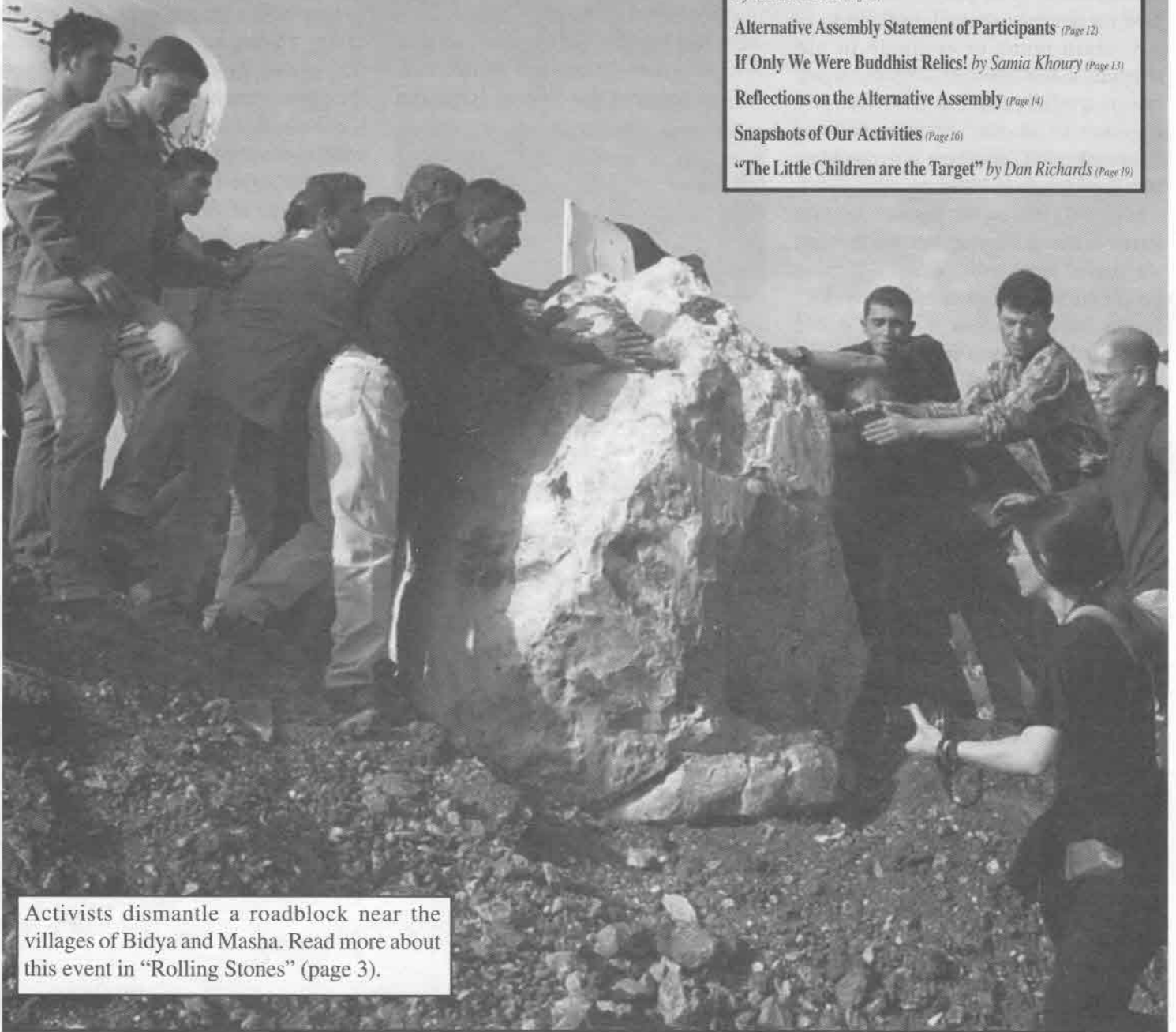


# CORNER STONE

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## WHO WILL ROLL AWAY THE STONE?



Activists dismantle a roadblock near the villages of Bidya and Masha. Read more about this event in "Rolling Stones" (page 3).

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## Who Will Roll Away the Stone? (Mark 16:3) by Naim Ateek

*This sermon was presented during the concluding worship service of the Alternative Assembly.*

In the Name of the One God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

We have had a rich four days, full of various experiences. We witnessed the sad and tragic situation as well as some signs of hope and encouragement. Tonight we bring all those experiences, the good and the bad, and lay them on the altar of God.

