

Letter from an Israeli Jail

Abdullah Abu Rahmeh, a leader of the Bil'in village Popular Committee Against the Wall and Settlements was abducted from his home on December 10, 2009 at 2:00 AM. Since that night, he has been held by Israeli authorities in Ofer Military Prison. A prisoner of conscience and one of several prominent Palestinian nonviolent leaders recently arrested, Abdullah penned the following letter, conveyed from his prison cell by his lawyers.

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It has been two months now since I was handcuffed, blindfolded and taken from my home. Today news has reached *Ofer Military Prison* that the apartheid wall on Bil'in's land will finally be moved and construction has begun on the new route. This will return half of the land that was stolen from our village. For those of us in *Ofer*, imprisoned for our protest against the wall, this victory makes the suffering of being here easier to bear. After actively resisting the theft of our land by the Israeli apartheid wall and settlements every week for five years now, we long to be standing alongside our brothers and sisters to mark this victory and the fifth anniversary of our struggle.

Ofer is an Israeli military base inside the occupied territories that serves as a prison and military court. The prison is a collection of tents enclosed by razor wire and an electrical fence, each unit containing four tents, 22 prisoners per tent. Now, in winter, wind and rain comes in through cracks in the tent and we don't have sufficient blankets, clothes, and other basic necessities.

Food is a critical issue here in *Ofer*; there's not enough. We survive by buying ingredients from the prison canteen that we prepare in our tent. We have one small hot plate, and this is also our only source of warmth. Those whose families can put money in an account for us to buy food, do so, but many cannot afford to. The positive aspect to this is that I have learned how to cook! Tonight I made falafel and sweets to celebrate the news about our victory. I cannot wait to get home and cook for my wife and children!

From the confines of my imprisonment it becomes so clear that our struggle is far bigger than justice for only Bil'in or even Palestine. We are engaged in an international fight against oppression.

unbearable not being able to see the rate at which time passes. Receiving it, I felt so overjoyed, like a child getting his first watch. I can barely imagine what it will be like to have a pair of proper shoes again.

Because of our imprisonment, the military considers our families to be a security threat. It is very hard for our wives, children and extended family to visit. My friend Adeb Abu Rahmah, also a political prisoner from Bil'in, cannot receive visits from his wife and one of his daughters. Even his mother, a woman in her eighties who is currently in bad health, is considered a security threat! He is afraid that he will not see her before she dies.



Abdallah Abu Rahmah (right) with Ela Bhatt, Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter, Fernando H Cardoso, Mary Robinson and Gro Brundtland of the Elders during their visit to Bil'in, at the grave of Bassem Abu Rahmah who was killed by Israeli soldiers during a peaceful protest in Bil'in. (Photo: Haim Zac)

I was arrested in my slippers, and to this day my family has been unable to get permission to supply me with a pair of shoes. I was finally given my watch after repeated requests. For me this is an essential way to keep oriented; it was

I am a teacher and before my arrest I taught at a private school in Birzeit and also owned a chicken farm. My family had to sell the farm at a loss after I was arrested. I don't know if I will have my position at the school when I am released. Adeen 's family of nine is left without their sole provider, as are many other families. Not being able to care for our loved ones who need us is the hardest part of being here.

It is the support that I receive from my family and friends that help me go on. I am grateful to the Palestinian leaders who have contacted my family, the diplomats from the European Union and to the Israeli activists who have expressed their support by attending my hearings. The relationship we have built together with Israeli activists has gone beyond the definition of colleague or friend; we are brothers and sisters in this struggle. You are an unrelenting source of inspiration and solidarity. You have stood with us during demonstrations and court hearings, and during our happiest and most painful occasions. Being in prison has shown me how many true friends I have, I am so grateful to all of you.

From the confines of my imprisonment it becomes so clear that our struggle is far bigger than justice for only Bil'in or even Palestine. We are engaged in an international fight against oppression. I know this to be true when I remember all of you from around the world who have joined the movement to stop the wall and settlements. Ordinary people enraged by the occupation have made our struggle their own, and joined us in solidarity. We will surely join together to struggle for justice in other places when Palestine is finally free.

