



“I Will Never Be The Same”

A Report on IFPB’s First African Heritage Delegation



IFPB Delegation 38
July 16 - 29, 2011

Introduction

In July 2011 Interfaith Peace-Builders (IFPB) sent an African Heritage Delegation to Israel/Palestine. This delegation, the first of its kind to be undertaken by Interfaith Peace-Builders, included 14 African American participants who traveled to Israel/Palestine for two weeks to meet with Palestinian and Israeli grassroots activists working for justice.

The delegation grew out of long-running conversations and represents an exciting new initiative for IFPB and the growing international movement for peace with justice in Israel/Palestine. At the outset, our goals for the delegation were:

- To exchange lessons learned from Black Power, Civil Rights, anti-apartheid, anti-racist, and pro-justice, struggles in the US with those waging similar campaigns in Palestine/Israel.
- To strengthen African-American leaders with immediate, on-the-ground experience in Israel/Palestine and prepare them to leverage that experience to work for change upon return home.
- To further link African American delegation participants with work being done in other anti-war, peace and justice communities in the US.



This report summarizes the work and scope of the delegation, highlights feedback from delegation participants, gives initial impressions of the impact of the delegation, and evaluates our success in meeting these above goals.

In sum total, the African Heritage Delegation was a powerful, important, and timely initiative. In planning and sending this delegation, IFPB more than met our three goals and has strengthened vibrant new connections for future work. We have deepened ties with African American activists, especially in DC and Atlanta, but also in other parts of the US. Participants felt deeply enriched and motivated by sharing with counterparts in Israel/Palestine. And Palestinians and Israelis were very grateful for the opportunity to meet members of this delegation. We plan to build on this work with another delegation in 2012.

Finally, the timing of this delegation could not have been better. In just the past few months, we have seen two new movies linking struggles (*MLK in Palestine* and *Roadmap to Apartheid*) and a burgeoning campaign of Palestinian Freedom Rides modeled on the US experience. We have also witnessed renewed efforts by “Israel Right or Wrong” groups to reach out to and ‘educate’ African American groups.

“The African Heritage delegation was amazing. I learned so much from traveling with people who had lived under Jim Crow and seeing Palestine through their eyes.”

Throughout this report quotes from delegation participants are featured in text boxes alongside the main text. The title of the report, “I Will Never Be the Same,” comes from a participant’s written reflections during the delegation.

*Interfaith Peace-Builders
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Delegation Participants

As with all our delegations, IFPB feels strongly that diverse participants strengthen the delegation experience. This delegation was no different; all African Americans, the 14 delegation members came from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and religions. Muslims, Christians, and of no particular faith, they ranged in age from 24 to 75. And they came from different professional backgrounds; teachers, ministers, long-time organizers, students, and more.

In post delegation evaluations, many participants remarked on the added dimension of traveling with such a group. Younger members learned from the life experiences of older members and everyone benefited from traveling with others of different backgrounds.

“As one of the younger members of the delegation, I have very little personal experience with discrimination or segregation. My delegation colleagues, however, were able to share accounts of living under the “Jim Crow” South. I was really inspired by their courage. . . . the delegation provided a unique opportunity for me to learn about my own heritage, as well as the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.”

Finances

We set an early and ambitious goal of raising \$40,000 for this delegation. While we only met 60% of our goal (raising just over \$25,000), we were able to provide every attending participant some financial help. All money raised went directly to scholarship support for participants; these scholarships lessened the financial burden of the delegation and /or international travel and made the difference in making the trip possible for many delegates.

While we were able to offer important financial help for 14 participants, there were others interested in the delegation who were ultimately unable to travel because we could not offer enough financial aid.

Over 80 individual donors and two organizations offered generous financial support for this delegation. Without these individual gifts and institutional funding from the ARCA Foundation and the Way to Jerusalem Mission Group this delegation could not have happened.

The Experience: Featured Meetings and Group Time

Delegation participants had the opportunity to hear directly from Palestinians and Israelis deeply involved in work for peace with justice. Meetings with African communities and allies were scheduled, including the African Community Society, the Israeli Black Panthers, and a newly formed group of Ethiopian Jews refusing to serve in the IDF. (Unfortunately the latter meeting succumbed to a scheduling conflict this time, but we hope to meet in the future).

Beyond talking with members of African communities in Israel/Palestine, other meetings explored the relevance of an ‘Apartheid analogy’ to this conflict, examined the growth of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) initiatives, and gave delegates a wealth of experience on issues facing marginalized groups in Israel/Palestine, including African communities, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and Mizrahi Jews. Meetings also focused on the connections between nonviolent resistance movements in Palestine and Civil Rights struggles in America. Several delegation participants who had grown up in the US



“I learned more today than I have any other day of my life.”

that the IFPB group was one of the most important groups he had hosted all year. Several other IFPB partners and allies in Israel/Palestine have likewise attested to the importance of the delegation and are encouraging IFPB to send more.