We lift them up in prayer, and we ask God for renewed strength and energy as we return home to continue in our struggle, so that through all the nonviolent means available to us, we will work together to shatter the structures of domination and contribute to the building of a just society in Palestine.

In our opening worship last Wednesday, we started with Jesus' words: "If these people are silent, the stones will cry out." In our travels we saw how the stones have cried out against the occupation and oppression. The small stones have been the Palestinians' sign of protest. The cry of the stones is for people of conscience to wake up and respond. They are meant to open people's eyes to see the extent and depth of the injustice. Through the stones, the Palestinians have been sending a simple and clear message: "We are choking. We are dying. Lift the Israeli oppression from us. We are tired. We are exhausted. Lift the occupation. People of the world, hear our cry for freedom. Remove Israel's apartheid. Take away its oppressive domination."

Indeed, the stones have cried out in Palestine. The injustice has been so stark and severe that many of our people have been suppressed into silence, but then the stones started shouting out. Consequently, hundreds of people have been killed and thousands injured. The siege of Palestinian towns intensified, checkpoints and closures multiplied, the economic situation

worsened. Three million Palestinians are practically living in a big prison and literally choking. Yet the occupation seems to be more entrenched. We know that the cry

***We are tired. We are exhausted. Lift the occupation. People of the world, hear our cry for freedom.***

of the stones will not achieve the desired results. We realize that these small stones the young Palestinians throw are not able to remove the big stone that obstructs the way to freedom and liberty. Israel has



Naim Ateek tries (and eventually succeeds in) convincing an Israeli soldier to allow the Alternative Assembly participants to pass through a checkpoint outside Ramallah.

placed a large boulder, a big stone that has metaphorically shut off the Palestinians in a tomb. It is similar to the stone placed on the entrance of Jesus' tomb, which Mark the evangelist describes as being "very large." This boulder has shut in the Palestinians within and built structures of domination over them to keep them in. We have a name for this boulder. It is the OCCUPATION. Unless this boulder of OCCUPATION is removed, there will be no justice and no freedom.

People of power around us might think that this assembly will not amount to anything more than the assembly of those three women who bought some ointment

and went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. "Their work will not threaten anyone," certainly not the principalities and powers. And so the powers that have been watching us these last few days may say, "These are a bunch of Christians who have come to pay their condolences to the Palestinians and offer them words of comfort and sympathy. They are no threat." I say they are in for a surprise. These are the Living Stones that are crying out. We, the Living Stones, have come to Jerusalem, this city of the resurrection, to witness the dawn of the resurrection morning for the Palestinians. We have come to witness the power of God that raises the dead. We have come to witness the end of the reign of death. We have come to witness the end of the night of darkness and the beginning of the light of day. We have come to witness that the same God who caused the ending of apartheid in South Africa will cause the ending of the Israeli occupation here in Palestine. We have come to proclaim that Christ is risen and so will justice be for the Palestinians. Christ is risen and so will freedom be for the Palestinians. Christ is risen and so will peace and reconciliation be for all the people of the Holy Land, Palestinians and Israelis, Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

Israel thinks that through its military power, it can pronounce the final word for Palestinian destiny. So did the Romans and the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They thought that they could kill, bury, and place the big stone and no one could remove it. They thought that their invincible army could guard the tomb and no one could come near. We Christians have a different experience in this city. We know that the final word does not belong to the powers. It belongs to God. We know that when the powers thought

*(continued on page 18, SERMON)*



### Rolling Stones by Bob Holmes

Perched atop the earthen roadblock, which for six months has isolated the Palestinian villages of Bidya and Masha in the Nablus District, was a huge stone almost two meters in diameter. On Wednesday, April 18, villagers approaching the barricade were met by friends coming from the other side. Together they dug and scraped to dismantle this major barrier to normal life and travel. It took an hour to dig away the earth from under the stone so that it could be moved.

The four Israeli soldiers guarding their checkpoint were powerless faced with two hundred de-constructors. It was another hour before enough soldiers and police could be assembled to reassert the domination of the occupation. The intrepid

station in the nearby Israeli settlement of Ariel. In solidarity, they accepted release only if all were to be released unconditionally. After several hours all were so released. Rejoining their companions, they learned that a seventy-two-year-old Israeli woman had been taken to hospital with injuries from a grenade and two other de-constructors had slight wounds when their car was hit with automatic gunfire from the Israeli settlement of Brukhim.