Missing the five-year anniversary of our struggle in Bil'in will be like missing the birthday of one of my children. Lately I think a lot about my friend Bassem whose life was taken during a nonviolent demonstration last year and how much I miss him. Despite the pain of this loss, and the yearning I feel to be with my family and friends at home, I think that if this is the price we must pay for our freedom, then it is worth it, and we would be willing to pay much more.

Yours,

Abdallah Abu Rahmah

From the Ofer Military Detention Camp

*For more information and to take
action for Abdullah's release, visit:*

www.popularstruggle.org/freeabdallah

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS TARGETED! CHANCES TO MEET AND SUPPORT THEIR WORK IN 2010

Increasingly, Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders, activists, and nonviolent leaders are being investigated, harassed, jailed, and killed. Nonviolent leaders have always challenged the status quo and envisioned a better future. Interfaith Peace-Builders delegations take you to the offices, living rooms and olive groves of these leaders, so that *you* hear the story from their own mouths and understand the passion and sacrifice they bring to each day of their lives. **Now, when leaders and activists are most threatened, it is a vital time to support their work by visiting the West Bank and Israel on one of our upcoming delegations:**



MAY 23 – JUNE 5, 2010: Voices of the Peacemakers: From Roots to Reconciliation

Led by Anna Baltzer and Cathy Sultan and co-sponsored with the National Peace Foundation

This delegation will explore Palestinian and Israeli efforts to achieve peace and a resolution to their conflict based on justice. The delegation will focus on learning about the current challenges facing nonviolent activists resisting occupation. **DEADLINE NOW: CONTACT US ASAP IF INTERESTED!**

JULY 24 – AUGUST 6, 2010: Tomorrow's Leaders: Youth Realities and Peacebuilding Initiatives

Led by Jacob Pace and Miryam Rashid and co-sponsored with the American Friends Service Committee – Chicago

Two thirds of the Palestinian population and one third of the Israeli population are under the age of 25. This delegation will explore issues relevant to young people in Palestine/Israel, including efforts to educate and empower future generations working towards a just resolution to the conflict.



OCTOBER 31 – NOVEMBER 13, 2010: Trees of Peace: Olive Harvest Delegation

Led by Scott Kennedy and co-sponsored with the Resource Center for Nonviolence (co-leader TBA)

This delegation will provide an opportunity to participate in the Palestinian olive harvest season, stay overnight with Palestinian farmers and celebrate an enduring cultural tradition. As with other delegations, you will also meet additional Israelis and Palestinians working for peace and justice.

For more information and an application visit

WWW.IFPB.ORG/DELEGATIONS/UPCOMING.HTML

Another Forward Step for the Movement

The second **Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby Day** organized by **Interfaith Peace-Builders** and the **US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation** concluded on March 8, 2010. The event, as successful as the first, again underlined the need for sustained action on US policy. IFPB's, Jacob Pace reports:

The group from California which I joined for the second Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby Day was a diverse one. Two Jewish women, both grand-daughters of holocaust survivors, an African-American veteran of the Anti-Apartheid movement, a young Palestinian-American born in the West Bank, and a young indigenous American woman all sat at the table when an aide to a congresswoman from California looked at me and said, "your organization is one of the places we look for advice on this issue."

To say that I felt we had arrived would overstate our influence. But I understood in that moment that our work can have an effect on the policy debate in this country. That California office may be one of the most progressive in Congress, but it was no accident that the aide (who had booked the meeting for 15 minutes) sat with us for three quarters of an hour. Even representatives whose total support for Israel is automatic, received participants of the Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby Day with less resistance than expected.

Those of us who attended the first Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby Day last February noticed the difference. **The winds of change which have been blowing strongly throughout our grassroots movement have finally begun to sway the upper branches of our political power structure.** Our work is finally paying off!