In addition to meetings, the delegation also had time in the evening for inner-group discussion and processing time that afforded emotional support and an opportunity to discuss the experience. As noted in the participant quotes scattered throughout this report, participants appreciated the chance to interact with delegation members of different generations and religious backgrounds. This group time is also designed to help people begin to strategize avenues for advocacy and education work in North America after the delegation – the ultimate purpose of the IFPB delegation experience.



during Jim Crow were struck by the many similarities they discovered between that system and the Israeli system of control. During one particularly fertile meeting, Sami Awad, the Director of Holy Land Trust, said

Participant Feedback

Overall, participants felt the delegation was a deeply enriching learning experience and were grateful for it. The following chart shows delegate rankings from their post-trip evaluations; percentages show the fraction of delegates who selected each grade (very good, good, etc) for several aspects of the trip.

Trip Detail	Very Bad	Bad	Average	Good	Very Good
Overall satisfaction with IFPB				25%	75%
Overall satisfaction delegation experience			13%	13%	75%
Pre-trip communication				38%	63%
Pre-trip materials sent to you				25%	75%
Orientation experience				63%	38%
Hotel in Jerusalem			25%	50%	25%
Food			25%	63%	13%
Services provided by driver and local guide				13%	88%
Delegation leaders				13%	88%
Group interaction and support				14%	86%
Itinerary & Schedule on the delegation			13%	25%	63%
Quality of meetings on the delegation				25%	75%

In addition to being overwhelmingly satisfied with this delegation, participants also gave us good suggestions to strengthen future delegations, including new ideas for future meetings, ways to better prepare people for accommodations in family homes, refugee camps, and villages, and materials to add to our pre-trip reading packet.. Since this delegation was our first African Heritage delegation, these suggestions are especially helpful.

Impact: Post Delegation Education and Advocacy Efforts

Since returning in late July 2011 the 14 members of the African Heritage delegation have already shared the message of what they saw, heard, and learned on the delegation far and wide. To date (six months after returning), participants have played a role in over hundreds of education and advocacy efforts related to Israel/Palestine, including being featured in media stories, organizing local conferences, appealing to elected officials, and publicly speaking about their experiences. It would be impossible to list all they have done so far, but here are some highlights.

In addition to the media exposures listed to the right, delegation participants have spoken at numerous public events across the country, sharing stories from Israel/Palestine and encouraging others to work for justice in this struggle. Delegates in Washington DC organized a three-session forum on *"The Black Church and the Holy Land: What's at Stake?"* that recruited local ministers to hear from delegation participants as well as Muslim, Jewish, and Christian activists. A delegation member spoke on a panel with Angela Davis in San Francisco titled *"Palestine and the Indivisibility of Justice."* Oberlin College hosted a panel discussion with an African Heritage delegate speaking along with a member of the Youth delegation. A delegate in New England has been meeting with officials in his church to educate them on the real situation in the Holy Land.

These are just a few of the many examples of delegate educational efforts to engage religious audiences, university students, civic organizations, and others. The need for justice in Palestine, the voices of those there working for peace, and the parallels between racism and oppression here and there have all been shared with thousands of people. All of these events widen the impact of the delegation and ensure that more and more people learn about the realities in Israel/Palestine – and what they can do to work for justice.

That so much has been done in such a short time is a testament to the dedication, passion, and skill of the 14 delegation participants and the transformative, motivating nature of the IFPB delegation experience. The above highlights – and the sum total of advocacy work to date – are only a beginning. Delegation participants continue to be active and have numerous plans for future involvement on the issue.

A Sampling of Media Highlights

- Avery Blakeney and Gerald Lenoir were interviewed on the nationally-syndicated **Michael Eric Dyson Radio Show** (US).
- Gloria Brown was featured in front-page article titled "A Mission Born of Segregation" in **The Record-Courier** (Ohio).
- Keith Harvey and Oscar Harrell were featured in **The Wareham Courier** (Massachusetts).
- **KBOO Radio** interviewed Jesse Hagopian (Oregon/Washington).
- **The Electronic Intifada** published a piece by Carolyn Boyd (international/online).
- Gloria Brown's trip report was carried by **Mondoweiss** (international/online).
- The African Heritage Delegation's post delegation statement was covered by **The Electronic Intifada** (international/online).

To access these and other follow-up activities, see:
http://www.ifpb.org/del37/del37_action.html

"It was very important for me to travel with other Black people. Our collective points of departure about our experience in an openly racist state were easier to express and process in our group."

Moving Forward

In the past few months, a series of articles¹ about Zionist outreach efforts to African American communities has only further confirmed the timeliness of IFPB's effort to send a justice and rights-centered delegation.



Given the overwhelmingly positive nature of participant feedback, the already impressive impact that delegates are making in educating others, and the continued encouragement of partners and allies, IFPB intends to send a second African Heritage Delegation in 2012.

To send a successful African Heritage delegation in 2012, we will need to:

- Continue working with and supporting members of the 2011 delegation in their education and advocacy efforts.
- Attract new, and increased, financial support. Several well-qualified applicants were unable to travel in 2011 solely due to lack of money. We need to make this a more remote possibility in 2012 by raising more scholarship money.
- Incorporate feedback from this year's delegates to make the itinerary even better and improve in a few other 'areas for growth' identified by participants.
- Expand our recruiting efforts. This year's delegate pool was impressive to be sure. And we can and should continue to think creatively about reaching out to others who will enrich the delegation experience and come back to North America primed to work for justice in Israel/Palestine and link struggles.