*A perfect symbol of liberation ... wrought by women and men, old and young, working together, by Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals resisting together, by Muslim, Jew and Christian peacemaking together.*

One great heave by twenty straining bodies, and the stone came rolling down! A perfect symbol of liberation from the crushing siege suffocating all Palestinian villages and towns in the Occupied Territories of Palestine--liberation wrought by women and men, old and young, working together, by Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals resisting together, by Muslim, Jew and Christian peacemaking together.

Women in Black formed a line protecting the workers, but, in the end, the soldiers pushed past them and fifteen diggers were arrested--two Palestinians, six Israelis and seven Internationals (including CPTers Greg Rollins and Bob Holmes). Those not arrested were dispersed with tear gas and percussion grenades (including CPTers Anne Montgomery and Rick Polhamous). The arrested were taken to the police

As Christian Peacemakers our Lenten prayer focus has been, "Who will roll away the stone?" This day we saw the stone move as grassroots Palestinian and Israeli organizations, with International support, resisted nonviolently together. It has only just begun.

*Fr. Bob Holmes is a member of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Hebron.*



*They said to each other,  
"Who will roll away the stone?"  
(Adapted from Mark 16:2-3)*

From the despair of demolished hopes  
...Who will roll away the stone?  
From the powerlessness of land confiscation  
...Who will roll away the stone?  
From the imprisonment of 24 hour curfew  
...Who will roll away the stone?  
From the fear of violence on the roads  
...Who will roll away the stone?  
From the suffocation of villages under siege  
...Who will roll away the stone?  
From the cruelty of school closures  
...Who will roll away the stone?  
From the tomb of the occupation  
...Who will roll away the stone?

Lenten Prayer from the  
Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT)



## Why The Palestinians Could Not Accept Barak's Proposal *by Mustafa Barghouti*

Time and again Palestinians are accused by the Israeli government of bringing the conflict of the past six months upon themselves by refusing to accept the "generous offers" made by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Camp David.

For some people, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's offer at Camp David of 94 percent of the West Bank sounded more than generous, revolutionary even, and Palestinians were castigated and called "inflexible" and "unreasonable" for refusing to go that extra step and make a compromise.

The fact that Barak offered more than any previous Israeli leader is unimportant, but if we examine what was offered and what the reality of these offers was on the ground, a clear picture begins to emerge. The offers proposed by Barak made the possibility of a viable Palestinian state an impossibility.

The first issue we have to examine is that of the generous territorial offer. It was



Israel continues construction on Har Homa settlement, which is being built on land owned by Palestinians from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Um Tuba, and Sur Baher.

said that Palestinians were offered eventual control of 95-96 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGs). However, after analysis it becomes obvious that this is far from the reality. For example, if the actual territory offered was calculated, it transpires that the Palestinians would have control of much

less than the claimed percentages. This difference arises because Israel's "total" does not include Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, the Jordan Valley or settlements in its computations.

Furthermore, the discussion about "this percent" versus "that percent" does not address the main issues for the Palestinians. Most importantly, it ignores international law and the rights conferred

*The offers proposed by Barak made the possibility of a viable Palestinian state an impossibility.*

upon the Palestinians, and effectively serves to push these legal frameworks aside. Without a commitment to these frameworks any settlement will be an Israeli dictated agreement.

The second issue overlooked in the discussion of why Palestinians rejected the Camp David proposals, can be referred to as "compromising the compromise." The 1947 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, from which Israel derives its legitimacy, provided 45 percent of historical Palestine for the Palestinian state. The demands of UN Resolution 242 for Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders means a Palestinian state would be founded on 22 percent of the area of historic Palestine. In their acceptance of Oslo, Palestinians accepted a two-state solution. This is a compromise of over half of the area that was originally assigned to them.

As Kofi Annan asked--is it acceptable by international standards to appropriate land by force? UN Resolution 242 stipulates that Israel has to withdraw from the lands it occupied, clearly indicating that no land can be illegally occupied. UN resolution 338 reaffirms this.

For the sake of peace and in hope of building a state, Palestinians are accepting this initial compromise, but any further compromise would undermine the "continuing and unqualified Palestinian right to self-determination" that the European Union, Berlin declaration of March 1999 affirmed, as well as restricting the potential for the establishment of a sovereign, viable, prosperous, contiguous and democratic state.<sup>1</sup>

The third reason the Palestinian negotiators rejected the less-than-generous offer from Barak stems from the continued illegal occupation, confiscation and expropriation of Palestinian land.