Participants from Virginia meet with aides to Senators Webb and Warner during the Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby Day (photo: Naeem Baig)

Our experience with the California congresswoman's office was unique. Most people did not find their asks were considered as seriously. Unfortunately, US policy in the region is still wedded to the arms trade and the maintenance of Israeli interests. But more than anything, the Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby Day underscored the importance of ordinary people engaging their representatives on these issues in ways that are strategic and sustained.

The **US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation** and **Interfaith Peace-Builders** suggest **five ways to follow-up from this important event.** It starts with each of us taking responsibility for working in our own communities and ends with all of us moving our movement one step closer to victory!



Keynote panel on US policy in Obama's first year, from left to right: Rebecca Vilkomerson, Jewish Voice for Peace; Noura Erakat, Palestinian attorney; Zahir Janmohammed, formerly of Amnesty International; and moderator Gerald Lenoir of IFPB's Board of Directors (photo: Amy Joseph).

Our Training Day which preceded the Lobby Day laid the foundation to make our congressional visits a success. The approximately 150 people in attendance from nearly 30 states brought the same energy and commitment that characterized last year's event. Students, retired people, seasoned activists and beginners alike gathered together to learn new skills, hone old ones, update their knowledge of the conflict, and share their commitment to a future of peace with justice in Israel/Palestine.

Throughout the day, two-hour workshops consistently went over time as people stayed engaged and active. The following day, participants held nearly 60 meetings with congressional offices, calling for conditions on military aid to Israel, an end to the blockade of Gaza, and investigations into illegal weapons use and Israeli settlement funding.

5 Ways to Follow-up from the Grassroots Advocacy Training & Lobby Day:

www.ifpb.org/grassroots

Building Circles of Support

Join IFPB's ambitious new effort

As occupation authorities step up the repression of nonviolent activists in Palestine/Israel, we are called to action. **But before we act, we must also ask ourselves how can we be most effective and in what way can our limited resources best be spent?**

In an effort to address this question and others, Interfaith Peace-Builders has recently launched a new initiative based on building **expanded circles of support** and a national network of activists based in regional delegate circles.

What does this initiative mean to you? It is an invitation to get active in new ways, to understand the nature of joint struggle, and to work together to advance the crucial voices of nonviolent leaders in Israel/Palestine.

We believe that only together can we affect real change and only by acting through expanded circles of support can Interfaith Peace-Builders play the important role which many in Israel/Palestine ask of us. That is why our recent Grassroots Advocacy Training and Lobby day was endorsed by 14 national organizations including the *Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, CODEPINK; Women for Peace, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Holy Land Trust, the Islamic Circle of North America, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions – USA, Jewish Voice for Peace, and the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation* whose 325 member groups nationwide make it the largest and most diverse coalition working on this issue in North America.

Many Palestinians and Israelis know that change must come soon. IFPB is committed to amplifying their voices and supporting their work. To do so, we need your support now more than ever.

Please donate to Interfaith Peace-Builders. Every little bit helps us in our efforts to spread a message of peace with justice and nothing can better support the work of Israeli and Palestinian peace-builders as they struggle every day to build a future free of war and occupation.



The nature of joint struggle. IFPB Delegate Tammy Bang-Luu holds up a sign she created for a nonviolent protest in the Palestinian village of Bil'in in May 2008. (photo: Nancy Hernandez)



JOIN IFPB's *HOUR-A-MONTH* PROJECT

Donate an hour of your salary each month
for a nonviolent future in Israel/Palestine!



IFPB's *Hour-a-Month Project* allows you to become an active partner in our unique work by *donating just an hour of your salary each month*. Almost everyone can participate! No matter what your income, you can make a lasting contribution to a nonviolent movement for peace and justice by supporting Interfaith Peace-Builders!

WWW.IFPB.ORG/DONATION

*Click on the link for Hour-a-Month Program
or check the box marked "Make my donation monthly" on the enclosed envelope*