an urgent need for ongoing witness to the EA experience and to be a voice for Palestinian people whose basic human rights are greatly ignored by the political and faith based world community. In conversations and presentations I have become aware how little most people at home know about the everyday hardship experienced by Palestinian families. For many, including Christian groups there is a confusion about taking sides and a reluctance to link discipleship with action for justice and human rights. In this respect it also feels important to engage with Israeli Human Rights groups.

The essence of my learning, public witnessing and ongoing motivation is threefold:

- I believe that the occupation is bad, unjust and intolerable for Palestinian people.
- It is also bad for Israel since it corrupts Israeli democracy and clashes with Jewish faith values such as Rabbi Hillel's 1st century teaching 'that which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary'.
- The ongoing occupation and military control of all areas of Palestinian life is also bad for our values through political collusion and the appalling silence of our faith community for our Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters who flee if they can or stay in the 'Holy Land' and become impoverished and feel abandoned.

Protest and lament seem to be the most honest places in relation to the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. In the light of my EA experience, I am more aware of the cost of Christian discipleship, where 'wordy' bible readings, prayers and hymns can become a hindrance to hearing what Jesus is telling us through his life and parables. Bonhoeffer during the dark years of recent German history dared to say to his fellow Christians: 'only those of us who shout out for Jewish people are allowed to sing holy hymns'; Palestinian people today ask us to shout out for them, too, and as M.L.King said: 'our lives begin to end on the day we become silent about things that matter'.



Anne C. Stephens, USA

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Metro
New York Synod,
Evangelical Lutheran Church, USA
Group 9

This is my testimony-my reflections-on my service as a member of Group 9, EAPPI, September-December, 2004. It is organized around the suggested foci: my 'spiritual motivation' as an Accompanier, deeply moving experiences during my service, and the lasting impact of my service on my thoughts and aspirations.

Spiritual Motivation

I must admit that I did not consider my desire to volunteer as an accompanier to be first and foremost spiritually motivated. Committing oneself to living and working in new, very different circumstances, especially when those circumstances harbor a significant amount of uncertainty, is a physical and mental challenge. I only came to realize a bit later the extent to which it was also to be a spiritual challenge.

It was the spirit-filled commitment to peace and justice of those whom I was accompanying that challenged, instructed and inspired me. Day by day I learned to look at the realities of Palestinian and Israeli lives illuminated by the grace of God's loving presence, and infused with the certainty of His care and guidance. It was more a matter of spiritual awakening than motivation.

Deeply Moving Experiences While Serving

- Huda, a young woman enrolled in the Vocational Training Course at the YWCA in Ramallah, was eager to improve her spoken English. Several weeks after we became acquainted she invited me to her home on the first Friday evening of Ramadan. The entire family; her grandmother, mother and father, older sister and brother-in-law (present on a visit from their home in Arkansas), and her younger sister, are devout Muslims who cherish their faith as an integral part of their love for each other. Sharing Iftar with them was a spiritual experience, a sense of family and faith, both traditional and immediate, that I continue to cherish.
- I think of Jean Zaru as a Quaker Saint. Of course, that is pretty much a contradiction in terms, but being with her was definitely a spiritual experience, and how I felt about her during my time in Ramallah. Jean is presiding clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting, but she is known and respected around the world for her leadership and inspiration. When I was in Ramallah, as a member of Group 9, October - December 2004, Jean was not well physically, and she was about to say good-bye to her son and his family as they emigrated to the U.S. Nevertheless, she always had time to speak with and share with visitors of many sorts, her staunch yet patient Christian faith. This, even as she was experiencing and observing life that she characterized as 'never as difficult as it is today', as Tor Rafoss says in his article, A Call for Justice and Peace... (See ChainReaction, Summer 2005 Vol. 1, # 1., Pg. 28), those who serve with EAPPI, whether in Ramallah or elsewhere, are blessed to benefit from her friendship and counsel.

Lessons/Insights for my Life's Journey

Our lives have meaning because of what we do, as well as what we believe - not only when or because our 'works' are good and important - but because much is revealed in the 'doing' that will never become apparent in any other way.

Biblical Ref. (Especially chosen):

Micah 6: 1-8 (Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha, c.1992)

Vs. 1-2: Hear what the Lord says:

Rise and plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and your enduring foundations of the earth; For the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel....

Vs. 6: With what shall I come before the Lord...

Vs. 8: He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The 'Beatitudes': Matthew 5:1-12

Dedicated to the Memory of Dr. J. Richard Butler, 1931-2005
Between 1974-1978, I worked for Dick Butler, then director for the Office for the Middle East/Europe at the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA and Church World Service in New York City.

During that time I not only learned a great deal about the various Christian communities in the Middle East, but had the opportunity to meet a number of their representatives, both lay and clergy, when they visited Church World Service. With Dick Butler's approval and assistance, I spent 6 weeks traveling

in the Middle East, visiting Christian leaders and their communities in Egypt, Iran, the West Bank and Gaza and Turkey. It was surely this experience that, these many years later, drew me back to Palestine with the sponsorship of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme. I thank God that I had the great good fortune to have known this fine man.





Colin Watermeyer, South Africa
April - July 2005

Spiritual Motivation

As a Christian, I've made it my prerogative to raise my voice against injustices of any kind against my fellow human beings (Joel 1:2-3). The Israel/Palestine conflict has a special significance to me, because the injustice and human rights violations that are being inflicted upon the Palestinians are being 'biblically justified'.

I think that the Christian community should vehemently oppose Israel's occupation of Palestine because it is against the basic doctrine of love, which Christ proclaimed (Mark 12: 29-31). Emphasizing the second commandment in verse 31: 'love your neighbour as yourself'. From this context it is clear that the conflict stems from a lack of love, which Christ commands (not suggests), us to have for one another as neighbours. I define love as an act of one's own will, and not as an abstract emotion.

As human beings, we have the ability to choose between love and hate, it doesn't automatically occur. I therefore had to go to Palestine and Israel so as to witness for myself the oppression and persecution of the Palestinian people. This experience enabled me to come boldly to God's throne in prayer and ask for His intervention in this situation. It is unfortunate that people make judgments about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict from the 'Old Testament' and not on current facts on the ground.

My experience as an Accompanier places me in a powerful position which enables me to challenge and change people's erroneous judgment on the Israeli/Palestine conflict.



David L. Lindberg, USA
Group 11, February-April 2005

I applied to become an Ecumenical Accompanier because I believed that more could be done from a religious standpoint to help resolve the present conflict in Israel and Palestine. It is not that I think it is possible to separate religious convictions from ethnic, political or economic ones; but that they may be having an inappropriate application in the mix. I suppose that I mistakenly believed that if each religious group - Jewish, Christian and Muslim - looked more deeply into its own traditions, that each would progressively become more open, understanding and respectful of its counterparts in the other Abrahamic faiths.

I don't know if the word 'deeply' could apply to the 'moving experience' I had while in Israel and Palestine, but the experience itself was certainly a transforming one for me personally.

Albeit unknowingly, the transformation began in Washington D.C. during the U.S. orientation for the programme. One of my U.S. colleagues in Group 11, Dr. Robert Traer, told me that I had to read the book he had found entitled: 'Infidels: A History of the Conflict Between Christendom and Islam,' by Andrew Wheatcroft (New York, Random House, 2004). Although I didn't need yet another book to add weight to my luggage and despite the fact that I thought that I was already fairly familiar with the history of the conflict between Christendom and Islam, I trusted his advice because he told me how much research he had already put into the subject.

As I had time during my three month stay in Bethlehem, I began to read the book and soon realized that I had never really understood the relationship of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Spain. What I learned was that some of the Christians in Spain at that time believed that the reason Muslims did not become Christians was because they, as Christians, were not faithful

enough. Of course, my ears pricked up at that because I had thought that being more faithful to one's religious roots would solve the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict as well. I won't go into the details here, but what happened when the Christians in Spain decided that they had to be more outspoken about what seemed to be false doctrine in Islam (as they perceived it) that they were martyred. This, however, failed to be any kind of possible witness to their Muslim neighbors and in fact caused dissension in the communities where the adherents of both faiths had been living together in a relatively peaceful way. Finally, when one of the bishops himself was martyred the larger church decided to take action. At a special synod of the church it was decided that martyrdom was heresy. This proved to be the way to end the conflict there at that time.

My own experience as an Accompanier soon bore out the wisdom of that decision. I was invited to be a presenter at the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem and despite my background as a historian of religion I was advised not to talk about the differences between Christians and Muslims. The reason for this advice was that the Christians and Muslims in the Institute were getting along quite well, thank you, and they didn't need me to cause trouble. In fact, one of my best received presentations by both the Christians and the Muslims in the Institute was when I talked about how misunderstood Islam was among many Christians in America. I told them that even

when I told American Christians that the word for God was translated Allah in many verses in Christian Arabic Bibles that they still insisted that God and Allah were two different gods. I had mistakenly expected that when large numbers of Christians and Muslims would live in the same town that there would be great animosity, which was exactly not the case. The animosity, at least among American Christians, developed when they were making very, very sure that they did not have a god in common with Muslims.

As I traveled to various cities in Israel, even though I had visited them thirty years before, I now saw them in a new way. My somewhat sacrilegious description of Jerusalem, which amused my colleagues, was that it seemed like an example of “religion run amok.” I intended no disrespect, but truly believe that if each religion is going to fight for every square inch of its heritage that it makes achieving peace harder, not easier. There are, no doubt, significant religious centers of all three faiths in Tel Aviv, but during a brief visit I saw almost no signs of any. To me it is Israel’s ultimate “Secular City.” Haifa, on the other hand, despite its occasional interfaith tensions, seemed like a place where religions could work together harmoniously. The Bahai Temple there symbolized that view for me.

Among the lessons learned or the insights gained at this stage in my reflections (some four months after coming home) are these:

- Each faith should point out to its own followers the folly of too much religious zeal. Robust Jewish orthodoxy, Christian martyrdom, and Muslims willing to die for their faith contribute to peace-destroying, not peace-making.
- I just learned that EAPPI had just welcomed its first Muslim Accompanier. If I had anything to do with EAPPI administration my recruitment goal would be to have an

- equal number of Jews, Christians and Muslims from each participating country and equally represented in each volunteer group and at each location.
- I would move the administrative center for EAPPI work in Israel and Palestine from Jerusalem to Haifa and I would assign teams to work in Tel Aviv and Haifa in addition to the present locations in the West Bank and Jerusalem.





Desmond Parsons, Canada
EA in Tukarem/Jayyous, July-October, 2005

Spiritual Motivation

I first learned about the EAPPI through a denominational circular at our church meetings in November, 2004 in Kerrobert, Saskatchewan, Canada. I read about the programme online and it tugged at me in the way that callings do, and by January I felt very much that I needed to apply to go. I am in the midst of my studies for ministry and the principal cost of this ministry to me is that it will delay by a year my route to ordination, which has been a goal that has been a long time coming in my case.

I became engaged with and moved by the plight of the Palestinian people when I was in Israel-Palestine in 1989 on an archeological and religious studies tour of the region. Prior to that, I would say that I was a great believer in the right of the Jewish people to a homeland and did not understand the nature of the lived realities of Palestinians or the conflict. Along with this emotive connection to the Palestinian people that was forged quite some time ago, I have also been engaged in many struggles over the years that I have felt were part of the biblical imperative that I believe Christians have to be justice-seekers. When this opportunity came to my attention, I had a sense that it was “my turn” to step up and stand in solidarity with others.

In terms of the biblical imagery which inspires me in this understanding of a means of faithful living, I look primarily to Christ's passion and suffering on the cross as an act of solidarity with all who are oppressed, particularly by illegitimate governance and occupation. I remember specifically the story of Jesus asking the disciples to stay awake with him in Gethsemane as a call to accompaniment and solidarity.

Deeply Moving Experience

I was new to this programme when the request to write came to me, and thus my experiences here are limited. I have been living in Jayyous where the primary manifestation of the effect of the occupation is the Apartheid Fence which separates farmers from their land. Having just returned from an internship in western Canada in a small farming community, I am struck by the radical difference in how the farmers here must try to continue to respond to their calling to produce food for us all from the land in the face of occupation, humiliation and oppression versus the Canadian experience (which is also fraught with difficulties...but different and now it seems ones which are essentially easier). Mostly, I find myself feeling very sad and wondering how I will cope with this for such a long period of time. I find myself wondering how people manage not to become completely depressed and just give up. And I think some people do at times do exactly that.

One man in the village, Mahmoud is very, very keen on learning English. He cannot go to his farm to work in any meaningful way, though he does have a permit. So he goes to Israel to work daily and returns home to his family. He is very gentle with his children and tender with his wife. He is a strikingly kind man who has a mixture of some insecurity at making new

relationships with me, a new English speaker in the community, and a dogged determination to do exactly that so that he can practice his English. This has led to comic results as I initially tried to put some boundaries on what times of the day, etc... that I might be open to providing English lessons.

As tutoring has turned to friendship here, Mahmoud asks me whether I think the situation here will get better. Do I think the occupation will end? He is asking this as we are sitting near the municipality building in Jayyous and watching the sun set in the west over the Mediterranean with the scar on the land called the fence right in under our eyes. The natural vista is gorgeous. Israeli Defence Force Vehicles patrol back and forth along the fence, not letting anyone forget their presence, even for a minute. Mahmoud's son runs and laughs in front of us. I think the boy is about 3 years old. He is a very happy child and Mahmoud is quite tender with him, giving me a "what are you going to do?" look if he interrupt us or "acts out".

Mostly, I think I just want to cry in response to the question of when this will end. I don't know if the occupation is going to end. I didn't come here with an impression that I was the answer to this 60 year old problem (or 3500 year old problem, depending on your sense of history). Mahmoud's father has an arthritic knee which probably in Canada could be remedied with knee replacement surgery and can no longer go to the land. Mahmoud can't get there meaningfully and I'm not sure that his boy will get there at all...or even see the land of his family. It is simply, tragically, horribly, nastily, meanly, wrong. And unpleasantly, the task of my accompanying seems to be going into those feelings of anger, sadness and powerlessness that is the day to day reality of Mahmoud and his people. That's a long way of saying it sucks.

Lessons Learned

I am not “there” yet, in terms of having incorporated this into a grand scheme. In my denomination we have a creedal statement which begins “We are not alone, we live in God’s world”. I think at this point, I need to trust that I am not alone, and to be faithful to my calling and understanding of who God is. I need to be the face and ears of that “not alone” presence for others, both to assist my own sense of aloneness, and that of others. I don’t know the answer to this problem, and foolishly I hope for something - anything - for Mahmoud, his land, his son. But, meanwhile, if God is to be meaningful to me, I must believe I am not alone, and I must be here, so that he does not feel as alone as we hope and pray together for just peace.





Rev. Dieter Ziebarth, Germany

EA in Bethlehem,

September - November 2004

My Spiritual Motivation

When I heard for the first time about the existence of EAPPI I felt an immediate desire to be a part of it. Two experiences from the past came together. Firstly there was an enduring love of the Holy Land and its people whom I visited several times for different causes. And I remembered secondly, the people I had contact with on these occasions: the pupils of the Evangelical Lutheran Schools, the teachers, the children of sponsorship and their families, some of them with long-term connections. I remembered the exchange of visitors between the members of my parish and a school in Beit Sahour which exposed us directly to the everyday life of the Palestinians under the occupation.

There was a growing awareness and embarrassment concerning the suffering of the people, but now, with the help of this programme my embarrassment could be changed into active solidarity in the frame of a longer time stay in this region. It seemed to be a unique opportunity to share in every day life, to better understand the reasons for despair, to live under the same conditions and to seek together an appropriate Christian peace testimony in this special context of hatred, despair and lack of perspective. I wanted to do so in view of my experiences in the GDR, where we once tried to find a way between adaptation and depression on the one hand and the growing aggressiveness of the peace and civil rights movement on the other. Certainly I was aware that both situations were not comparable, but I thought it could be fruitful and exciting to share the different experiences.

