

INTERFAITH PEACE-BUILDERS

Autumn 2007 Newsletter

*“Opening eyes, hearts,
and possibilities. . .”*

THREE FAMILIES

Mark Braverman, co-leader of the most recent IFPB Delegation, reflects on the journey and one day in Bethlehem

Returning from my second trip with Interfaith Peace-Builders within the past 13 months, I am again struck by the power of meeting the people of Israel/Palestine. I watched our delegation register the impact of witnessing a military occupation. We saw the humiliation and economic impact on the Palestinians – innocent working people and schoolchildren caught up in the unending conflict. We saw the Israeli kids – for kids they are – doing their mandatory military duty on the 500+ checkpoints where they treat other human beings – their neighbors – as subhuman. As Americans, with our own current baggage, it affected us deeply and changed us. These are stories that need to be told: the courage of Palestinian farmers and shopkeepers raising their children to believe in peace and nonviolence, the Israeli activists struggling to keep their culture whole and healthy in spite of the continuing militarization of their society.

One day in particular stands out for me. It is the story of 3 Bethlehem families.

Daher’s Vineyard. The Nassar’s are a Palestinian family living on a 25-acre hilltop south of Bethlehem. The grandchildren and great grandchildren of Bishara Nassar, who bought this land in 1924, are at home in this beautiful, breeze-blessed spot overlooking terraced valleys and minaret-crowned villages. On a clear day the Mediterranean gleams in the distant west. But the hills surrounding the farm are filled with Jewish settlements. The family has already spent over \$75,000 in legal fees and surveys to establish their right to the land. Israelis have offered millions, but the family remains steadfast. Daoud Nassar told us: “We are not allowed to give up. This land is our mother. Our mother is not for sale.”

The family is not waiting for peace to come, but actively pursuing it. They are prohibited from building yet they erect tents, use their caves to hold classes for children of the nearby villages and refugee camps, and use existing buildings for cooking and housing international volunteers. They are allowed no electricity or water. So they build cisterns and run a generator. Even in the face of the encroachment of the Jewish settlements and overt harassment, this family is eager to share this valley and these hills with their new Jewish neighbors. Something very important is happening here. We felt it, we carried it with us as we bid them goodbye.

A family threatened. We left the farm and traveled to Beit Jala, a suburb of Bethlehem, home of my good Palestinian friend Rosa. Rosa’s father, George, built his dream house and proudly raised his large family. But some of his children have

“We are not allowed to give up. This land is our mother. Our mother is not for sale.”

Daoud Nassar speaks to delegates on his family’s land south of Bethlehem. In the background is one of four illegal Israeli settlements that surround the property.



had to study abroad, frustrated by the restrictions in movement that limited their choices. One daughter lives with her husband and three children in Dubai – that’s where the work is. “How is life for your parents these days?” I asked Rosa. Her father is thinking of emigrating, she told me. There is no future for him here. Meaning: this place no longer can give his children a future. So the occupation steals the future from the children, and the children from the parents. Rosa too has had to disrupt her studies in business management because she can no longer manage the frustrating battle with the checkpoints to get to university. She, too, looks for opportunities abroad. A strong, loving, talented family faces uprooting and fragmentation.

Grief and hope. Suheir and Naji Owdah live in the Deheisheh refugee camp next to Bethlehem. Naji, from a village that now sits in ruins in modern Israel, has been imprisoned multiple times for his political activism to secure rights for dispossessed Palestinians. Suheir works for women’s rights. Their home is a vibrant center for the work of local and international peace activists. This extraordinary couple shares the dream of return, the pain of loss, and the power of love. Suheir tearfully described failing to recognize Naji after a beating he had received in prison. Naji describes how he must answer his son who asks, “Daddy, why did you let them beat you?” Together, Naji and Suheir are one heart. They stand together to maintain their dignity and their hope for a future for their family and their people.

After meeting these three families, it was clear to us that the Israeli government is not just taking land and destroying an economy. It is stealing the future. Do Americans, exposed only to our commoditized media, know these families? Of course not. And the overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews do not know them either. These families must become our families, these stories our stories. Without this knowledge, we will not understand Palestine and Israel today and we are sorely handicapped in our ability to act for peace and justice. We must meet and join in solidarity with these Israelis and Palestinians who are working for peace and pursuing nonviolent protest and direct action to secure their rights and their future.

Mark Braverman was the co-leader, with Meera Shah, of the July 2007 Interfaith Peace-Builders Delegation, the 24th to visit Palestine/Israel since 2001. He is a clinical psychologist and organizational consultant specializing in psychological trauma, crisis intervention and conflict resolution. Mark has deep family ties in Israel, translates modern Hebrew protest poetry, studies history and Liberation Theology, and is deeply committed to an interfaith approach to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More of his work is available on his website: www.jewishconscience.org.

NEW IFPB RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Take a minute today to visit www.ifpbdel.org/resources

The IFPB website now features a new page including a broad range of RESOURCES for your work and activism.

Interfaith Peace-Builders encourages all our delegates, friends, and supporters to be active participants in our work of building a more just and fair approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. **IFPB empowers citizens to be advocates for a constructive change in public discourse and foreign policy.**

We are taking the next step in this process by providing essential resources for your activism. On our new page you will find guides for taking action on the media, through speaking events, and with your elected representatives. You will find links to fact-sheets and additional resources compiled by our partner organizations and others. And you will find links to other organizations that can help inform and guide your activism.