Israel has already confiscated a large portion of the West Bank for its ever-growing illegal settlement blocks. This violation of international law restricts the viability of a Palestinian state. The settlements, the system of highways and by-pass roads linking the illegal settlements to Israel proper, industrial parks, the web of closed military areas, army bases and internal checkpoints all occupy large tracts of land. Passages from one area to the other are also controlled by Israel. The West Bank and Gaza Strip have been transformed into 64 clusters of townships that imprison over three million Palestinians, a people held hostage for the sake of 450,000 illegal settlers.

The confiscation of Palestinian land has been a systematic pattern of Barak, Sharon and other Israeli leaders, in order to increase the number of Jewish citizens in the Occupied Territories. Unable to successfully transfer the native Palestinian population from these areas, Israel has restricted them to tiny enclaves through a series of measures designed to restrict Arab growth. Israel has exploited Palestinian land, water, and natural



resources and continues to hold sovereignty over them in addition to the concerted effort made to separate the Palestinian people from their land and thereby denying Palestinians a viable state.

The illegal annexation of East Jerusalem is a perfect example of Israeli policy towards Palestinians. Instead of admitting Palestinian rights to sovereignty over the 1967 areas, with Israel maintaining control over West Jerusalem, Israel has used various administrative measures including denial and removal of residency rights and house demolitions to once more transfer people from the area. As experts point out, "63.5 square kilometres--90 percent of the land annexed by Israel as 'East Jerusalem'--in fact belonged to 28 Palestinian West Bank villages, which suddenly found themselves part of an 'indivisible,' 'historic' and 'sacred' Jewish city."<sup>ii</sup> Israeli settlements cut East Jerusalem into clusters, huge areas of land have been annexed to serve the needs of settlers and settlements, and only some civil affairs are under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

Accepting any Israeli control of the Occupied Territories negatively affects the quality of the Palestinian state and would transform areas of Palestinian Authority into clusters of Bantustans, as well as legitimize and reward Israel for occupying and annexing land in violation of international law. In fact, under international law these actions can be regarded as war crimes.

The fourth and equally important reason for the rejection of the Camp David offer can be attributed to the lack of settlement of the refugee issue. Most Palestinians are realistic about the possibility of a compromise. Nonetheless, the fate of over 3.7 million Palestinian refugees registered by the United Nations and about 2 million

others unregistered is of utmost concern to Palestinians.<sup>iii</sup>

The issue at stake is the acknowledgement of the right of return, as well as Israel's culpability in the creation of the refugee problem, and the application of the United Nations Resolution 194. Paragraph 11 states: "... the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date . . . compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return."

The right of every human who has been dispossessed of land and forced to flee was not even mentioned in Camp David. They did not accept to discuss

***Israel must be ready to accept and acknowledge that it is illegally occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip and must withdraw after 34 years of a long and terrible military occupation.***

the return of refugees at the level of interim agreement--they chose instead to force a full and complete acceptance of a final solution without any right of future discussion and obliterate any right these millions of Palestinians have.

The Israeli government tried to bargain away the right of return for Palestinian refugees as well as sovereignty over Jerusalem and the Muslim Holy site of Al Aqsa mosque for an entity that is not even a feasible state. Israel wanted to achieve the termination of the conflict without tangible compromises or resolving the basic issues. Their intransigence at the negotiating table has

led to the rejection of the Camp David settlement, and now they accuse the Palestinians of not wanting peace.

Israel must be ready to accept and acknowledge that it is illegally occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip and must withdraw after 34 years of a long and terrible military occupation. Israel must accept international legitimacy and the application of international standards.

What we have witnessed in the past six months is the culmination of violations of international law and human rights. When one looks at the West Bank and Gaza Strip, even without indulging in conspiracy theories, one gets the impression that Labour and Likud were alternating to practically implement a process of Judaization through the systematic transfer of an Israeli civilian population into the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Through illegal settlement, the continuing expropriation and confiscation of Palestinian land, and Bantustanisation of a people's homeland, Israel is destroying the potential for peace, a peace that is based on international law--a compromise that Israel is unwilling to make.