And while reflecting these items I saw before my inner eye a vision reported in the Bible, in Acts. 16 where St. Paul tells about a vision in which he saw a man standing at the other side of the Bosphorus calling: come to us and help us! And then we read in the Bible-text shortly and strictly: "After seeing this vision we tried immediately to travel to Macedonia". This is one of numerous stories of departure reported in the Bible, starting with Abraham, continued by the prophets and especially by Jesus and the apostles and especially amongst them St. Paul, who focussed on the duty to visit and accompany other Christian congregations living under oppressive conditions, such as the congregation in Jerusalem. And so he departed to see it, despite the alerts that his life was in danger (Acts 20,16). Before doing so he wrote to the Christians in Corinth: "When one limb is suffering, all limbs are suffering as well" (1. Cor.12,26).

But the most basic reason for accompaniment, which is not a rigid idea, but a vivid power, was accompanying his people through the desert in the shape of fire and cloud, as a protecting and comforting God ("Comfort, comfort my people", Isaiah 40,1), and Jesus himself calls upon Peter: "strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22,32). So I see the EAPPI exactly on the line of these multiple Biblical traditions, And so I was sure that sharing in this programme responds to the call of God who is always accompanying his people. It was also evident to me, that accompaniment in His name has to follow the same rules Jesus followed and confirmed himself: in compassion and love, by encouraging and comforting and only with peaceful means. Based on these spiritual and theological insights, I felt well placed in this programme.

Story of a Deeply Moving Experience

Close to our home in Bethlehem the wall reaches a height of 6.5 meters. Everyday we had to walk alongside it. On a hill, a small distance from the wall, the house of family H. was visible covered by a lot of rubble and debris in front of the broken fence. In former times a garden with 300 olive trees stretched around the family's home. For sake of the wall construction, the garden was confiscated and devastated, only 30 olive trees around the house were left. A distance of just 50 meters separates the house from the wall. Mrs. H. is a teacher and teaches the nurses of the nearby baby hospital of Caritas in Arabic. The nurses, together with Mrs. H. and her neighbour, started a peace prayer walk along the wall and the place of devastation. They continued this prayer weekly, every Friday in the evening. Our team of EAs accompanied them regularly. The scenery every Friday seemed to be extremely absurd. A small group weak people gathered in powerless protest in front of the symbol of power and superiority - how can it help? For us, the EAs, it was a significant testimony, a kind of peaceful protest using the original means of faith, the prayer, the lamentation to God. It was a small sign of the power of the powerless and I remembered that the peaceful revolution in the GDR also started with a peace prayer of a small group of people. And indeed, our peace prayer was perceived by the other side. During one of our prayers, a military van of the IDF appeared, directed its floodlights at us and ordered us to leave the area immediately. We asked them if they felt threatened by prayers and declared that we would only leave after finishing the prayer. So we continued our prayer in front of the armoured car, interrupted from time to time by shouting from the car: "Go home!" We did so after asking for the benediction of God, including the IDF soldiers: "The Lord bless you and give peace to us". On our way home we were deeply moved and decided to continue our prayer as usual.

Lessons Learnt and Insights Gained

1. The importance of presence

One of the requests of the EAPPI is the presence of the accompaniers in the region in crisis. In the beginning I had underestimated the importance of presence in itself and thought that presence can only be meaningful when it is linked with concrete tasks. But I was surprised - and ashamed - when I had to learn that everywhere in Bethlehem - walking through the town, visiting neighbours or organisations - our mere presence was already perceived as a positive signal for the people under occupation. The first questions were not, what are you doing here, what do you do for us. The first reactions we heard were: Great that you are here, that you are learning to know how we are living. Presence in itself is a sign of hope and a way of strengthening. This was the first insight provided to the accompaniers by the accompanied.

2. The impacts of the occupation

Based on my former visits to the region, I knew the system and the impacts of the occupation. But what I learnt during my participation in the programme exceeded all my previous experiences so that my feelings were floating between rage and lethargy, between compassion and cynicism, compulsion for action and helplessness. The many stories I got to hear every day made me silent and helpless. Whenever I took with me some ideas about how to tackle a problem I got confused by the toughness of the facts and the growing hate on both sides. So I learnt more and more that accompaniment under these conditions primarily means to monitor, to listen and to report. And to comfort by presence and help.

3. The admirable activities of peace-workers.

Facing the multitude of frustration and hatred growing on both sides of the conflict, the most encouraging experiences were the visits and meetings with different Israeli peace groups, activists and initiatives. All of these meetings were based on the insight that Israeli society is about to destroy itself by upholding the occupation, so the most effective contribution to Israel's security is not the construction of walls, but ending the occupation. I admired the power in which these groups and people are active in building and changing the consciousness of a society, yet are a tiny and often combated minority. So I felt honoured for example to accompany the Women in Black in one of their silent protest actions against the occupation, to stand together in silence at a traffic junction in Jerusalem exposed to the insults of the passing car drivers and the indifference of the people walking by; an activity maintained regularly once a week for decades. So I learnt from the accompanied that visions need a long breathe and a lot of patience, trust and hope.

4. Upright walk in spite of occupation

One experience passing through all my observations and experiences was that the occupation, even in its worst manifestation, could not destroy the dignity and the upright walk and the will to resist amongst the people I met. Despite the feeling of being hemmed in on all sides, despite the harassment and dehumanisation of the occupiers, they try to maintain normal life, they initiate social and medical projects to help each other, to improve the living conditions in the refugee camps, to continue to invest in health care and education and to stand up for their rights. For instance, in harvesting their fields facing menace and oppression from settlers or from the IDF. To accompany them in such situations and to learn from their courage and readiness to resist is one of my most important experiences.

I learnt a lot from their courage and power of endurance. I came to bring a signal of hope. but I was taught much more about what hope means and requires. On balance the result of the accompaniment was that I came home much richer than I left. Accompaniment was not one-way. For the accompanied, the accompaniers were living symbols of hope and solidarity, but on the other hand the accompaniers learnt from the accompanied what hope, peaceful resistance and struggle for justice really means. So the accompaniers have been accompanied as well in a mutual learning process. It was a reciprocal giving and receiving, learning and encouraging. The programme is right in aiming primarily at the people in the region, to strengthen and to comfort them, but for the participants in the programme like me, it was in the same way a tremendous spiritual gain for my further life and for my activities in church and society.



Eva Rasmussen, Denmark

EA, January-June 2005

My name is Eva Rasmussen and I am a medical student from Denmark. My spiritual motivation has nothing to do with God or churches. I went as an Accompanier, because I feel obliged to see these places, where things like the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are ruining the lives of so many people. I felt the urge to go somewhere, where I could use my expertise as a medically educated person for a good cause.

The most touching moment was, when I said goodbye to one of my dearest families from Palestine. The father of the family took my hand and kissed it and bowed to touch my hand with his forehead. This is the kind of greeting a father gives his daughter. This family was like my own, while I was with them. The Palestinian spirit is unbreakable. Even though their lives are so difficult, they keep on living. I have learned so many things, that I cannot point out one single thing as the most important.

Maybe one of the most important things I can take with me on my life journey is that even when things are at their worst, the human being is created to live on - to go on and to get the best out of life. We still smile, we still find time for love, people ask you to eat with them even though they have nothing fancy to offer. The western world can learn a lot from these people. The way they welcomed me and other EAs into their homes was just amazing.



Hansueli Gerber, Switzerland

EA, April - July 2004

Spiritual Motivation

In September 2000, my wife and I attended a seminar on “Theology in the Palestinian Context” in Bethlehem. So I became a witness of the weeks leading up to the second Intifada. We had the opportunity to visit Gaza, Ramallah, Nablus and other places. The one-day tour round Greater Jerusalem, led by Jeff Halper, had a tremendous impact on my understanding of the conflict. Since then, I was visiting websites of Israeli and Palestinian NGO’s and kept myself informed about the situation in Israel/Palestine and my conviction grew that only a non-violent approach can bring this conflict towards a peaceful solution. As a long term participant in the monthly vigil for “Just Peace in Palestine and Israel” in Bern, I also had contacts with the earlier EA’s from Bern and decided to apply. As a former missionary in Sabah/Malaysia and Cameroon, ethnic and religious conflicts were not new to me and as a pensioned pastor, I could afford - with my wife’s consent - to spend 3 months with the EAPPI.

Story of a Moving Experience

One evening, a man came to the quarter, where my EA Team was living and asked if we could help him. A newly issued governmental decree would prevent him from going to work. He stays with his family only two houses away in a rented flat. When we visited him, we learned his story:

Mustapha studied engineering in Jordan where he married an exiled Palestinian women. After completing his studies in 1993, he moved back to Sawahreh, where his family owned land. His wife was not allowed to enter Israel. At the border (Allenby-

Bridge), he was interrogated and asked to “cooperate” with Shabak but he declined. For nine months, he was engaged in a lawsuit, until his wife could follow him. In 1997, when he returned from a visit to Jordan he was held back at the border again. He once again refused to become an informer for the Israeli intelligence service. Three months later, the bulldozers came to destroy his nearly completed new house in Sawahreh.

Mustapha works as an engineer in the industrial zone near the settlement Ma’ale Adumim and needs a permit to cross from Sawahreh to his job site. The Family now has (as at 2004) 3 children and is in need of a regular income, but the new decree demands a new permit in the form of a magnetic card. He applied several times for the card, but was denied. We could only give him some advice about which organisations he should contact for help, but it turned out that he had already contacted all these addresses, without success. Finally, we gave him a phone number to contact a lady from Machsom-Watch, who promised to ask a member of parliament for help. But at the end of my accompaniment, the man had not yet got any response and I could not follow up the case.

The fate of this man is not a single experience, but an example of how Palestinians are systematically excluded from having an income, face movement restrictions and are forbidden to build a house on their own land.

The Lessons Learnt

- I gained the insight that a conflict like the one in Palestine never can be resolved by violent force. Neither suicide bombing nor ethnic cleansing can bring peace.
- I realised how important it is to show solidarity to the oppressed - even if it is not possible to relieve their actual situation.

- To experience how many highly qualified people on both sides of the conflict are engaging themselves peacefully against the oppression has filled me with great hope that a peaceful solution can be found in the future.





Hans Ruedi Guyer, Switzerland EA in Zababdeh, 2003

We were three EAs, living for three months in the predominantly Christian village of Zababdeh, near Jenin. 2003 was the time of frequent curfews in the Palestinian cities but Zababdeh remained calm. With the newly opened Arab-American University, the village was still prospering: accommodation was needed for lecturers and students, new shops were opening, the internet-café was in demand, and with the presence of expatriate lecturers the village also had some international attention. We lived in a flat with a Christian family who cared for our wellbeing and we maintained close contact with the three Christian communities and their priests. Life continued with the normal difficulties because of the occupation and curfews: taxi-drivers were always well informed about the flying checkpoints of the army and how to bypass them; workers knew when they had to stay at home because of curfew in Jenin; people disappeared when army vehicles passed by and reappeared when they had gone... The occupation had caused much hardship and anger and yet had become somehow part of the daily routine.

The large Catholic school had children who came from Jenin. Every day they were collected with the school bus in the morning and returned to their families in the afternoon. In principle, the bus had permission to pass the tank which blocked the main road outside Jenin, but of course it was always stopped, checked and delayed. The fifteen minute journey to Jenin could become one hour or more but somehow the driver

always got the children to school or back home again. I had volunteered to travel with the children back to Jenin in the afternoon. Nobody had asked me to do so. When I was present I was welcome; when I was absent the bus made its way just the same.

On our way the children had great fun teaching me some words in Arabic. We were a noisy, happy lot until we got close to the roadblock when everyone became quiet and still. The driver had to show his papers; adults their particulars, and quickly the soldiers attention focussed on me: "Where do you come from? Why are you travelling in this bus?...." Maybe my presence made the soldiers care less about the others, maybe I startled them, made them suspicious and they had to check my case before turning to the children and the few staff members who travelled with them. I never knew whether my presence helped to speed up the passage at the checkpoint or whether I even delayed it. Once we were prohibited from entering Jenin altogether and only my phone call to the Principal and his intervention with the DCO (District Co-ordinating Office) opened up the way. But without my presence the same contacts would have been made. Maybe the bus would have been delayed half an hour more.

People told me it was good that I was with them. But I do not think I made a difference to their daily harassment, which they had become used to. So what was the use of my presence in the school bus? What difference did we make in the village of Zababdeh? I think the children felt more at ease when somebody was travelling with them and I think the soldiers had less freedom to delay the school bus wilfully. It is not a particular presence which made a difference but more the fact that the congregations and the village realised there was somebody here who cared. We were not present in Zababdeh

to give protection to the people. They still had to cope with the problem of how they would manage to enter Jenin, or with the fact that for months they never had a chance to visit relatives in nearby Jenin. They did not expect us to give them protective accompaniment. Whom could we have accompanied amongst the many workers, traders and students who were used to the risks of checkpoints and army control? In fact, we were asked only once to accompany a patient to the hospital in Nablus but when we came to the agreed meeting point, the ambulance had left and was already stuck at the checkpoint outside Nablus. Because of army presence it had not been possible to contact us, so the people found their way as they had always done without us. So we travelled to Nablus on our own. Because all the access roads were cut off by the army, we had to enter the city through the back roads over the hills, together with others in the taxi who had no alternative than to risk a journey into Nablus, not knowing whether they would be turned back, arrested or even shot at.

Our presence did not make a difference to the occupation. But we experienced how difficult daily life had become for the people because of the occupation. We realised the passive resistance to the occupation. I think of the taxi drivers who always found a way around the checkpoints, knowing very well that they risked arrest and confiscation of the car, if they were caught. There was always the temptation for us to watch all this as an interesting experience - after all, it was just for a period of three months and we assumed that with our Swiss and American passports we would not risk much in a confrontation with the soldiers. But as we shared the daily harassment with people on their way, we also realised their fear of the occupiers: when people began to run at the approach of an army vehicle, when they did not move again as soon as the soldiers came in sight or when a taxi-driver turned off the

radio immediately he saw the tank with the soldiers around the corner.

Zababdeh was rather calm but we realised the stress under which people lived. We did not make a difference to the occupation but our presence made a difference to the people. Very often I sat in the evening in the village coffee shop, together with the men who would gather there. There would always be somebody who understood English and who asked me about our presence. I would tell them what I had learnt or experienced during the last days. And usually this would be the starting point of a flood of stories about their situation, their difficulties; about somebody in prison; about a husband whose wife was stuck in Jordan without permission to join him; about arrests; about a life without a real future and full of hatred against the occupier.

People would not ask me to help them in their difficulties, they would not ask for accompaniment. But they would always stress: "Go back to your country and tell people about our situation here." It was important for them to know there was somebody who listened to their stories and to feel they were not alone without anybody caring about their oppression.

It was easy to understand the Palestinian side of the occupation. It was more difficult to find the right attitude towards the Israeli soldiers. Approaching soldiers at a checkpoint often made me feel like meeting the bad guys who were responsible for all this harassment. Now and then I was tempted to challenge them, asking them the reason for their presence, asking if they realise how they made people suffer. Once our journey on the school bus was filmed by a camera crew, who shot a documentary about the checkpoints. Months later I saw this documentary ("Checkpoints"/"Machsomim") and I could watch

myself and how I interacted with the soldiers. Was I not reacting like: "I am here to see what happens, to make sure that you do no harm to these children!?" Why did I only realise later when I saw the video that one of the soldiers told me: "Yes, I also want to go back to my mammy". The objective of accompaniment should also be to see the soldiers on the other side as human beings who perhaps do not like the job they have been asked to do and whose inner self certainly also becomes disfigured by the violence of occupation.





Inger Styrbjörn, Sweden

Group 10, November 2004- February 2005

During my first trip to the Holy Land in 1987, I was surprised to see how bad the Palestinians were treated. I saw all the young soldiers carrying their weapons and we were reminded several times about the Holocaust. And I thought: "how can there ever be peace if people are not ready for reconciliation and if they can't leave their terrible history behind them? And anyhow, why can't they see the Palestinians as human beings, friends and neighbours, instead of enemies?"