"Comparing notes, sharing life experiences, becoming friends, looking out for one another, and sharing human emotions with fellow travelers were all integral parts of the experience."

¹ See Mondoweiss: mondoweiss.net/2011/10/the-pro-israel-lobby-courts-influential-african-americans.html and *The Jewish Daily Forward* : www.forward.com/articles/144558/#ixzz1d3xEI9h5

Multimedia & More...

In addition to this brief report on the delegation, there are number of online resources to learn more.

Delegation Statement on Israel/Palestine Situation

<http://www.ifpb.org/africanheritage/statement.html>

Reports from the Delegation, Authored by Participants

<http://www.ifpb.org/del38/report1.html>

Post-Delegation Press Conference Video

<http://www.ifpb.org/multimedia/video/africanheritage/pressconference.html>

Video Testimonial from Rev. Carolyn Boyd, Delegation Member

<http://www.ifpb.org/multimedia/video/groves.html#Boyd>



"It was important that our delegation was going to be more focused on the connection between the Palestinians and Black Americans, namely a non-violent movement that changes laws. I very much wanted to focus on that aspect of the trip. But, it superseded my expectations. I had heard about the Black Panthers, but was ecstatic to meet them."

Statement of the African Heritage Delegation on Returning

August 1, 2011

We, the members of the Interfaith Peace Builders' first African Heritage Delegation, participated in a study tour to Palestine/Israel, July 16-29, 2011.

The delegation consisted of seven men and seven women from 25 to 73 years of age who came from different parts of the U.S. — the West Coast, the East Coast, New England, the Midwest and the South. The group included teachers, professors, college administrators, human rights activists, and ministers and lay leaders from both Christian and Islamic faith traditions. Our primary mission was to listen and to learn about the impact of the Israeli Occupation upon the lives and livelihood of Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel as well as those who have been dispersed throughout the world.

Many of us have worked in support of civil and human rights in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the anti-apartheid movement, the Haiti solidarity movement, and anti-war movements against U.S. wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. For 11 of us, the tour was our first trip to Palestine/Israel.

Because of our experience of fighting racism and exploitation in the United States, we are united in our support for civil and human rights of all peoples of the world. Before going on the delegation, we had an intellectual understanding of the impact of the Israeli Occupation on Palestinian people but we wanted to get a first-hand account from members of Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, faith-based groups, civil society and grassroots organizations.

Based on our observations and discussions with Palestinians and Israelis, we have come to the following conclusions:

- 1) The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of the Gaza Strip are in direct violation of international laws and several United Nations Resolutions;
- 2) The Occupation has led to the physical, psychological and spiritual oppression of Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel, as well as the forced expulsion of millions of Palestinians from their homes, farms, businesses and their homeland;
- 3) In addition to the illegal occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government, many Israeli businesses and wide swaths of Israeli society discriminate against Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and against Mizrahi Jews (Jews of Arab descent) who are citizens of Israel;
- 4) The Israeli Occupation and the suppression of Palestinian rights conform to the United Nations definition of Apartheid.

As a result of our findings and conclusions, we adopted the following resolutions:

- 1) We call on African Americans and all people of good will to support an end to the Occupation, including the removal of all Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the dismantling of the apartheid wall; the end to the military and economic blockade of the Gaza Strip; the granting of full equality to all Palestinian citizens and Mizrahi Jewish citizens of Israel; and the recognition and realization of the right of return for Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians.
- 2) We call for the humane treatment of Palestinian children and adults in the custody of the Israeli Defense Forces and Israeli Police; the release of all political prisoners; and an end to indefinite detentions without trial.
- 3) We call for the United States government to cease its military aid of \$3 billion of our tax dollars annually to Israel, which, in the name of security, is used to further oppress, harass, maim and kill Palestinians.
- 4) We endorse the international campaign calling for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel in support of Palestinian freedom, justice and equality.
- 5) We call on U.S. citizens to join an Interfaith Peace Builders delegation and travel to Palestine/Israel to learn about the impact of the Occupation firsthand.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. told us, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." We believe in the indivisibility of our human rights and those of Palestinians and all oppressed peoples. We will not rest until all of humanity is free.

African Heritage Delegation Members:

Queen Adams - Chattahoochee Hills, Georgia
Avery Blakeney - Washington, DC
Carolyn L. Boyd - Alexandria, Virginia
Gloria Brown - Streetsboro, Ohio
Jesse Hagopian - Seattle, Washington
Oscar Harrell - Sudbury, Massachusetts
Keith Harvey - Wareham, Massachusetts
Trina Jackson - Decatur, Georgia
Gerald Lenoir - Berkeley, California
Michael Nettles - College Park, Maryland
Sterling Pack - Marriottsville, Maryland
Mark Pollard - Atlanta, Georgia
Raheemah Raheem - Tulsa, Oklahoma
Paula Watts - Fort Washington, Maryland