We hope you find the resources offered enlightening and helpful!

www.ifpbdel.org/resources

IS IT TIME TO GO?

Have you or a friend been thinking about joining an IFPB Delegation?

Now is the time to Act!

Join an **Interfaith Peace-Builders Delegation to Israel/Palestine in 2008** and find out what is really going on beyond the political posturing and media black-out. No other delegation program offers an experience as rich and diverse as IFPB. You will be an eyewitness to the conflict - and your understanding of the issues will be enriched and transformed.



IFPB delegations provide an excellent opportunity to meet with 'ordinary' Israelis and Palestinians, and people and organizations working for peace and justice. As a delegate you will confront and analyze the US role in the conflict and discover new ways to translate your experience to others when you return home. The experience will empower your work back in the United States.

Highlights of a Delegation:

- *Meet a wide range of Israelis and Palestinians from across the cultural, religious, and political spectrum*
- *Meet with Israeli and Palestinian peace and human rights activists and learn from their struggles*
- *Learn from Palestinians and Israelis about their nonviolent resistance to the occupation*
- *Stay in Palestinian and/or Israeli homes for 1 – 3 nights during the trip*
- *Visit selected religious and cultural sites*
- *Examine the US role in the conflict*
- *Get professional support and resources from IFPB staff for your continued activism and engagement on your return*

Delegation Costs:

\$1950 includes: 15 days, hotel and home stay accommodations, breakfasts and dinners, local transportation, guides, speaker/event fees, basic tips and gratuities. It does not include domestic and international airfares.

Apply Today!

Find more information and download an application or flyer for the 2008 delegations at:

www.ifpbdel.org

Upcoming Delegations in 2008:

IFPB is proud to be working with two experienced organizations on our 2008 delegations:

March 29 - April 12

Interfaith Peace-Builders is currently developing plans for a co-sponsored delegation with the **National Peace Foundation**. The National Peace Foundation was founded in 1982 and has developed people to people exchanges and dialogue projects in locations around the world. The collaboration between IFPB and NPF promises to open new dimensions to our work in the Middle East and North America.

May 24 - June 7

Interfaith Peace-Builders and the **American Friends Service Committee** will collaborate on our fourth delegation in May - June 2008. AFSC has brought more than 50 years of experience in Israel/Palestine to our partnership. Previous IFPB/AFSC delegations have received rave reviews from participants.

July - August (exact dates pending)

The summer delegation is often one of the most popular so contact us early if you are interested!

October - November (exact dates pending)

The fall delegation focuses on the Palestinian olive harvest. Delegates have the opportunity to join Palestinian farmers in harvesting olives and learn about the economic and cultural significance of the fruit.

WE'RE GROWING!

Your Continued Support Makes it Possible

More than a year after IFPB began our work as an independent organization, we are moving forward in new and exciting ways. We are exploring new partnerships, delving into new forms of outreach and education and building our staff in ways that compliment our existing work and programs.

Developing New Relationships and Strengthening Existing Partnerships

Interfaith Peace-Builders is pleased to be working closely with the **National Peace Foundation** in preparation for our 26th Delegation in March 2008. The National Peace Foundation brings decades of work in citizen diplomacy and other programming to the table in what promises to be a long and fruitful partnership. The relationship is one of several we are developing and will continue to propel us in exciting new directions. Meanwhile, existing partnerships with the **Fellowship of Reconciliation** and the **American Friends Service Committee** remain strong. FOR and AFSC continue to support our work and collaborate on important projects.

IFPB Plans Visit and Events in Boston

IFPB Co-Director Joe Groves will visit Boston this fall on a regional speaking and outreach tour. The purpose of the trip is to meet with former IFPB delegates in order to support their work while making connections with potential future delegates and possible partner organizations. Joe will be speaking publicly on several occasions and the dates will be listed on our website and distributed via e-mail. Contact us if you would like to receive updates or if you can help host Joe in the Boston area.

IFPB Announces New Staff Position - Builds Capacity to Support Delegate Activism

We are please to announce that we have expanded our staff by creating the position of Assistant Director. The new Assistant Director, **Jacob Pace**, joined our team in July and has already contributed greatly to our efforts. Jake previously worked as the Program Coordinator for *Partners for Peace* and has spent more than a year living and working in Israel/Palestine. He was also an IFPB delegate in August 2003. Jake's position was created in part to provide further support for delegates' activism upon return to the US. He has been working to line up media and support speaking events and other efforts. We are excited to welcome Jake aboard!

Essential New Resources at ifpbdel.org

IFPB's new resources page is one of the most immediate affects of our expanded capacity. Visit the new page at www.ifpbdel.org/resources

WE NEED YOUR HELP

DONATE NOW to support our work for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine!

The work of Interfaith Peace-Builders depends on the support of our friends and colleagues. **The majority of our funding comes from small donations by individuals like you.**

Since 2001, IFPB has brought more than 300 people to witness the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while providing resources for education and activism here in North America. Our delegations are essential pieces to building a strong and diverse movement here in the US for an end to the Israeli occupation and a more peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians. As we expand our efforts, we find ourselves more in need than ever.

Our continued success depends on your donation.

Please give generously today!

	Interfaith Peace-Builders 1326 9 th Street NW, Washington, DC 20001 Phone: 202-244-0821 Fax: 202-232-0143 office@ifpbdel.org www.ifpbdel.org
--	--