"He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up swords against nation, nor will they train for war any more."

Micah 4:3

Some years later, when Sharon had entered the Temple Mount, I took part in my very first demonstration in Sweden. Together with Palestinians, Christians and Muslims, we walked to the Center of the town Borlänge, shouting "Sharon out of Palestine".

What is it to be a Christian in a world full of injustice? I read the messages from the Church leaders in Jerusalem. "We need your presence". What can I do? All the questions overwhelmed me and I asked myself, "What would Jesus do?"

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

James 1:22

The Bible gave me the word from the Virgin Mary; she did not hesitate, "May it be to me as you have said". Luke 1:38. And I remembered what my Bishop Martin Lönnebo had said at my ordination: *"Do as Mary! Do not hesitate!"*

As an Ecumenical Accompanier, I arrived in Palestine and Hebron in November 2004. Hebron is a Muslim town occupied in the center by around 400 settlers and 2000 Israeli soldiers. It is the town where Abraham and Sarah are buried. It is a very hard situation for the people here. Most of the shops are closed, many houses are demolished, unemployment is very high and the economic situation is bad. The main task was to follow girls to their school, situated opposite a settlement, with very aggressive settlers. The settler youngsters used to throw stones, garbage and eggs at the girls. The girls, teachers and the headmistress were happy to have us there. I used to take part in the lessons, even if I don't speak Arabic. During the break I spoke to and played with the girls. They were all very friendly and the headmistress used to say, *"Anyhow, there is only one God, thank you for being here"*.

To share the circumstances, to be there, at the school, in the streets, traveling in Palestinian buses in solidarity with the oppressed often made me feel helpless and sad. I experienced all the violation and outrage of the soldiers. Sometimes the people are treated worse than cattle. But I could see that our presence makes a difference: *"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."* Matt 23:4

Every journey gave me a story. One day I sat in the Servis bus to Jerusalem. Behind me there was a woman and two of her children. The boy was about one and the girl about eight years old. The mother's name was Heba and she told me about their

life near the settlement Kiryat Arba. How their Jewish neighbors insulted and injured them on purpose to throw them out of the area. "Where shall we go?" she said. Now they had walked a very long way to reach the bus, because they were not allowed to use the shorter, easier route, built only for Israelis.

Her son had to visit the hospital in Jerusalem and she had had huge difficulties in getting the permit. Her husband was detained before the son was born and he had never seen his son. There had not been any trial and she did not know when or if he would return to his family. There were five more children in the family and Heba was very worried about the economic situation and the constant harassment from the Jewish neighbors. She had lost her hope for the future.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Matt 23:23

Some days before, there had been the peace negotiations in Sharm el Sheikh, and on the phone from Sweden I heard that the media talked about peace in the Middle East.

When the Servis arrived at the checkpoint before Jerusalem, there were a lot of soldiers and all the women, except me, were forced out of the bus. They were taken to a small house, and we waited and waited. When they came out after a long while, Heba told me that they had had to take off all their clothes and were thoroughly searched. She felt very ashamed; it is a big dishonor for a Muslim woman to show her naked body to a stranger.

“The King will replay, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”
Matt 25:40.

My compassion was overwhelming, and I felt so sad for her sake. To be there, as an Accompanier, holding her hand was my only contribution. This is just one example of an everyday event for the Palestinians. They go through constant degradation and insults, all their feelings as human beings are put aside. I feel ashamed!

“The days of punishment are coming; the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac.” (Hosea 9:7). I don’t want revenge or punishment. I want people to live in peace and freedom, in mercy, love and justice. We all belong to the Creator, our Lord.

“The scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you. So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” Gal 3:8-9.

Jesus said that he brought good news to the poor, to the people that suffered and I think that this is the purpose of our life too. To be there, sharing their life, their circumstances, I think that is the intention of Jesus teaching.

Back in Sweden, I will never be the same person as before visiting Palestine. Everyday I look for the news, good, bad and sad. The internet gives me messages and I have got some friends there too. I think that God cares for everyone in the world. I try to keep their hope alive in my prayers and long to be there again. We all need to see that God loves the world, the whole

world, and the whole creation, as it says in John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*





Jeanne Coker, UK

EA in Hebron, September - December 2004

Spiritual Motivation

The Lord opened my eyes. In October 2002 I travelled to Palestine and Israel with a group from 'Christians Aware'. We visited the Christian hospital in Gaza (which suffered an Israeli rocket attack soon after our visit); Dehisha refugee camp near Bethlehem; a home in Hebron that had been rebuilt after demolition with the help of ICAHD; we were refused admission to Nablus. I kept these and many other experiences in my prayers.

The Lord talked to me. A friend who travelled with me told me about EAPPI; the hymns I sang "...I have heard my people cry, whom will I send?..." in my reading; I met Palestinians and Jews for Justice.

A Deeply Moving Experience

I escorted girls to and from school in Hebron, through the checkpoints. Behind the school were some Palestinian homes. Three small boys, aged three to four, played together on the path outside school and on the empty street. Their parents were Russian/Palestinian, Jordanian/Palestinian and Palestinian/Palestinian. They talked to our school girls, they talked to me and the refuse collectors who drove down their street once a week who were their friends. (no other civilian vehicle was allowed in their road). Their play was the violence enacted around them daily - guns, jeeps, soldiers beating civilians (one laid on the ground while another pretended to kick him). At present these boys do not know prejudice and hate but they will learn it quickly. Will they be future peacemakers or will they become suicide bombers? I pray for them.

Insights Gained

There are so many people working for peace - Israeli and Palestinian and foreign nationals, particularly Jordanians.

Two examples:

- I worked with an organisation called “The Library on Wheels for Non-Violence and Peace”. Sadly there is no library on wheels - you cannot take a mobile library through a checkpoint. But they continued their activities with the local children using story telling and drama. The drama facilitator came from outside Hebron and it was common for him to be delayed at a checkpoint but the children waited patiently. The leader had set up a programme for the teenagers to use the Internet and have e-mail contacts outside their country. But the facility was outside the area where these young people lived (an area controlled by the Israeli Defence Force) and they were prevented from attending by being detained at the checkpoint. But the leader patiently tried again and again....
- I visited many families of the schoolgirls I escorted. They told their stories of living under occupation, surrounded by extremist settlers. On one visit the two teenagers were telling me of the time when settlers came into their garden, threw their washed clothes down the hillside and cut through the vines which were hundreds of years old. The vines are now dead. They were angry as they showed me the cut vines but the uncle (who was acting as translator) calmed them down and explained to me how it was necessary not to get angry about the daily abuses. Otherwise they would destroy themselves and their society.



Martin Smedjeback, Sweden

Group 8 , July-September 2004

For me, being a Christian means that you are willing to risk or sacrifice something because of the care and the love you feel for your fellow human being. Christ himself did not avoid conflicts. He chose to stand on the side of the weak and oppressed. This is also our task as Christians. We are called to stand in solidarity with the ones without a voice and to challenge oppression and violence in any form. In nonviolence we talk about the open hand and the hand that says no. Christ used both. He said no to the legal and religious rules that he found unfair and unjust - he chose to break them and he took the punishment for it. But he also always showed his open hands towards anyone who was willing to take them. He gave them to the rich and poor, to the priest and the illiterate. This is also the role of the accompanier - to show both resistance to oppression and a willingness to see everyone as God's children and to always be open to dialogue. Some people think that you can't do both at the same time. It is difficult, but I think it can work.



Rev. Max Surjadinata, USA
EA, February - May 2005

Theological Reflections of Being an Accompanier

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream - Amos 5:24

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
- The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Saviour Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declare through prophets and apostles....

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil....

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace....

- The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ in the Form of a Doxology

A Theology of Accompaniment

As a member of the February-May, 2005 Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme, I attempt below to articulate what I perceive to be my evolving theological perspective and personal understanding of being an Accompanier. As a Christian, I find my understanding of my accompaniment experience to be derived from, and rooted in, the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Now the Lord said to Abram, *“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.... And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

- Genesis 12:1, 2a, 3b

It is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who led our ancestors in faith and tradition - the people of Israel - to a new land to fulfil the promise of their identity as God’s people. The promise, therefore, is not exclusively mono-ethnic but includes all the families of the earth.

... I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry.... Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land.... - Exodus 3:7, 8

Our God is the God who observes the suffering people and responds with caring and with action to their cries. As God in ancient times called Moses to bring the people out of slavery and into the land of promise, so, too, does God respond throughout our human history, including today. When God hears the cries of suffering people, God summons people to be agents, participants and partners with God in working toward liberation and healing.

Without God, we can't; without us, God won't. - St. Augustine

In our time, we have become increasingly aware of how small our earth truly is. We are inextricably linked in our common humanity, and must share the earth's resources if we are to survive both in body and in spirit. In the words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. *"I can never be what I ought to be unless you are what you ought to be."*

Through Jesus Christ, Emmanu-el, "God With Us," God gathers us to be the church, God's body and presence in the world, joining Jesus as agents of reconciliation: working for peace and justice, breaking down the walls that divide people, loving God by loving all people and nations, joining in mission so that they may all be one. (John 17:23).

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making God's appeal through us. We entreat you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. - II Corinthians 5:20

As a Christian believer, I understand that accompanying people who are suffering, witnessing to the injustices that they undergo, is therefore a faith calling and a mission. To be an Accompanier is to be with Jesus, who is with us, who walks with us in our human journey, who is incarnated among people, and who is particularly present among those who suffer from occupation, oppression and violence. He promised to be with us in all circumstances of our life together.

As an Accompanier, I have an opportunity to live my Christian faith alongside those who are struggling for freedom and justice, who face oppression and violence. In so doing, I believe that I follow Jesus, who is present in the lives of those who suffer. I seek to be an instrument and witness for peace and justice,

joining the people in their joys and sorrows, working together with the God Who Is With Us to build the beloved community where God's reign of peace, justice and love may come on earth as it is in heaven.

A Prayer

*Show me the suffering of the most miserable
So I will know my people's plight.
Free me to pray for others
For you are present in every person.
Help me to take responsibility for my own life
So that I can be free at last.
Grant me courage to serve others
For in service there is true life.
Give me honesty and patience
so that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration
so that the spirit will be alive among us.
Let the spirit flourish and grow
so that we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice
for they have given us life.
Help us to love even those who hate us,
so that we can change the world.
Amen.*



Mechtild Kappetein, Germany
EA in Bethlehem, February-May 2005

My name is Mechtild Kappetein. I was born 58 years ago in Duisburg, Germany. I studied social sciences, did a lot of additional training in counselling, therapy and management, and have worked in various social fields. In 1975 I married Johannes Kappetein. We have three children and two grandchildren and are now living in Aachen.

Spiritual Motivation

I grew up in the Roman-Catholic tradition and, despite the many irritating pronouncements, actions and attitudes of the official church which I do not support, I still belong to this church.

There are two strong bonds which connect me to EAPPI, my being a Christian and my being German. From my early childhood I heard and read the stories of the First and the Second Testament, which were very important in my family, and so it has always seemed to me that I know the whole region, the "Holy Land", although my first visit only occurred when I was 52 years old.

(Here I also want to mention that I also heard and read a lot of fairy tales in my family. Since I adored the stories of the 'Thousand and One Nights', it also seemed to me that I was familiar with the "Arab world".)

In my adolescence I was confronted with the German history of “National Socialism”, the Second World War, and the Holocaust. The fact that my own people are inseparably connected to the suffering and the murder of the Jewish people as well as my efforts to understand my Christian faith in view of Auschwitz have both become existential issues for me.

I went to Auschwitz twice, both times with Pax Christi, and I found it helpful to be in a group and to be with Protestants from the Netherlands and with Catholics from Poland. Although both countries had been occupied by the Germans and were themselves victims, all of us - Germans, Dutch and Poles - shared the same emotions when confronted with the untold suffering of all these Jewish men, women and children.

We felt shame. What we all had in common was being Christians, and we all knew that there were no Christian protests when the Jews suffered discrimination and lost all their rights. There were no crosses on the streets or at the train stations when the children, women and men were deported, and no accompaniment, monitoring or advocacy work by the official Christian Churches or their practising members. There were some individuals and small groups who did speak in public and helped Jewish people to survive while risking their own lives - thank God and thanks to them.

We also discovered that Christian anti-Judaism had fuelled anti-Semitism. Most of us remembered how we had prayed for the faithless Jewish people on Good Friday, and this is only one example of how we ignored - and quite often still do today - the Jewish faith, Jewish biblical and theological studies, the Jewish religious reality, and the unceasing participation of the Jewish people in the mission of salvation. Through Jewish-Christian dialogue and encounters with Jewish believers, I've

learnt about anti-Judaism in Christianity, which has lasted nearly 2000 years, and what it means to the Jews. I have learnt a lot and become more sensitive to this issue. And so, I'm very grateful to Vatican II for its "Nostra Aetate" and the initiation of dialogue with other religions. But in this case I unfortunately have the feeling that the head of the Roman Catholic Church was much more advanced than the Catholic masses and many of its teachers and priests.

These experiences, as well as encounters with Sufism, led me to the Christian-Muslim as well as the Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue. Here I learnt a lot about religion, mysticism and culture, and how to distinguish between them. I also rediscovered the meaning of prayer.

At most of these conferences and encounters the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was explicitly or implicitly on the agenda, and this finally opened my eyes to the suffering of the Palestinian people. I must confess that I already got information about the situation of the Palestinian people 28 years ago when I was a student, but I didn't want look at it precisely or learn more about it. Today I realize that doing this would have brought me into an inner conflict. Although most of this happened unconsciously, I would describe it as taking sides with the Palestinians and thus not being loyal to the Jewish people. This means that I've been involved for quite a long time.

The EAPPI gave me the chance to accompany Palestinians and those Israelis who wanted it (we - the programme - could perhaps find more of them and get them involved) in their non-violent actions and efforts to end the occupation. Being present and standing one's ground in this situation of daily degradation and harassment, of violence and brutality, signifies solidarity and bearing witness. The people in the Occupied

Palestinian Territories, as well as those Israelis along with Jews all over the world who do not agree with the Israeli policy and also suffer from this occupation, which they want to end, need this accompaniment.

Monitoring and reporting human rights violations and violations against international law gives hope to those who are most affected. The First and Second Testaments, as well as the lives of quite a lot of holy men and women are telling us stories in which hope against hope happens. And as we all know, without hope desperation increases, and desperate people are not good peace-makers.

Deeply Moving Experience

Once I was waiting at the Bethlehem Checkpoint when I saw a Catholic priest in a car on his way to Jerusalem. I showed him my EA vest and asked him to give me a lift. He did so and soon we had a lively discussion. We talked about the occupation and the situation of the Palestinian people and what the occupation means in their daily lives. The priest was from Jordan and had quite a high position in the Latin Patriarchate. I was shocked when he said: "The Jews are hated all over the world. I was in the UK, in the USA and a lot of other places; they all hate the Jews." I tried to interrupt him in order to contradict, but he continued, "And do you know why that is so? Because all over the world the Jews always want to be the masters." I told him that I completely disagreed with him and spoke to him about my experiences and my friendships with Jews from different countries and communities. I'm quite sure he didn't listen to me. During all my time in Palestine I never heard so much hatred expressed as on this one occasion. But two weeks later I did hear a person whom I respect say: "Sixty five suicide bombs a day, that's it. There is no other chance than to bomb them away."

Another time I was sitting with two other women from the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem after a meeting of the women's group. I can't remember the context when I said, "In the Jewish tradition God is not the only one who blesses; in his or her prayers the Jewish man or woman blesses God, too." One of the women remarked, "I like this thought very much and it touches me, but at the same time I realize that I don't want to hear anything good about 'them'." We talked seriously about religion, peace building activities, and spirituality, and I mentioned Auschwitz. The same woman said to me, "You must not feel guilty! What they tell us about the Holocaust is not true. There is a professor in France who became a Muslim some time ago, and he has written a book about what really happened to the Jews. He says these other things are all legends." I contradicted her and told her what I had seen and learnt. In contrast to the priest she listened to me, but was not convinced.

At Pesach (Passover), the Hebron Team asked us from Bethlehem to help them out. The day before, on the Sabbath, Jewish children had thrown stones at the Muslim girls when they were leaving Cordoba School. While the girls were in the school we four EAs walked around a bit. A Jewish family on their way to the synagogue crossed our path. They were rushing and the father shouted, "Go back to Europe, go to your Hitlers." Then a stone - a small one - was thrown at us. Later I reported this incident to the school director, a wonderful, strong woman and mother of 11 children who has suffered a lot from her Jewish neighbours. Her answer was, "There can't be enough Hitlers." Again I contradicted and tried to explain why. She invited us into her house, but unfortunately our group had to leave very soon. We both promised each other to meet again, and I really hope to be able to do so soon.


I talked to Fuad Giacaman, the director of the AEI, about these experiences, and we both decided that I should talk to the women's group about National Socialism and the Holocaust. I did so at the end of my time in Bethlehem. The women already knew me quite well and we had shared many great times with each other; talking, arguing, laughing, and even dancing. When I started this meeting I told the women about my experiences, which I have described above, and that I thought as a German I should talk about these things and give some historical information. Then I began with the words of Pastor Martin Niemöller, "When the National Socialists came for the Communists, I didn't speak out, because I wasn't a Communist..." I tried to explain how Hitler and the NSDAP eliminated all kinds of opposition and established the dictatorship. I told them how the racial ideology and racial laws, which had already been described in "Mein Kampf", excluded Jewish people from public life, declared them as vermin, and led them into the concentration camps, where 6 million Jews from all over Europe were murdered.

The women said again and again, "The Jews complain about this until today, but they don't see that they are doing the same to us." The discussion was very heated, and there were always some talking at the same time. It was loud and words had to be translated from English into Arabic. A complete change occurred when I started talking about their beloved Pope John Paul II who had just died. I told them about the conditions under which he had to study and become a priest, and that all this took place underground and often at the risk of one's life. Since the National-Socialist racial ideology had declared the Slavic people to be slaves, they were to attend school only to the fifth form. After the German invasion of Poland the universities were therefore closed and many professors and intellectuals were carried off to the concentration camps. There

was a pensive silence, but then one of the women said, “But the Jews nailed Jesus to the cross!” Others agreed with her, and then I asked what Mary, Joseph, all the disciples of Jesus, and above Jesus himself were. Then one of the women said, “And then they murdered all the children in Bethlehem.” I was confused because I thought she was talking about the children from Bethlehem who had been killed in the second Intifada. But she meant the children who, according to biblical tradition, had been killed by Herod. I again asked what these children were and which position Herod held. Then I tried to give a few more examples to make it clear what anti-Judaism means and what I have learnt in my encounters with devout Jews. At the end we discussed pain and what it means to know the pain of the other. We talked about the fact that each pain is unique and thus can’t be compared or measured. And also that suffering and pain can never be a justification to harm the other.

Lessons Learned

In the beginning I spoke about my being a German and my being a Christian. Since my return home I have to add “my being an EA”. Bishop Munib Younan calls the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme a human chain of hope for peace and justice. What I feel sometimes is that I am a link in this chain. Now that I am back in Germany, I’m telling people what I’ve seen and what’s really going on in Palestine. (While I was in Bethlehem I did so in Israel where I was visiting some friends). I speak about the suffering of the Palestinian people under the illegal occupation, the violations of human rights and international law, and all the daily humiliations. And I speak about those Israelis who are committed to justice and peace and about their non-violent actions in order to end the occupation; I also talk about the fear and the trauma of the Jewish people and about their longing for true security. It’s a great challenge to be very clear in what I say. I have already



experienced that talk about Palestine and the Palestinian people has been misused, namely as anti-Semitism. Therefore it's necessary to be connected to all the other links in the chain, EA's as well as peace groups at home like Pax Christi.

Although Jesus teaches that to make peace and to establish justice, we have to confess and to profess that our practice in the past has often demonstrated the exact opposite, and that this situation is frequently no different today. We as Christians and Christian Churches, especially those from the North, should always be aware of this. We are not "born" peace-makers.

The accompaniers come from different denominations, cultures and continents. Can we find a way to share our spirituality with each other and with the people we accompany? By this I mean that we should have a spiritual foundation for our work. In the sense that we experience this, we, too, are accompanied by God and the people we meet.



Patricia Price-Tomes, UK
EA, June-September 2004

Spiritual Motivation

I grew up with a fundamentalist evangelical Christianity which neglected, even demonised, any social engagement, and regarded our humanity as something to be subdued and regretted. We knew we were saved and where we were going; most other people were unsaved and we knew where they were going too! Eventually I was able to admit that I'd never really belonged there and to embark on the journey of becoming more fully human and engaging with human issues. But I was never a campaigner until I visited Palestine and Israel on a short awareness-raising trip in 2002. That trip was, for me, like a conversion experience; I knew I had to become more involved and eventually I applied to the EAPPI and the rest is history - well not quite, as I will be serving another 3 months as an EA starting in December.

Deeply Moving Experience

The most deeply moving experience during my service as an EA was probably meeting mothers in Nablus whose children were in administrative detention. I told one of the stories in a journal letter which is attached.

Lessons Learned

I guess that I've learned that I shouldn't be afraid to try new things, and that I have something to offer. I'm even more aware of how complicated the situation in Palestine/Israel is and how ignorant I am. I am not in a position to explain everything or to offer clear-cut solutions. The importance of team work came

to the fore as I saw how some of our teams worked well and some didn't. I became more conscious that there are many complications to living with people of another culture. Here again I have no answers, which reinforces to me that my life today is about questions and journeys, not answers and destination!

Motherhood in Nablus

It was with some apprehension as well as excitement that my Swedish team mate Ylva and I approached our first visit to Nablus. After all, it's a pretty bad place according to the media, and the army at Huwwara checkpoint are reluctant to let us through because "we can't guarantee your safety in Nablus". But we loved it - it felt great to be greeted everywhere with "Welcome to Nablus" - though being the centre of attention in every street and restaurant can become wearing after a while. Once, the man at the next table (with his wife and 5 children), who had been without work for 6 months, wanted to pay for our meal!

We soon learned that the Israeli army make incursions into the Old City (a World Heritage Site which was badly damaged by the army in 2002) all the time; every night shooting resounds around the hills. We wondered - what are they doing during these incursions? On our second visit, we find out.

We meet a group of mothers whose sons, all children currently (August 2004) aged 16 or under, are in administrative detention - which means they can be held for 6 months without charge. After 6 months the detention can be renewed - the longest serving adults has been held for as much as 11 years (Haaretz, 6th August 2004), and we were told that even children have had their detention renewed 4 times.

Um Mohammed (mother of Mohammed - not her real name)

tells her story through an interpreter; she's smallish with an open face and friendly smile. Separated from her husband, she works in a school canteen earning 300 shekels (less than £40) per month. Mohammed, second of her three sons, was born 13th September 1987. On the night of 19th January this year (earlier in the day, he had finished the first semester exams of his technical college training to become an electrician with UNRWA) the army came to his college to arrest him.

As soon as she learned of his arrest, his mother contacted human rights organisations who checked and told her he had been taken to Maskobia in Jerusalem (the nearest prison). She found a lawyer through the Palestinian Prisoners' Club. After four days the lawyer received a permit to visit, but on arrival he was told Mohammed was not there. Eventually on the 6th day, another lawyer from the same firm did visit him in Maskobia; she said, "He is ok" (which his mother didn't believe), and that the investigation was finished.

2 months passed with no further news.

Somehow Um Mohammed manages to maintain her composure as she tells us that on 26th March her oldest son was killed by an Israeli car bomb. The ambulance crew made 6 journeys to the hospital in the course of collecting the ten pieces which were his remains.

She sought permission from an officer in Nablus for Mohammed to come and see his brother before his burial but this was refused. Her distress was increased by the news that when Mohammed heard of his brother's death, he collapsed and was taken to Talmund jail for under 18's at Ha'Sharom near Netanya, where there is some psychiatric care.

Eventually in response to a petition from Mohammed, the Red Cross intervened and he was allowed to phone both his parents

on 3rd May - 38 days after his brother's death. During a 15 minute conversation, he wept with concern for his mother as he expressed his condolences, asking after her and his younger brother aged 12.

At last a trial was set for 23rd June; both his parents made the journey to court at Ofer Prison in Ramallah, where they waited from 7 am until 3 pm. Eventually Mohammed appeared, was asked his name and told that the trial was adjourned until 5th August. No charges were mentioned. Um Mohammed saw her son for 5 minutes in the court, during which time they managed to exchange a few words despite being told repeatedly not to talk. She describes how at first she did not recognise him because he had become so thin. He asked for clothes suitable for the prison heat, and showed her how his arms had been affected by the chains he had worn during the journey to Ramallah (although these had been removed on arrival, his legs were still chained).

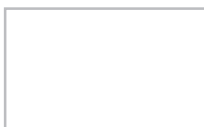
She sent clothes through the Red Cross but Mohammed has not been allowed to have them.

On 4th August the Prisoners' Club called her to say there was another postponement until 27th September. Now, his mother tells us, she knows nothing of what is happening; still she doesn't know what he's supposed to have done. She receives neither letters nor phone calls and is not allowed to visit. Other prisoners, whose mothers are able to visit, say that psychological difficulties are common in those who receive no visits. Reports that the food is not good and that the soldiers treat prisoners badly, do nothing to alleviate her fears for her son's well-being. That's the story so far.

And why is Mohammed not allowed phone calls and visits? Is he especially bad? Was he a known trouble-maker? What makes him different from other prisoners?

Well, he just happens to come from Nablus. That's all. It's called collective punishment - somebody in Nablus has upset the Israelis badly, so the whole city, each family, every mother, must suffer. A social worker who runs groups for mothers like Um Mohammed told us that there isn't a family in Nablus without a prisoner, a martyr*, or someone disabled by the violence of the Occupation. Mohammed is just one among many.

Maybe Nablus is not a good place to be a mother.



Rev. Roger Mörk,
EA in Jerusalem, April - July 2005

My Experiences

Although our primary activity in the Jerusalem team was to meet with the different Israeli Peace groups and activists and accompany them in their work, I also, as my personal interest, wanted to see as much as possible of the Church life in Palestine and also tried to do so.

I therefore attended a worship service every Sunday in different churches in Jerusalem. I was in The East Jerusalem Baptist Church, The Church of God, The Baptist House Center, The Jerusalem Alliance Church, St. George's Cathedral, and The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, The Notre Dame Center, and The Pont. Biblical Institute and St. James Cathedral.

Outside Jerusalem, I visited the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Ramallah where I attended and even participated with singing in the Sunday school and even the Sunday Service. In Ramallah I also preached and sung in the First Baptist Church.

Besides this I participated with singing every second week in the Swedish speaking Service at The Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem.

Lessons Learned

You are told before you leave your home country and even when you get here, that the local churches in this country have invited us to come and that they really appreciate your presence here.

In our group (Group 12), we did not see a single representative from the Churches until the last two or three days when we met bishop Rev Riah Hanna Abu El-Assal, a meeting which had a great impact on all of us. We were supposed to meet with the Lutheran bishop The Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib A. Younan during our orientation week but he could not manage to meet with us. I myself met with him when the next group (Group 13) had a meeting with him, and I am sorry for my group that they did not have the possibility to meet with him.

If I had invited guests to come to the churches in Sweden, I would certainly try to make a programme for the guests that makes them visible to as many churches as possible. Here we are left to ourselves to make us visible to the churches. It is not easy. I think that the local churches have to do more to invite the EAs to participate in their churches with bible reading, sharing the communion (if possible), presentations, and so on. I had hoped for a more developed program regarding our presence in the churches.

My suggestions

1. I think that the “Church profile” has to be strengthened within the EA’s Programme. One of the Danish girls said one evening when we where gathered for the post-orientation in Jericho: I do not understand why they call this a Christian programme? I have not met a single Christian yet! We were several pastors sitting around her! Of course this says something about those of us who were sitting next to her, but it also says something about the programme.
2. I think it is a necessity that immediately after we arrive, we meet with representatives from as many churches as possible. We have to meet and get to know “the faces” of those who have called upon us to come!

3. As I have said above, I think that the local churches have to do more to invite the EAs to participate in their services with bible reading, sharing the communion (if possible), presentations, singing, etc.
4. I also want the new EAs to meet with Rev Naim Ateek and get acquainted with the organization Sabeel as soon as possible when they arrive in Israel/Palestine. This will also strengthen the Christian profile.
5. I think that the National Coordinators have to, in every group, select at least one person who has a certain interest in church life and relations with the local churches and theological institutions and that the Local Programme Coordinator place these people in the Jerusalem, Bethlehem or Ramallah team, where it is possible to meet with the local churches.
6. These three people could, even though they are members of their local teams, create a certain “church-team”.
7. If there is at least one EA in every team in Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jerusalem who has a certain interest in church life, I think that these three should once in a while invite each other and present their special situation in their city, try to arrange some meeting with local church leaders and discuss common issues.
These three people should also try to help the other EAs in their relations with the churches. They should try to find out, among the other EAs, who can sing, preach, give greetings or testimonies from their home countries, etc.
8. I would like to suggest that one of the EAs in the Jerusalem team should have a certain relation, and maybe do some voluntary work, within Sabeel.

Spiritual Motivation

I was very clear from the start why I applied to go to Palestine/Israel. (I think/hope I have changed a bit since my original application). I was aware that the Middle East is the cradle of three great faiths, all of which feed into my own: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As a Vice-President of Pax Christi UK this has been part of my being for many years. I was also aware that these three great faiths have a book as the main (or one of the main) sources of their inspiration. Other faiths use the recorded word as well of course, but maybe in not quite the same way.

Each of these three great faiths also has a central message of love, tolerance, making life better for others. It seems to be the main message of all the great faiths - love your neighbours: do good to those who hate you.

And yet we fight each other. People of these three great faiths have done so much harm to each other over one thousand or even two thousand years. I am thinking about the Crusades when Christians did so much harm to Muslims - and Muslims did so much harm to Christians. I think we still live with the hate of that period. And I'm thinking of what Christians have done to Jews over two thousand years - not just the Holocaust but all over Europe - in my own country there was persecution and expulsion. Jews were welcomed when useful as money lenders, because of course Christians were not meant to do this lending while receiving interest - but then they were chucked out violently when we no longer needed them.

So I went to find out more and see if we could find a way of living together. And I didn't find an answer. I just have more questions.

I was in Nablus - a city besieged, cut off by checkpoints. A city of all the faiths I've mentioned. Abraham was about to sacrifice his son just up the mountain behind where I lived for 3 months. And his hand was stopped. And he came down the mountain and found a spring of water in Shechem (now Nablus) - and that is Jacob's Well.

So it's a place that is important for all of the 3 faiths. Jews, obviously because of Abraham, but Muslims too because Father Ibrahim (which is how they talk about Abraham) is so important to them. And for Christians because not only is the Abraham story important but also because this is where Jesus met the Samaritan woman, (This was some encounter: a Jew speaking to a Samaritan, (enemy) - a man speaking to an unknown woman, and one who was not "respectable" . And they discussed their faith. Daring - says something about Jesus and the unnamed woman).

And the Samaritans are still there, up the mountain, carrying out sacrifices each year at the time of the Exodus. Very few now, but still there.

Deeply Moving Experience

The day I left Nablus one of the students to whom we had tried to teach English said in answer to the question "What would you like us to say when we get back?" "Tell them I would like to be able to let my two little sons onto the streets (actually narrow passages in a Refugee Camp) without worrying about whether they will be shot by Israeli soldiers". That still breaks my heart.

I could talk about children who were shot, bereaved families I met, brave Israelis who stood up against what is happening.

But I think one thing that stands out for me is a family we met when olive picking in a little village outside Nablus. We were there to give confidence that they could do this most important thing - pick olives - their livelihood, their fuel, their food, their cooking oil, their source of income. We were there to make sure “settlers” (i.e. newcomers recently settled in the West Bank) would not disrupt the olive harvest.

One of the families we helped (well, we weren’t very proficient so I’m not sure how much we helped though we did work hard) asked us back to their home for a meal. This was during Ramadan and it was not yet time for them to eat but they gave us this beautiful meal, while they were still fasting, knowing we had to get back through the checkpoints before the end of their fast.

A couple of days before we left Nablus we thought we should go and thank the family and give them some photos and say goodbye.

Imagine our horror when we realised the house where we had enjoyed that beautiful meal had been destroyed! I still gasp at the thought of it.

Israeli soldiers had arrived at 3.30 am and given them 35 minutes to get out and take whatever possessions they could salvage in that time, The reason - their eldest son whom they had not seen for four years was suspected of being a person behind a suicide bombing. No proof, no charge. The family have six younger sons. The father had built the house. We left with tears and sobs. I hate to think what some of those sons might do. I fail to see the logic behind this action. And it took us ages to get back through the checkpoint.

That is not the saddest story I could tell but maybe it indicates how stupid - no - tragic - some of the actions are.

Lessons Learned

- I wish I had known more before going there. I think we were very well prepared by QPSW in London but I still think I didn't know enough. So if I ever do anything like this again I will do more "homework".
- Nothing is simple - this situation is very complicated.
- Don't expect to be accepted straight away. People are suspicious - especially in a predominantly Muslim city. We should have realised it would take time for them to accept us as not trying to convert but being there as friends and companions. But it did work by the end with both Muslims and fellow Christians.
- I should have read more of the Jewish and Muslim books so I would have known where other people are coming from. And I should be more aware that not everyone knows the Bible.
- It is very easy to get on local Radio. And into local newspapers.
- I want to go back. I would be better at a second attempt!
- Many of our gentle helpful Muslim friends didn't accept the fact that the Holocaust had happened.
- Some Israelis are very good and brave.



Tor S Rafoss

EA in Ramallah, April-July 2005

Spiritual Motivation

LUKE 24: 13 - 32

Now behold, two of them were travelling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.

But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"

Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"

And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.

But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.

Yes and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.

When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.

And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.”

Then He said to them, *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?”*

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.

But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave to them.

Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

ROM 13: 12

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

JOHN 8: 31 - 36

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

They answered Him: “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever

commits sin is a slave of sin.

And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.

Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

FATHER EMMANUEL, I can tell about his work

FATHER IBRAHIM, I can tell about his work

RAMALLAH BAPTIST CHURCH,
I can tell about Cynthia and Jad Mikhail and the church

CARRYING THE CROSS IN JAYYOUS
I can tell about Collin Watermeyer and my wife, Ellinor Rafoss,
among villagers

Three Norwegian poems, songs about accompaniment

EG SER

*Eg ser at du e trøtt,
men eg kan ikkje gå alle skrittå for deg.
Du må gå de sjøl,
men eg vil gå de med deg.*

*Eg ser du har det vondt,
men eg kan ikkje grina alle tårene for deg.
Du må grina de sjøl,
men eg vil grina med deg.*

*Eg ser du vil gi opp,
men eg kan ikkje leva livet for deg.
Du må leva det sjøl,
men eg vil leva med deg.*

*Eg ser at du e redd,
men eg kan ikkje gå i døden for deg.
Du må smaka han sjøl,
men eg gjer død til liv for deg.
Eg har gjort død til liv for deg.*

*Tekst og melodi Bjørn Eidsvåg
Sangen er skrevet på nynorsk og dialekt.*

NOEN MÅ VÅKE

*Noen må våke i verdens natt,
noen må tro i mørket,
noen må være de svakes bror,
Gud, la din vilje skje på jord!
Hjelp oss å følge ditt bud.*

*Noen må bære en annens nød,
noen må vise mildhet,
noen må kjempe for andres rett,
Gud, la ditt rikes tegn bli sett!
Hjelp oss å følge ditt bud!*

*Herre, du våker i verdens natt,
Herre, du bor i mørket,
Herre, du viser oss Kristi dag!
Selv under livets tyngste slag
er vi hos deg, du vår Gud!
Amen, amen.*

Tekst: Svein Ellingsen
Melodi: Trond Kverno

KOM IKKJE MED HEILE SANNINGI

*Kom ikkje med heile sanningi,
kom ikkje med havet for min tørste,
kom ikkje med himmelen, når eg bed om ljøs,
men kom med ein glimt, ei dogg, eit fjom,
slik fuglane ber med seg vassdropar frå lauget
og vinden eit korn av salt.*

Tekst: Olav H Hauge

Tone: Sindre Bratland

Jean Zaru, Theologian and Clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting:

“These are very hard times in Palestine. We have been working for a long time to end occupation, oppression, and destruction without any political gains. Fear and loss surround us, and many forces are at work making us feel isolated, marginalized, and disempowered. At best the work ahead seems overwhelming. Death and loss rearrange our priorities, and teach us how much we need each other.”

“I have lived all my life in Ramallah, but it was never as difficult as it is today,” Zaru says. “While Israeli troops are amassing in the Occupied Territories and the siege is tightening, we are increasingly subjected to a policy of persistent shelling, random shootings, political assassinations, house curfews, impoverishment, abductions, imprisonment, house demolitions, the illegal confiscation of our land and water resources, and the destruction of our remaining crops and trees.”

“My first problem has always been introducing myself. If I called myself a Palestinian, I was equated with terrorism. If I

said I was an Arab, I was assumed to be a Muslim - and then people wanted to know why I was even present. If I said I came from Jerusalem, thinking this would make things clearer for my fellow Christians, someone would immediately say, "Oh, you are Jewish! Shalom." And, when I continued to point out that I am Christian the inevitable final query came: "When were you converted?"

I gave the only reply I could: "Sorry, I cannot give you the satisfaction of saving my soul. I am a Christian, I must tell you, because my ancestors were Disciples of Christ. They were members of the first Christian Church which was in Jerusalem."

When I asked Archimandrite Melithus Bassal what the rest of the Christian world could do to help alleviate the situation of the diminishing Christian population in the Holy Land, his answer was direct: "Christians and churches all over the world should pray for the Christians and churches in Palestine."

It seems quite clear that if Christians around the world want living churches in Palestine in the future, they have to mobilize immediately against the Occupation and the political and cultural oppression - and give heavy support to the churches and the Christians in the Holy Land.

The Rev. Max B. Surjadinata
Ecumenical Accompanier in Ramallah



Valentina Maggiulli, Switzerland
EA in Ramallah and Yanoun,
July-September 2004

Spiritual motivation

In summer 2004, I had the possibility to experience two very diverse placements during my stay as an EA in Palestine. I spent the first two months in Ramallah, and the last month I stayed in Yanoun. As our team had the task of building up the placement in Nablus, we travelled a lot between those two placements. Writing this down and looking back I sometimes wonder what I really 'did' in Palestine - what was the purpose of my stay? Travelling through the countryside?

But this travelling, especially when I was on my own, actually meant much more. Either standing in line at a checkpoint for hours in the sun with Palestinians, or finding a solution together with others to get a ride from Aqraba to Nablus when all the checkpoints were closed, or just giving the young woman next to me in a bus the opportunity to have a conversation in English. I realized that accompaniment did not just mean to accompany somebody from A to B as a protection, but to accompany people in their daily life, to be present, to hear and to see.

Deeply moving experience

I will tell you about an episode from Ramallah, in fact from the nearby refugee camp of Al Amari. Our team had established a very good contact with a female social worker, Diyala, who worked in different refugee camps around Ramallah. She suggested that we could meet with some women in the camp

whom she had already met. My Swedish colleague and I were very much looking forward seeing those women as we sometimes felt that personal contacts were a bit limited in the busy town of Ramallah as we were getting tired of visiting NGOs. We decided that it should be an afternoon organized by us Internationals so the Palestinian women could have a new experience.

When we arrived at the UNWRA office, there were already some women gathering around and there was a sense of nervous curiosity in the air. For 'breaking the ice' we thought of playing a game first, telling our names and making the sound of an animal in order to either remember the name or at least the animal. There was a lot of laughter and after some minutes the language barrier became less important. As a theme for the afternoon, Diyala suggested "domestic violence", which is very common in Palestine and especially in the refugee camps. We first watched a movie together to take it as a starting point for our discussion. We were aware that it was a difficult topic. I saw some of the women crying during the film and I just hoped that it was not too much for them. Ulrika and I started by telling them about the situation in our home countries to show them that even in our so called 'modern democratic world,' the abuse of people and especially women, exists.

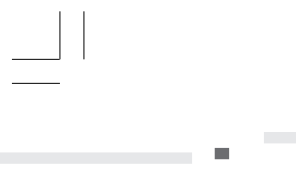
Slowly, women began to speak about life in the camp in general before telling us their personal stories. I remember one young woman telling her story about falling in love with a man whom her parents disapproved of. They did everything to separate the two; they beat her, cut her hair and sent her abroad for study just to prevent a relationship. Finally, she ran off with him, they married and now he is in jail serving a life sentence. We heard a lot of stories that day and sometimes Diyala couldn't manage to translate because all of them spoke at the same

time. This afternoon I felt very close to those women. And again it was one of those moments that I realized I can't really 'do' anything to change their situation but I can be there to share their pain.

Lessons Learned

I started my testimony by talking about my life as a 'travelling EA'. I did not have a lot of ideas about what to expect in Israel-Palestine, as I have never been there before. Luckily, we were told by our Swiss coordinator and by former EAs from the beginning of our training in Switzerland that it is not so much a 'to do' programme than a 'to be' programme. Therefore I could identify from the beginning with my role as an EA with this sense of just being present, watching, hearing, listening and accompanying, while being together with either Palestinians or Israelis. Of course, being with Israelis meant for me more or less enduring the humiliating treatment of Israeli soldiers as I spent most of my three months in the West Bank. But there were as well very nice encounters with Arik Aschermann from Rabbis for Human Rights or Gila Svirsky from Women in Black. I just wished I had had more time to get to know more Israelis and to hear their stories and views.

Of course there were moments when I asked myself if my presence makes a difference. It would be naive to think that our presence makes the lives of Palestinians easier. And sometimes, like in Yanoun, I felt like being on a roller-coaster. Some villagers told me that without us being there they had to leave their land and their homes and others argued that we as Internationals are creating a dependency that is not good for the villagers and their future. So, emotionally, I was often torn between enjoying the good feeling of being 'needed' and the bad feeling of probably making the situation worse for the Palestinians.



I saw Arafat during a rally in Ramallah, I experienced some incursions in Nablus, I went through tough situations at checkpoints many times, but what stays with me in the end are those 'silent' moments, short as they might have been, meeting people with this urge to live a normal life. A women smiling at me while riding the same bus from Tulkarem to Qalqiliya, a man telling me a story about his kids living abroad, a child playing like every child in the world in a summer camp in Jenin or a soldier helping me find the right bus to Tel Aviv.

The participation in the EAPPI programme and the experiences I had in Israel and Palestine has changed so many things in my life. I felt and I am still feeling very close to the Palestinian people. Since I returned in 2004, I have not stopped monitoring the situation and back home I was active in telling people about my experiences in the West Bank. Therefore I was more than happy to return to Palestine once more this summer. I had the opportunity to meet almost all the current EAs and visit some of the placements. Apart from getting an overview of the actual situation, I participated with a Swiss delegation in the Women in Black conference held in Jerusalem, which gave me the opportunity to learn more about the feelings of Israeli people and to get a more balanced view of the conflict.




Vivienne Jackson, UK

EA, November 2004 - February 2005

I am not a religious believer according any traditional sense of the word 'God'. However, I retain some of the feelings I derived from religion when I was a younger woman - the sensation that there is something beautiful and communally transcendent to be derived from developing solidarity amongst human beings based on common humanity and respect. My family religion is Liberal Judaism, but there are both Jews and Christians strewn within my predecessors - and probably much else. I chose to be with EAPPI for several reasons.

Firstly my analysis of the injustice in Israel-Palestine is that deeply divided identities keep people from recognising humanity in each other. I felt I wanted to be in a justice group in Israel-Palestine, where I was not working with those recognised to be from my so-called 'ethnic' or religious background. I wanted to work across categories. Secondly, the Quakers who operate EAPPI in the UK have a reputation for their interfaith work and commitment to peace and non-violence spanning centuries. Thirdly, I was excited that through EAPPI not only would I meet Palestinian Muslims, who I had never knowingly spent time with in Israel-Palestine, but also Palestinian Christians...who I had never met before (and never heard of when I was younger). Fourthly, I was probably seeking other people who would feel emotionally in a similar way to me about the situation, who could understand their reactions to the terrible situation through a spiritual lens.



I was moved by some of the young people of Yanoun's acceptance of my Jewish background. Given the terrible experience they have had with many Jewish people - usually only seeing the army or settlers who arrive from nowhere to threaten them. They did not reject me or hold me to account for these people. I have to remember that some of the first people to come to support Yanoun when the villagers left were Israeli Jewish activists. Yanoun residents could teach the world a lesson in global ethics on this front. They treated me with great hospitality and good humour, and in some cases genuine affection.

I believe that going to Israel-Palestine and my time with EAPPI was one of the most important and formative times of my life. It reinforced my belief in common humanity, despite paradoxically seeing the most intractable injustices.



TESTIMONIES OF THE ACCOMPANIED



Rima Tarazi

President of the Board of General Union
of Palestinian Women (GUPW)

Member of EAPPI Local Reference Group

Dear friends

Thank you for asking me to be with you today.

At a time when the Palestinian voice is being drowned by an avalanche of slanted media and jubilant voices rejoicing the deceptive withdrawal from Gaza while Israel consolidates its occupation of the West Bank and Jerusalem, there is an urgent need for the Palestinians to be heard by caring human beings who are willing to confront the status quo and are striving hard to find means to redress injustices and wrongs in order to build a more harmonious and safer world for all.

Will this august body amongst other caring human beings, ever be able to make a difference? This of course is a challenging question and a disturbing one at the same time. For we all witnessed the masses of human beings flooding the streets of several countries around the world, protesting the war on Iraq before it ever took place, with no success.

What then is our role as Christians and as responsible, caring human beings? How can we put an end to the grave injustices perpetrated around the world and the ongoing disregard for human rights, and the lives and dignity of millions of human beings by those who have military and financial supremacy?

Dear friends, in order to act and to make a dent in the course of events we have to be fully aware of any situation confronting us. It takes a great deal of courage and compassion to do so,

because it is not easy for many of us to fully comprehend those who have reached the abyss of despair and whose lives are kneaded with suffering.

It is not easy to understand what it means to spend a lifetime surrounded by oppressive walls and military barriers and to have one's life reduced to trying to provide the next meal for one's starving children.

It is not easy to feel what it means to watch one's child succumbing to random fire and one's home, orchard, and life savings and memories completely destroyed.

It is not easy to imagine life with no horizon, with no hope, with no dreams, except those of the ever after.

Above all, it is not easy to live with injustice for ever and ever, for there is no pain worse than being punished for the ills imposed on you. Punishing the victim is the gravest injustice of all and the perpetration of injustice is the gravest travesty of all, because injustice breeds hatred and violence and it drags human beings into a quagmire of eternal strife.

This, is why, ladies and gentlemen, the EAPPI programme is full of possibilities and opportunities. It links witnessed reality to one's Christian faith. It becomes incumbent upon us to search from within, what it really means to be a Christian, especially in a situation where Christianity is being abused and used by some, as a tool to oppress and dispossess.

In Palestine, our Christian faith is deeply embedded in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who treaded the paths of many a Palestinian town and left His deep mark on our lives and our relationships with others. To us, Palestinian Christians, the New Testament is our guide, this Testament which offers us the gift of love, equality, tolerance and respect for the dignity of every

human being, and which should have put to rest for good, the era of a God who allows men, women and children to be killed in order to make room for A Chosen People. It is unfortunate, however, that several groups who claim to be Christian, especially in the US, have yet to come to terms to the New era that the New Testament has ushered; an era of inclusiveness and tolerance. The ever growing power and influence of such groups on local and international politics is today, one of the major challenges facing the Christian Church and all those concerned with the future of humanity.

Dear friends, history is marred with many a dark period and shameful events, one of which is the Holocaust. Amending the past and redressing wrongs are grave tasks that must be undertaken and shouldered by those responsible for their perpetration. But they can never be a justification to create another horrible present; a present that often surpasses the past in its gravity.

Unfortunately, the tragic events of the Holocaust did exactly that. They strengthened the Zionist movement, which had - from its early beginnings - grand designs for transforming Palestine into a Jewish State as a response to anti-Jewish sentiments and actions in Europe, and had colluded with British colonial interests in 1917, to extract the Balfour Declaration, promising a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. This promise - given without the knowledge or consent of the indigenous population - by a government who did not own the land, was to create one of the gravest injustices of the 20th century which, unfortunately seems to linger well into the 21st! The Palestinian people whose roots were embedded in a civilization resplendent with tolerance and respect for other faiths were, thus, made to pay the price for the intolerance and racism of others.

The unfolding of events after 1917 became marked with the Palestinian struggle for independence from the British Mandate and the struggle to curb Zionist designs which were starting to pose a serious threat to the Palestinian existence on the land as uncontrollable numbers of Jewish immigrants were allowed to flood Palestinian areas despite the objection of the indigenous Palestinian population. The Palestinians began to realize, there and then that if Zionist goals for the establishment of a Jewish State were to be fulfilled, a gradual process of discrimination and ethnic cleansing would have to be implemented, considering that the majority of the population of Palestine was Moslem and Christian. By buttressing its ideology with religious claims to the land, Zionism was to plant the first seeds of religious strife in the region. God became a party to the conflict. The Dark Middle Ages of intolerance were threatening to infringe on our hard earned enlightenment, after centuries of struggle and human sacrifices.

The catastrophe of 1948; evicting and dispersing 3/4 million refugees, destroying their towns and villages and never allowing them to return, despite UN resolutions to that effect, was the beginning of the implementation of this policy. In 1967, instead of redressing wrongs and abiding by international law, Israel continued this process by every means available, discreetly at the beginning and blatantly at later stages. The present situation and the arrogant declarations from Israeli leaders, testify to this untenable situation.

For many years between 1948 and 1967, the UN was the haven to which we addressed our grievances. Hundreds of resolutions affirming Palestinian rights were adopted, reiterated and reaffirmed, to no avail, as Israel continued to ignore them with impunity. A resolution equating Zionism with Racism, adopted during the hay days of the UN, was later struck from the annals

of the UN as Israel consolidated its existence on our land and its financial and military power worldwide, enabling it to muster enough support to do so, even when it was at the peak of its defiance of international law and flagrant violations of human rights. As a result of course, Zionism became gradually accepted and indeed elevated to the status of a liberation movement. Israeli protagonists succeeded, to a great extent, in linking Zionism organically with Judaism, rendering it very difficult for people to attack it for fear of being accused as anti-Semitic; thus attacking Zionism became synonymous with anti-Semitism. The concept of a purely Jewish State became regarded as a right in the minds of many, who seemed forgetful that supporting such a state implied the gradual dispossession of the Palestinians. Thus, to our great dismay, the seeds of religious strife which were sown at the beginning of the Century started growing wildly.

The challenge remains. What do we do about our situation? We Palestinians, are unhappily and slowly coming to the conclusion that whatever course of action or inaction we take, we end up losing, and Israel ends up swallowing more land and establishing more facts on the ground. Do we bend until we are gently and quietly flattened and eventually wiped out, or do we stand tall and sturdy and risk being broken by impending storms?

What do we expect of our friends and in particular the Christian Churches?

What actions do we call for to put an end to the prevailing attitudes and policies, worldwide that continue equating the victim with the aggressor, the occupied with the occupiers, the dispossessed with the dispossessor?

One step in the right direction is to be well acquainted with the facts through objective sources. Besides firsthand documents of the UN which no-one can contest, the EAPPI and other eyewitness groups form a very powerful source of information. This information should find a way to be widely disseminated, because I believe that once the facts are known, human beings with commitment and compassion will find the right means to respond. I also feel that the WCC and the Christian Churches in general have the obligation to confront the Christian right by concerted educational programs that would highlight religions as compassionate havens for human beings - havens of justice, love and peace and not racist and sectarian battlefields.

As a second step, one needs to work on more than one front. Advocacy, campaigns and mobilization of public opinion within countries and national and local organizations can be effective in changing governmental timid policies towards Israel. The focus, we believe, must be a concerted call for the implementation of international law and conventions. It must be impressed that the violation of this law and these conventions by states signatories to them, is a serious precedence and justifiably gives license to any group of people or any organization to do so. How will the international community ever have the high moral ground to demand of smaller, illegitimate entities what it is unable to demand of its own constituency?

On the Israeli front, it is apparent, that as long as Israel perpetrates its occupation and defiance of international law with impunity, the only means to exert pressure on it is by taking action where it really hurts, such as divestment, and economic and cultural boycott of institutions that condone the occupation and collaborate with it. A number of Churches have

already taken such steps with conviction and courage. If these actions snow ball, then I believe that Israel will have to think twice before continuing to defy international law and to violate human rights.

These are but a few thoughts that I wanted to share with you, dear friends. I am sure that the WCC which has been historically one of the staunchest advocates of justice and peace in the Middle East, will continue in this thorny path of soul searching and confronting power structures with courage and fortitude.

May God grant us wisdom to act, wisdom to use our freedom for the good of all, and wisdom to use our intellectual, spiritual and financial resources to confront natural disasters and to alleviate poverty and sickness, instead of using them to aggravate the problems of the world and to inflict more suffering on the human race.

Thank you again.





Angela Godfrey-Goldstein

Action Advocacy Officer, Israeli Coalition
Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)

My connection with the EAPPI programme dates to the early days, when I first started tourguiding groups of new accompaniers, as part of their orientation, in my work as a critical tourguide with ICAHD, which in itself is part of my work as an Israeli peace activist working to end the Occupation and advocate for a just peace. I have therefore been privileged to know many individuals on the programme, whether during those orientation tours or later.

Firstly, I want to say that I believe firmly in this programme because I know that one of the best ways of changing public opinion internationally (where there is much political involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict, but too little real commitment or firsthand knowledge), and thereby changing the political reality, is for enough ordinary people to come for long enough to Israel-Palestine to see for themselves on a daily, regular basis (not just a 1-week rushed holiday, jumping through tourist spots) what the reality on the ground is really all about, from all angles. Only when diplomats and politicians (who already KNOW what is happening), only when those people feel enough pressure coming from their grassroots, will there be significant empowerment and - hopefully - change.

Secondly, I pay tribute to the number of extremely intelligent, gifted and spiritual people who have been EAs, many of whom I may have momentarily forgotten but whose ongoing work in this whole field is also so valuable. Some of them have

influenced my work, indubitably. Others have provided a network of their own contacts, which form a multiplier effect to my advocacy work as I keep in contact with them. I recall, for example, Anne, whose husband was a Professor of Human Rights at Harvard, and I imagine her work and daily experiences, as witnessed by her husband Peter when he visited her, must be filtering through into the academic and student world at the highest level. Knowing he had always “pooh-pooed” her work until he saw it at first-hand, it’s obvious this programme has huge potential and is remarkably fulfilling in many ways.

Not only have individual accompaniers helped me personally on a regular basis, I also have no doubt that all the accompaniers have been eyes and ears that the Israeli authorities, especially individual soldiers and policemen and settlers, have been sensitive to; without their presence, Israel could and would have acted with even more impunity than it has. Whilst this is difficult to quantify, one knows that this little band of people, this army of world citizens, is a small force that keeps some of the worst behaviour from erupting; whilst foreigners are watching, or likely to see, soldiers, settlers and police are less likely to indulge in the behaviour that goes on, daily, out of sight. And even average Israelis who come into contact with the Accompaniers must have to revise and justify some of the ideology and mindsets that allow the worst excesses to happen. Any EA who cares about Palestinian suffering is a challenge to all those Israelis who do not care and this in turn challenges us all to try to understand one of the issues: what makes people care, and what stops people from caring? Any EA who takes time off from family, work, commitments, personal safety and familiar culture to travel abroad and become involved in other cultures’ realities, which realities (in the case of Israel) are being steadfastly ignored by that culture itself, is an example that

must challenge people to question their own commitment and views. The “situation” has been going on so long (and 70% of all Israelis are under 37, so know nothing but Occupation) that one is aware that most Israelis do not question it; nevertheless, when face to face with foreigners who are living in the middle of that situation and who are more expert than they themselves as citizens, this must jog Israelis (and Palestinians) into heightened awareness. For Palestinians, I know that the solidarity of foreigners is one of the few rays of hope they have on their grim horizon. For Christians particularly it must be somewhat of comfort to see that the Church internationally cares and is doing more than just praying at a safe distance for its brothers in faith in trouble elsewhere.

The Christian church is also, it has to be said, one of the few external powers that Israel will not only listen to, but try to mollify and please, for its own political reasons, some of which are pure realpolitik. This is partly because of the vast numbers of Christians in the world, for whom the Church is the ruling authority, and also because Israel has to admit the legitimate Christian right to be involved in local affairs because of its history and the importance of its holy sites (not least to the Israeli economy). Therefore I believe that Christians not only have a spiritual duty as to their involvement in the Holy Land while maintaining access for all Christians (something which in the current political climate we cannot take for granted, since the strategy of settlement and Wall development in and around Jerusalem distinctly threatens free Christian access to all holy sites and already is causing a “quiet transfer” of Christians from Palestine - 40% of Palestinians were Christian in 1948, today the statistic is a chilling 1.7%), but they are amongst the only international players acceptable however grudgingly by Israeli authorities and therefore also have a spiritual duty to fulfil that mission on behalf of all those for

whom such involvement is completely impossible. This is not even to touch on the healing role of Christians as interlocutors between Muslim and Jew. America seems to be singularly failing in that role; indeed, one of the current ongoing debates is how best can Christians advocate amongst their brothers, Christian Zionists, who are happily egging on nuclear holocaust in a misguided belief that the Messiah will arrive once all the commandments, together with Mankind, have been burnt on a nuclear cross. One wishes such people could start to understand that Paradise is already here, if we would but wake up and see God's miracles and creation here in front of us. Even Jews seem to me to be praying for the Messiah to arrive exclusively for them, without seeing God in all creation and the equality of aliveness in all that is living. Here I would quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the charismatic Anglican bishop of Cape Town who was one of the leaders in the forefront of the struggle: "People are scared in this country (the US) to say wrong is wrong because the Jewish lobby is powerful- very powerful. Well, so what? For goodness sake, this is God's world! We live in a moral universe. The apartheid government was very powerful, but today it no longer exists. Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Pinochet, Milosevic, and Idi Amin were all powerful, but in the end they bit the dust. Injustice and oppression will never prevail. Those who are powerful have to remember the litmus test that God gives to the powerful: what is your treatment of the poor, the hungry, the voiceless? And on the basis of that, God passes judgment. We should put out a clarion call to the government of the people of Israel, to the Palestinian people and say: peace is possible, peace based on justice is possible. 'We will do all we can to assist you to achieve this peace, because it is God's dream, and you will be able to live amicably together as sisters and brothers.'"

Having lived in S. Africa for five years under apartheid, with now a 35 year span of experience in that land, I know how much Archbishop Tutu's charismatic leadership meant to his fellow South Africans and the world, especially during the dark days of Mandela's 27 years in jail. The Church in South Africa was in the frontline of the struggle, showing us all the way, just as now it fights for peace and justice. I remember those days when freedom seemed a desperate illusion. At such times, the spirit must kick in. I speak as one who went to Israel to study with a Teacher whose goal was to waken my spirit and to work on developing my soul. This spiritual work is hard work, and the Way to enlightenment not easy, it is not for the faint hearted. But once the heart is open, God shows the way. Herein lies our faith and the simplicity of love.

Some EAs who stood out in their helpfulness to me are as follows:

Christoph Gocke, a journalist on the Jayyous team, whose work was of enormous impact and efficiency when 700 olive trees were uprooted by settlers on Jayyous farmers' land. Christoph efficiently communicated with me while I was organizing some of the advocacy work and liaising with diplomats, international and local journalists and other peace activists, including internationals who took up the case in order to lobby both in Europe and Washington, and on the same day managed to launch his photographs and reports in an online diary (an invaluable resource to this day), which therefore got photos of the uprooting into the press both locally and internationally. Because of his professionalism, there was never a problem in receiving up-to-date information, news, updates or responses; it was thus a pure pleasure of teamwork to be able to rely on and trust him. On that team at the same time was also Helle Preisler, who managed on her own to monitor and report on another day of uprooting; face to face with armed settlers and

bulldozers, she survived what must have been an intensely scary experience; I know when we spoke on the mobile phone a few times during that experience, she managed to be extremely brave, while justifiably scared. Speaking of Helle, I note that one of my Palestinian friends was a pupil of hers, while she was teaching English in Tulkarem, and that woman's English progressed so fast that it finally became possible to have long and easy conversations with her on the phone. In her work teaching English to university professors at Al Quds University, Helle managed to identify a very real gap in Palestinian advocacy - its almost total absence of good civilian spokespeople, ordinary citizens sufficiently empowered to advocate on behalf of their population.

The current status of Jayyous and its longstanding and tragic isolation from its farmland because of the strategic placing of the Wall on its farmland (to develop new settlements on land being stolen with impunity by Israel) is an ongoing problem. There are very few methods of fighting this injustice - public awareness is one, and the legal system in Israel (so vastly tilted towards the Israeli settler community's colonialist predatoriness) is another; the fact that an EA currently in Jayyous is a trained lawyer is of enormous value, bearing in mind that the Association for Civil Rights in Israel is currently preparing a Supreme Court application for Jayyous and Falamyā, and dependent on statistics which the villagers themselves have not provided. It is my hope that Desmond will be able to fulfil ACRI's needs; one small gripe is that natural humility prevented him from stating at an early stage that he is a lawyer and therefore ACRI was not alerted to the benefits of working seriously with him. Similarly in the past, an EA in Jayyous failed to mention to anyone when the village received land confiscation orders, for the Civil Administration to build a new road and direct farmers through Falamyā gate; not knowing

the farmers only had seven days in which to appeal, it would have been more effective had campaigners known about this prior to Day Five. This was a specific breakdown of communication, bearing in mind that EA had in fact attended a lawyer's office when the case was being discussed and had indeed been asked to report on new developments.

Outstanding, wonderful EAs come easily to mind: whilst on a tour of Hebron recently with the Breaking the Silence soldier group, I asked a Palestinian surrounded by an Israeli settlement in Hebron's Old City which international groups were beneficial to him in his isolation - CPT, EAs or TIPH. Knowing the long involvement in Hebron of CPT (as opposed to the relatively recent presence of EAs), I was surprised to hear that the most useful internationals are EAs. I know Pandora was especially valued in her work, partly because her South African experience made her such a shining example of the ability of people to rise above racism and head for solidarity and reconciliation — something she has imparted (even to soldiers). All such contacts are important, especially because Israeli civil society is unable to impart such energy: the Israeli peace camp, together with the general Israeli public, is too numbed by the whole 38-year Occupation and its toll, by the suicide bombs and ongoing conflict, by never-ending propaganda demonizing Palestinians and perpetuating a mythology of "tiny Israel" or "security" reinforced by right-wing politicians that it accepts the worst corruptions without comment, fearing too much deep inquiry. Let sleeping dogs lie...

In Abu Dis, EAs found an unconscious Palestinian who had been thrown, literally, from a high window of the Cliff Hotel by Border Police; the EAs contacted MachsomWatch, and this led to the trial and punishment of those policemen, who were found guilty of torture. No Palestinian eyewitnesses could have

effected an indictment and verdict, which took place during the middle of the day when MachsomWatch has no presence in the field. It goes without saying the EA presence hugely augments MachsomWatch checkpoint work.

My experience with EAs will always be highlighted by the Madonna saga. Having been forewarned by foreign journalists that Madonna was planning to visit Rachel's Tomb (in Occupied Palestinian Territory, but newly annexed to Jerusalem by Israel, neighbouring the Aida Refugee Camp, and itself housing both a Muslim mosque and cemetery), I decided to hold a vigil at the tomb in order to garner some of the paparazzi interest in Madonna. I prepared signs with slogans ("It's the Occupation, Stupid!" "Madonna, Rachel's Tomb is in Occupied Palestine!" or "Ayda Refugee Camp is next door here, Madonna!" etc.), and put out the word to Israeli activists to join me. Some took up the call to organize a successful demonstration outside her hotel in Tel Aviv. But for the Rachel's Tomb vigil no one came forward, specifically since it had to be held during an Israeli public holiday, but also because it probably seemed somewhat frivolous. My call was taken up by the EAs; Cathy Nobles promised me "her gang" and indeed all 21 arrived; since they were in the middle of another programme, it had to be only a brief vigil, but they were interviewed by the press (Reuters, AP and others) whom I'd co-ordinated, at the tomb itself. As an Israeli, I'm not allowed over that Bethlehem checkpoint (unless I go in a special bus to the tomb together with settlers!), so I awaited them nearby, with a gang of photographers. Their bus came into view, they leaped off, grabbed signs, had a massive photo-shoot, leaped back on the bus and zoomed off. To their fast retreating backs I called "It may seem silly, but this could be about the most important thing you did while here." Needless to say, the photos went worldwide and the message got across that it's the Occupation that's the problem: Madonna

learnt from it, too, and only scheduled a night trip to a tomb elsewhere. To sum up, without the EA presence at that vigil, it would have been a singularly damp squib, whereas actually it was a demonstration that caught worldwide attention, riding on celebrity coat-tails.

Since boycotts and sanctions and selective divestment and war crimes trials are currently very much on the agenda, I would also give credit to the first team of South African EAs who were able to give testimony in a presentation at Beit Sahour's YMCA as to their effectiveness in helping to end the apartheid struggle. I specifically asked them, knowing the answer but needing to have it heard in public (especially by Israelis) how South Africans had responded to sanctions, being the people who suffered most under them. They affirmed (being people very much active in the ANC and The Struggle) that they had known they would suffer more, but that it would hasten the end of apartheid, and that therefore they welcomed those boycotts, sanctions and divestment. Their presence, as living proof that oppression ends, that truth and reconciliation, non-violence and dialogue, negotiation, justice and respect of the other are all part of the way forward, was for me as an Israeli a source of spiritual comfort. Similarly, all EAs are a spirit of normalcy in two very traumatized, sick societies whose very sickness has numbed creative spiritidness. That EA creativity was on display, for example, at the Abu Dis demonstration against the wall (where Arun Gandhi, the Mahatma's grandson, spoke). It took an EA member of the Sawahre team to come up with an original sign - which garnered all the press and TV photographs - in the shape of red letters to form the words NO WALL, individually carried by EAs. I saw press photographs of those same letters being held ahigh at an anti-wall demo in Jordan, shortly afterwards. The same creative mind that had come up with those words was alert enough to take them with him as he exited via Jordan back to the UK.

And whilst talking of creative minds, another EA, Matt, comes into focus: having been a BBC cameraman, his photos were absolutely superb. Stationed in Jayyous in 2003, he was well able to upload onto the computer of Abdul Latif, a hydrologist; those photos are to this day to be seen everywhere as a historical record of the early days of the Wall's oppression; at the time of the preparation of the Palestinian case against the Wall to the ICJ, they were an essential record. I have no doubt that when transitional justice kicks in (and the example of other hellholes, oppressions and racist supremacies gives one hope that this day will come even unto Palestine), those photos will contribute to the world's judgement.

My experience with fellow Israelis is mixed and of itself a whole lengthy discussion which we do not have time for here. Let me therefore give one small but telling example of EA influence in that sphere. I have twice recently been a privileged guest at the Willy Brandt Centre, invited by Jerusalem EAs. On the first occasion, I heard a fellow guest (the leader of the Jerusalem branch of Young Labour, a political group whose parent party "Labour" has a Zionist agenda and a huge responsibility for the sins of "Oslo") as he told a Young Meretz student that we Israeli radicals did enormous damage to Israel by spreading bad stories about Israel to foreigners. In my own discussions later with him, I made little headway as he patronizingly presumed that real power can only be found in the major parties. I said civil society is a huge power; he remained unconvinced. The following meeting, EAs presented photos of their work - covering their assignments, in a very practical, uncontroversial way. The silence in the room spoke volumes: the Young Labour leadership saw at firsthand what it almost never sees - the situation on the ground. In discussion later, that young man was anxious to let me know he had indeed seen me in Silwan on a day of activism when we'd worked

together with the villagers. He went on to discuss with me in a far more open way some of the serious issues facing Israeli society as a result of its occupation. I knew intuitively that the presentation by the EAs of their work in Hebron, Jayyous, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Yanoun and so on shocked him out of his macho composure, his self-satisfaction and presumptions. His eyes had been opened, he had seen the ugly face of his country's occupation through the eyes of strangers, and was now open to me as a fellow Israeli, and ready finally to accept and welcome my invitation to come and see more in our tour of East Jerusalem and surroundings settlement blocs. Most Israelis really don't want to know or face the truth. Although they may be victims, they are in no way open or interested in knowing of Palestinian suffering. We have to find ways to bypass that mindblock, that ghetto. Compassion and humour and love and patience may be useful tools. Impatience and anger also have their place. Jesus Christ knew how to rage. The test is usually to check the heart and the ego. And whilst anger with violence is always destructive, anger well focused can channel energy which otherwise lapses into depression and pathos. Whilst understandable, these are simply less useful spiritual qualities. In this psychological warfare that we are in, we must learn how to focus our energy and win. In a win-win situation, so that losers will not need to fight back. South Africa's Mandela has shown us how well that strategy serves.

Other EAs have been on regular olive harvest (human shield) work, sometimes being the only volunteers available during weekdays. In Yanoun I know the presence of internationals, including EAs, is saving lives. And in Bethlehem, Christian Palestinians really need to know the Christian world is witnessing their isolation behind the prison of the Wall. EA presence there must be of enormously supportive solidarity.

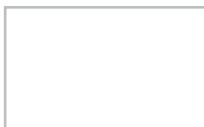
Inasmuch as the way ahead seems currently bleak, we must work to save and therefore value life. This is about as spiritual as it gets. At this point I'm reminded of that group of EAs who asked for a more spiritual tour, with whom we therefore organized a walk from the Old City to Abu Dis Wall, with stations on the Way, including Lazarus' church, and discussion at St. Anne's of what spiritual qualities their work required and where spiritual growth would take them... sense of humour, perseverance, compassion, an open heart, a listening ear, self-forgiveness and so on. But, as I said, anger can be a releasing force for good, if used and channeled wisely. The fact that a whole people are not being allowed basic human rights - are being denied anything like a decent life or future - and that something intrinsically evil is being carried out (sometimes in the name of religion, in a travesty thereof) - is something that keeps the spirit fighting. Thank God for people such as Martin Luther King, whose statement "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" inspires me every time I remember it, on all my emails.

Finally, tribute to Mina Damons who, with enormous perception, has been one of the few (including neither Israelis, internationals nor Palestinians) to notice there's no strategy. Her experience in South Africa's fight for racial justice is of excellent value and deeply important; one hopes that her experience is being fully exploited by the programme and that such perceptions will strengthen the Israeli peace movement in its ability to see the wider picture, and not be over-involved in stamping out every forest fire, whilst those with flamethrowers in hand are blithely setting fires everywhere deliberately.

In short, the EAPPI programme seems to me, an Israeli peace activist, to have a huge mission, much of which is being accomplished. If lessons learned can be translated into greater

sensitivity, and intelligent, political strategic clout, this great little programme can help to achieve much that neither Palestinians nor the Israeli peace camp alone can achieve. Only when international civil society understands well enough from hands-on experience what is really going on - away from the media hype and political spin that spells it out as a fight against Islam and terror - only when enough people understand that the political map has long been sewn up by successive Israeli administrations (and not just the settlers or the Sharon government), so that Palestine can never exist as a state unless huge steps are taken (steps which are certainly not even considered by the Israeli government, State Department or EU), can a real, just, viable peace be attained. I personally don't hold out hope that Israeli public opinion is suddenly going to have its moment of truth on a Road to Damascus; 38 years of occupation have progressively distanced us from sensitivity to common sense - Israel is a psychiatrically sick society (some of that sickness dating to the holocaust and previously), desperately in need of being saved from itself. Whilst Sharon is busy in Washington telling the world that Israel will not retreat from the settlement blocs (Ma'ale Adumim, Ariel, Gush Etzion, etc.) and the State Department is not contradicting him, and whilst Sharon is stalling meeting with Abu Mazen, and indeed deliberately heating up the Gaza "front," we have to admit that the 2-state solution is dead. Certainly the EU is neither efficient in its advocacy, nor able (for historical reasons) to be effectively critical of Israel. Few people as yet are articulating a strategy to supersede that solution, but public opinion must be able to judge, with enough first hand testimony from average world citizens, whether a one-state solution is the only alternative. If that is the case (and it is increasingly obvious that it is), then the path ahead is not easy. It will be, like the downfall of apartheid, a struggle involving world opinion, human rights, real democracy, international law and refugee

claims for restitution. The change will come because the problem will not go away until it does. The question is how many senseless deaths we allow, and how we manage to proselytize to the world so that it understands its own self-interest in solving this tragedy - whether we have to learn how to convince the Jews of the world that Judaism is losing its intrinsic and historic spirituality, or whether we work to defuse the stress levels of an increasingly escalating, militarized world. Strategy is not coming from the Palestinians, who are much involved in power struggles between the corrupt PA (corrupted deliberately by a wily Israel or a naïve EU) and the more militant Hamas, who have been partly responsible for the Gaza “redeployment”. I believe that civil society, together with the church, has to take up the challenge, as the only really viable opponent of Zionist colonialism, imperialism, racism, militarism or fascism. To fail will fan the flames of militancy, and thus increasing anti-semitism and/or anti-Israel feeling (especially in the Islamic world), will cause the international community itself to suffer more terrorism, with Israel. At such times as this, spiritual energy is certainly essential - this is not a time for weak spirits - we may well be in the lull before the storm and must use it wisely. Bearing in mind the risks encountered or imagined in advance by all EAs, I see them as a feisty, trusty band of healers. May God and His miracles be with them.



Nidal Abu-Zuluf

Network of Christian Organisations
in Bethlehem, NCOB

Accompaniment reflects the religious and human commitment and dedication to help the poor and marginalized resume their human dignity. It's a way of showing support and care of those in need for help. A way of showing that we are all one in God and all the Images of God. A way of showing that people everywhere are equal and enjoy the same God's grace and love. A way to show that people of faith do care about their fellow the human beings when in need. A way of sharing, caring and daring to help tell the truth and act for justice and human dignity. It's a way of showing compassion and solidarity with the people of God to the People of God. A way to make me feel that someone listens cares, pray and act with love, compassion and dedication and commitment to my human and just cause. Accompaniment is the feeling that we are all the sons of God who accompanies us and leads us out of the evil to the good.

Accompaniment must not be necessarily a physical presence. I need you to be next to me in difficult times but I also need you to care and share me my dreams and inspirations. For me accompaniers are those who do share with me humane dreams for a better future and a better world. The accompanier and I walk together to reach a certain beautiful destination and goal. He /she is the empoweror and I am the one in need for this power.

Accompaniment is a the power that give hope to people in need and push them to look to the future in an optimistic way,

developing their self-esteem and better human role and contribution to their community and the entire world. It's a power that helps people get more realistic expectation from themselves and the others.

Accompaniers are those who are not necessarily physically available but those who make you feel that they are by you when needed, who work for you from their own surroundings using all the means possible and who make you develop proper inspirations and dream for a better world.

The EAPPI was proven to be of good support and help for the Palestinians, especially those who lived under daily difficult conditions and needed help. The EAs played a wonderful role in supporting the peoples of Jayyous, Hebron, Bethlehem and the other areas. People of these areas have the feeling that they are not left alone in their fight for freedom, peace and justice.

The fact the EAPPI is based on Christian Theology and implemented in a the Holy Land , is a key issue for a better Christian involvement in a just and peaceful solution for the Israeli Palestinian conflict, in a way that reflects the Christian beliefs and values of love, openness, reconciliation and human dignity

In a society that is mainly made of oppressed, traumatized and disadvantaged people targeted by a brutal military occupation, international presence that might help putting an end to violence and bring personal security to the people is badly needed. The evil is there everywhere and the good is wanted. EAs and other solidarity groups resemble this good that brings some balance, at least at the psychological level. EAPPI is a Program that must continue and get more developed in a way to reflect the WCC vision and pursuit for the creation of a

better, just and peaceful world. The Palestinian Cause is not anymore a national one, it's a global cause of international concern, and resemble the struggle of the good against the evil.

STORY

In October 2004 some 35 internationals, including 3 accompaniers took part in the olive picking program organized by some local organizations in Bethlehem area. The idea was to show solidarity with the Palestinian People and mainly the villagers who have difficulties in approaching their fields . In that year and the year before the Israeli settlers and soldiers frequently attacked the villagers mainly after picking the olive and used to steal it. In other areas the villagers were denied access to their fields because they are located in areas that is considered military zones under the Israeli definition. And for most of those villagers olive and olive oil is the main source of income

It was so nice gathering, people from all over the world were driven by human motivation based on their belief that they might be of some help to their fellow oppressed Palestinians. The group have travelled in the areas designated for olive picking, but they were also denied access to the field. Soldiers and settlers used to threat the villagers before time and the international were faced by the fact that these fields were declared closed military zones that none can have access to.

Then the option was to move to other fields, where we worked with other families who were not in need for our help. Still, they very much welcomed us and the fact that internationals are there to give some help and show support. The best part of the activity was having lunch together. Some 50 people sharing food and talking about their humane concerns

Those families have shared their feelings and conditions with the others and mainly the companions who were better involved in the area. The father in one of the families said “ I have never talked to foreigners. It was so good to feel that someone cares and listens to you and understand your inspirations and fears. This made us feel that there is still good people and that our situation might get better” other family members, especially children were very pleased by the presence of the internationals and had impressive talk with them

Despite of the fact that these families were not in need for physical help, having someone to talk to was a key issue, since this shows that some people do care and share the human dreams for better conditions, freedom, peace and justice with the oppressed

LESSONS LEARNT AND INSIGHTS

1. The presence of internationals in Palestine-Israel might help reduce violent acts
2. Palestinians are in need for the internationals and always asked for international presence as a means by which better living conditions might be secured
3. the presence of the EAPPI Companions has been a good expression of solidarity with the directly affected Palestinians. It also helped to reduce possible tension with the Israeli soldiers
4. showing solidarity and human support in the areas next to the Wall, the check-points and other tense areas, where houses are regularly demolished served as an important means of empowering of the people
5. having the EAs as companions and good listeners to people stories was always appreciated by the Palestinians and showed that people of different nationalities do care about the oppressed Palestinians

6. psychologically speaking, telling stories to persons who show care and compassion is very therapeutic to those who developed difficulties associated with the violent and traumatic experiences
7. ending the physical presence in Palestine must not be the end of the accompaniment. The EAs better keep the ties with the people and the organizations they have been introduced to. This will secure a continued solidarity. Solidarity does not end with the end of physical presence
8. the EAs are in need for organized local support to facilitate their mission. This could be made by a group of local interested organizations and churches
9. the EAs better get involved with some local organizations especially those working in advocacy. There they get better information on the area where they serve as well as a better facilitation for their tasks. In many of such organizations the EAs can also take part in different relevant activities
10. sometimes the situation gets calm, at least for a while. Therefore the EAs and their coordinators need to have a flexible plans and activities that includes relevant alternatives mainly working with some local organizations on certain activities

The EAPPI has serves a tool which shows that people of faith can employ their beliefs in a proper way that will create a better impact on the others who share with them this globe. We are all the images of God and God companies his people. We all deserve a better world that is driven by ethical power. One of faith and values cannot forget about those who are poor and oppressed. The people who are blessed with freedom and decent life need to have a human cause to defend "WITH WHAT SHALL I COME BEFORE THE LORD". The People of Palestine need us and we are here inspired to serve.



Shareef Omar Khaled (Abu Azzam)
Land Defence Committee, Jayyous

Hello friends. My name is Shareef Omar, a farmer from the Palestinian village of Jayyous; a village of 3200 people situated northeast of Qalqiliya. I am a representative of the Land Defense Committee in Qalqiliya district. These committees were established in 1981 and 1982, consisting of many volunteer farmers to face the Israeli aggression towards us when they confiscated our lands. These committees became an active member of the Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, which was established in 2002, in an attempt to unite all the efforts of Palestinian public organizations to resist the Apartheid Wall.

Jayyous had 12,500 dunums of land after losing 2000 dunums in the 1948 war (a dunum is 1000 square metres). 9200 or about three quarters of those dunums are located either under or isolated behind the wall. Even worse, in a dry country like Palestine, all of our wells (we have 6) are behind the wall. Ever since the occupation began in 1967, we have not been permitted to drill any additional wells - and even the wells we do have, have meters on them which are monitored by the Israeli authorities. Whilst we are only permitted to use the same amount of water that was allotted to us in 1983, we watch settlements grow greener with well watered decorative trees and flowers on land that, if it had not been stolen from Palestine, we would hardly have been allowed to irrigate to produce the fruit that we can feed the world with.

Since we began the resistance, and from the moment our olives trees began to be uprooted, a lot of internationals and

Ecumenical Accompaniers came to Jayyous to support our resistance against the occupation. I want to thank those who invited me here to explain the situation in my country. I will begin by talking about the historic and present cooperation between Muslims and Christians, with a passage from the holy Qu'ran.

In the Al-Baca rah (the cow) Sura, verse 285, God says: "The Messenger believeth in what hath been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of the Faith, each one (of them) believeth in Allah, his angels, His books, and His messengers. We make no distinction between one and another of his Messengers. And they say: We heard and we obey (we seek) thy forgiveness our Lord, and to Thee is the end of all journeys."

Friends, from the time God gave the message of Islam, believers were persecuted by those who did not believe and by the polytheists, so Mohammad "alihe assalam" sent the faithful Muslims to the Christian king of Ethiopia, who supported them and protected them. This event is mentioned in the holy Qu'ran Al-Maida (the table spread) Sura verse 82: "And nearest among the people in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say: "we are Christians" because amongst these are men devoted to learning. And men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant."

These two short verses of the holy Qur'an give the clear idea that Muslims believe in all the Messengers. We also believe that the principles in Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the same. This is born out in the respect we pay when we mention the name of Moses, or Jesus or Muhammad; we must add alihe assalam which means "peace to him".

In view of this, we are not astonished about why we have this wonderful cooperation with the Ecumenical Accompaniers. In fact, as I explained to you, from the time of Mohammed, alihe assalam, we have benefited from Christian support and friendship. And on the ground, your presence has meant a great deal, not only for my village of Jayyous, but for all of Palestine, and I bring you our love.

The Ecumenical Accompaniers participate in our non-violent demonstrations; daily we find them monitoring the gate; observing the treatment of the soldiers to the farmers and if some problems take place, they call human rights organizations. They also prepare monthly reports about the opening and closing times of the gate, which we are able to use in our court cases. During the olive harvesting season they do their best to help those farmers whose farms are threatened, because many farms are surrounded by settlements. We seriously need and appreciate their help. Sometimes they teach English courses for boys and girls who are in need of that. They build friendships with the people. And best of all, they write reports about the situation here to their people - the thing that it is most important for us, because the Israeli media supported by the U.S. media is well arranged and very active, but does not tell the whole story about Palestine. When one of those Ecumenical Accompaniers conveys the facts to his or her people, they will believe and forget the Israeli media deception. For example, on 9 December 2004 when Chris from Germany (one of your colleagues) witnessed the Israeli bulldozers uprooting olives trees from Tawfiq's land (map no.1) - a farmer from my village - he took many photos. We published these pictures and our advocate who sent the objection attached these pictures to the Israeli Supreme Court papers. He is very hopeful that we will win back this land. Israeli peace activist groups were motivated by these pictures and two hundred of them came and planted

the land again with small olive nurseries plants. Unfortunately, the settlers uprooted the olive nursery plants again within three days of the replanting.

In map number 1, B is my land which was part of 1362 dunums confiscated on 30 October 1988. After three hearings in the Israeli Military Court in Beit Eal, I came to understand how the Israelis were using the British Mandate laws and the Ottoman Empire laws to confiscate our land. According to the British Mandate law, land consisting of more than 50% rocks and stones can be confiscated because it is considered unsuitable for agriculture. This was the argument that they were using to justify keeping my land. The British Mandate law also allowed the government to confiscate land for new communities to install pipelines for water or sewage or to construct new roads. The Israeli's then said that their settlements - which are illegal under international law - were "new communities" according to this British Mandate Law.

To keep my land, my advocate postponed the case many times. During this time, I was obliged to sell my sheep and goats and my wife's jewelry to pay for 1306 bulldozer work hours, and 28,000 metres of plastic pipes for irrigation purposes. I did this to prove that my land was an agricultural success. It is perhaps funny that the Israeli's say they make the desert bloom, when it is us Palestinians who must make the trees grow out of the rock if we want to keep our land. I was lucky and won my land case in the Israeli Military Court. The decision was issued on 28 May 1996, eight years after confiscation.

According to the law of the Ottoman Empire, land could be confiscated if it is not planted or used for agricultural purposes for three years. The purpose of this law for the Ottomans was to enforce the Islamic law that 10% of the income of the land

was to be given to the poor. The Israeli's use this confiscation law to take land from those who are already poor because of the occupation. To the south of my land is my neighbour's land; 77 dunums for 7 brothers. O is two shares (22) dunums planted with 728 olive trees. A is one share (11) dunums planted with hundreds of almond trees. Those three shares escaped confiscation, but E, F, G, and H were lost because the advocate couldn't prove that it was planted in those years. The Israeli government takes aerial photographs during the year, so if it was in May after harvesting time we can't prove that it was planted, and if it was in November before ploughing we can't prove that it was planted, thus we lose many dunams of land, as the word of Palestinians who remember that it was planted does not seem to be good enough.

Friends, Israel's government announced on the 21 February 2005 that they will build 1500 houses to expand the settlement of Zufim. This settlement is built on Jayyous lands. On the 6 April 2004, the Israeli Commander of Qadummim delivered to the Mayor of Jayyous a new confiscation order to construct a new road requiring Jayyous people to go to the Falamiya gate. Falamiya is the next village to Jayyous to the north. We refused that order and as usual we sent our objection through our advocate to the Israeli Supreme Court (please note that Palestinian courts are not authorized to judge in such cases). Up until now we haven't received a decision from the Court, but the Israeli company, protected by the army, finished construction of the road. Today, as far as I know, our gate number 25 is still open and we still use it, although the officer told us that they will close it. I want to tell you that Israeli army closed this gate from 12-16 May 2005 but we arranged a sit in on both sides of the gate and we were determined to sleep at both sides of the gate and we were supported by the Ecumenical Companiers who live in Jayyous. On the

morning of 17 May the army opened the gate again, under the pressure of many organizations (local and international).

Friends, let me please explain to you what the closing of gate number 25 means. Obliging us to use Falamia gate number 24 means many more difficulties: the distance between our village and our farms through gate 25 ranges from 4 to 6 kilometres , but the distance between our village and gate 24 is 4.5km; the distance from gate 24 (Falamia) to the same line of Jayyous gate 25 is also 4 kilometres. So for my loquat farm, it is now 6 kilometres for me. If I have to go through Falamiya it will be 14 kilometres. I have to tell you the loquat trees are not moving, so why should I have to go an additional eight kilometers to get to them? If we want to go to our farthest farms through gate 24, it will range between 8-14 km. This means that farmers will lose many hours in going and coming back to the village, and those farmers who don't own tractors or cars and depend on their donkeys or their feet will stop accessing their farms altogether. This ultimately means that their farms will be neglected and the Israeli government can confiscate them according to Ottoman law. Also, we refused this new confiscation, because the Israeli bulldozers will uproot more olive and almond trees.

It is very clear to us now that they will close gate number 25, after we received map number 2, published by the Israeli army which shows clearly that if we continue using gate 25 we will pass through the houses of the proposed expansion area, and of course they will not allow us to do this.

At present, 118 farmers in Jayyous are completely forbidden to access their lands because they are denied permits to pass through any gate - usually for so-called 'security reasons'. If it is impossible to give them a permit to go to their farm, how

will it be possible to give any of us a permit to walk through their houses? This explains why they uprooted the olive trees from the land of Tawfiq, marked O: it is because they don't want to leave Palestinian land inside the expansion area. We might also question why they want to expand Zufim settlement in the first place. Zufim currently consists of 185 houses. The expansion will increase it to 1500 houses - this is the direct effect of the disengagement of the Gaza strip; we in the West Bank will pay for it!

During last August, the Israeli government confiscated thousands of dunums of land in the Jerusalem area, annexing that to the Ma'ale Adumin settlement. This one confiscation is taking more land than the total area of the Gaza strip. According to the Israeli residential ministry, Ma'ale Adumin will enlarge to one million people. The Apartheid Wall has deprived 120,000 Jerusalemites from entering Jerusalem and has also deprived 65,000 people in Al-Ram and Abu Dis and Qalandiya from entering Jerusalem, although they have Jerusalem identity cards. This means the remaining Palestinians inside East Jerusalem will be a minority. West Jerusalem has 600,000, Ma'ale Adumin will have one million, and where will this leave the remaining isolated 200,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem? It will never be the Palestinian capital as we dream, so what about the project of the independent Palestinian state? As perhaps you have heard, Professor Sofer of Haifa University has said that Israel has a demographic problem - by 2020, the Palestinians will be 60% of the population of historic Palestine. He said that if Israel builds a wall and adopts these policies then Palestinians will leave, and Jews will come from other countries to be Israeli, and they will cure Israel's demographic problem. Is the Israeli government achieving Professor Sofer's theory?

Friends, our land is not only our main source of income, it is our life, our memories, our dreams, our hopes. We feel many times great thanks for the deep meaning of Ecumenical Accompaniers who supported us by sleeping with us in our farms, especially when we felt that we were threatened and we will never forget that.

Friends, in addition to many indirect methods to confiscate our lands such as curfews, barriers, military closures, unfair competition, water meters, closure of our cities, no markets....etc, they also justify confiscating our lands according to the British mandate law or Ottoman law as I have explained and sometimes confiscation for security reasons as in the case of the Apartheid Wall.

Friends, I am 62 years old, not one of my sons has a permit, because of the occupation we have bad marketing, this means we have lost 50% of our income since the beginning of the Wall. This means I do not have enough money any more to pay for workers. So, I began from the 1st of July last year to live on the farm. This is not only because I need more hours to carry out the necessary work, but also to escape from the daily humiliation at the gate either in the morning or evening. Moreover, to feel that I am alive; I get this feeling when I am in the land. Let me please tell you a short story, maybe you can understand the relation of the farmer with his land.

On 18 July 2003, the Israeli army built Jayyous gate number 25 which we have been using up to now. On 15 September 2003, the Israeli civil governor of Qadomem sent permits for many farmers to Jayyous municipality to let them to pass through the gate, but the farmers refused to take them - they believe they have right to reach their lands without permits. On 2 October, the army closed the gate. The farmers made

small gaps in the fence, and passed through them to the farms, but without tractors or animals.

On 12 October, the army arrested 66 of the farmers with their families and drove them out to the gate where they gave them their identity cards, warning them that if any one of them came back to sleep in the farm, they would be imprisoned for one month and have to pay 2000 New Israeli Shekels. I and another 18 farmers escaped being arrested. It was guwafe season as it is now, but no trucks were allowed to come so we couldn't load any boxes of fruits or vegetables. On 16 October, the army prevented our relatives to throw food for us over the fence as they did before, (from 13 -16 October).

On 20 October, my wife called my mobile asking if we are separated or not. I advised her to marry the house which we built after 36 years of marriage, and I said I will marry the farms, but instead of laughing with me at my joke, she got nervous and put down the telephone.

On 21 October, I discovered a wild tree growing on an inclined rock; it was faded, because of thirst. As a farmer I felt I must help. I brought a bottle of water and poured it on the wild tree, but because the rock is inclined the water came out quickly, so I drilled the lid of the bottle with a nail, so the water came out drop by drop. The wild tree began to bloom. I did that daily until my wife called me on the last day of October to say that she had received my passport with a ticket to attend the European Social Forum in Paris, so I must come back home. I felt sorrow towards the wild tree, I went to it and said: sorry, because I will leave to France, sorry because I will not be able to come back to take care of you, because I have no permit. I don't want you to suffer again and to die many times daily, because of thirst. So, I cut its two branches, and when I reached

the gate the Israeli soldier asked me what I had in my hand. I felt really puzzled; why was I still carrying the two branches in my hand?

After five months, I got a permit and went with my wife to the land. After we passed the gate, we kept silent, watching everything as if we were seeing it for the first time in our lives. When we reached the shed, my wife began crying because everything was dusty and the food was damaged. I ran away to do a tour of the farm; after an hour and a half I came back to the shed to have breakfast. On my way I found my wife moving out the grass around a small orange nursery plant, and she was singing with tears (the Palestinian way). She was 10 meters away from the place of the wild tree, so I went there to see if it was still alive. I was astonished when I found many branches were growing again, I kissed it, and apologized that I had cut its two branches before. My wife heard me talking - she was worried that I had become mad, and shouted, Shareef!! Wake up!! With whom you are talking? I was lying beside the wild tree, a few drops of blood came out of my lips, because of the thorns of the tree. Then my wife, who was gazing at the rock, asked: 'how can this tree survive?' I answered: 'This is a Palestinian tree; a Palestinian can live without water, without food, if his roots are in his land'.

Friends, when the late President Arafat accompanied one of the most famous Christian leaders, Shamandrit Attala Hana to the Islamic summit at Abu Thabi and gave his speech on behalf of Palestinian freedom fighters, we were very proud of his attendance at the Islamic summit and by his impressive speech. We were also very pleased when he participated in the hunger strike beside Sheikh Ikrima Sabri and other Palestinian leaders on 1 July 2004. This showed solidarity with Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli prisons, who were on hunger strike also.

Friends, Islam is not terrorism as President Bush seems to think, and in fact, even in Palestine where there has been armed resistance, it has not always been only the Muslims who have participated. We remember that Archbishop Hileran Kubotchi was arrested in May 1974, imprisoned and later expelled after Israel discovered he was a leader in the PLO of the armed resistance of Palestine. Maybe they will start calling Christians terrorists next. Perhaps we feel that we are humiliated daily because of the occupation; an occupation which is strongly backed by the U.S.A. I think the same feeling is felt by the people of Iraq and Afghanistan. If no government dares to say no to Bush, I think that the wider community of people and churches are able to say no to the aggression of the policy of the United States and to invite the international community to raise their voice loudly against humiliation and oppression everywhere. You have enough power to do it, even though you do not have the F16's and the tanks. You have your voices. Please don't let Sharon oblige us to pay the costly bill of the disengagement of Gaza by building and expanding new settlements.

In Palestine, we hope that you will continue supporting us because when the Israeli army invades Beit Jala, Beit Sahour and Beit Lahim, their bullets do not distinguish between Muslims and Christians. And we hope that you will support the calls for sanctions against Israel and boycott Israeli products to make the occupation costly for them. So let us continue to struggle together until we have an independent Palestinian state. With peace and brotherhood and mutual respect.

Thank you for your patience, I will be very pleased to explain and to answer any questions.