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- i EUROPEAN UNION, Berlin European Council (26 March 1999) Declaration on the Middle East Peace Process.
- ii "The 94 Percent Solution - A Matrix of Control," Jeff Halper, Middle East Report 216, Fall 2000 [http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/216\\_halper.html](http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/216_halper.html)
- iii Al-Awda, The Right of Return Coalition fact sheet: <http://www.al-awda.org/factsheet.htm>



## Why The Palestinians Refused Barak's "Generous Offer" by Jeff Halper

Since the Camp David talks in the summer of 2000, the notion has taken root that Israel "generously" offered 95 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, as well as parts of East Jerusalem, only to have been answered with violence, with another Intifada. This has been used to "prove" that the Palestinians are not true "partners" for peace. Even the mainstream Israeli peace movement feels "betrayed" by the Palestinians and places the responsibility for their current suffering squarely at the Palestinian doorstep.

All this is based, however, on inaccurate information and false assumptions. Inaccurate information: the figure of 95 percent (even 96 percent) was bandied about by Clinton; Israel never offered more than 88 percent. Still, one could argue, even 88 percent sounds extremely generous. After all, no one gets 100 percent in negotiations. That leads to the false assumption: that 88 percent of the territory equals 88 percent sovereignty, or that 95 percent of the territory equals 95 percent--even 100 percent--sovereignty.

The issue of territory is important, especially territorial contiguity. But the crucial issue is one of control--not the 95 percent, but the significance of the other 5 percent (or 12 percent). It's like a prison. Looking at a blueprint you might get the impression that the prisoners actually "own" the place. After all, they have 95 percent of the area--the living areas, the exercise yard, the cafeteria, the work areas. All the prison authorities have are a measly 5 percent: the prison walls, the bars around the cells and a few control points. But that is what makes a prison, the difference between a mini-state dependent upon and controlled by Israel, and an economically viable, truly sovereign state with a coherent territory and control of its borders.

The issue, then, is how the prison is constructed. The 5-12 percent of the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem, also a major point of control) that Israel insists on retaining is diffused in a way that it constitutes a Matrix of Control. The settlements, by-pass roads and highways, border crossings, military bases and checkpoints--the walls and bars of the Occupied Territories--altogether add up to only 5-12 percent. Yet they absolutely nullify the sovereignty and viability of any Palestinian state. All this can only be appreciated, however, by looking at and understanding the reality "on the ground."

Constructing The Matrix of Control and "De-structuring" Palestine.

The Matrix of Control is a subtle construction, and it is no wonder that people following the conflict from afar cannot perceive it in the media. Although it is built on not-so-subtle policies and activities of the occupation, people invested so much hope in the "peace process" that they did not want to hear about the "other" process--the steady strengthening of Israel's grip on the Occupied Territories even as it was negotiating "peace." Let us recall what has happened "on the ground" since the Oslo Agreement was signed in September, 1993. In that time Israel has:

- \* Dismembered the West Bank into "Areas A, B and C," giving the Palestinian Authority full control of only 18 percent of the land and retaining full Israeli control over 61 percent; divided tiny Gaza into "yellow, white, blue and green areas," giving 6,000 settlers control of 40 percent of the territory and confining a million Palestinians to the rest; and completely isolating East Jerusalem;
- \* Imposed a permanent "closure" preventing masses of Palestinian workers from seeking employment in Israel and preventing Palestinians in general from entering Jerusalem. The

Palestinian workforce has been transformed from one based on agricultural and an incipient industrial and commercial economy to impoverished casual laborers dependent upon an Israeli economy from which they are now largely excluded;

- \* Expropriated thousands of dunums of farm and pasture land from its Palestinian owners for exclusive Israeli settlements and roads;
- \* Uprooted more than 120,000 olive and fruit trees--for settlement or road construction, for "security" purposes or for denying ownership rights to their Palestinian owners;
- \* Established more than 40 new settlements, including whole cities like Kiryat Sefer, Tel Zion and Giva'ot constructed some 90,000 new housing units in East Jerusalem and the settlements, and doubled its settlement population;
- \* Demolished more than 1,200 Palestinian homes, including some 500 during the last Intifada;
- \* Began construction of a massive 480 km system of highways and "by-pass" roads serving the settlements which dissecting the West Bank and Gaza into dozens of tiny islands;
- \* Exploited the natural resources of the Occupied Territories, illegally drawing for example, 25 percent of its water from the West Bank and Gaza while leaving Palestinians with chronic water shortages;
- \* Vandalized the West Bank, the Holy Land, one of the world's most sacred heritage sites, destroying its historic landscape and turning it into a disposal site for Israel's industrial and urban wastes;
- \* Virtually completed the incorporation of the West Bank into Israel proper, thereby eliminating any possibility of a viable and truly sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel, raising the danger of apartheid;

\* Implemented plans for a “unilateral separation”—another sign of apartheid—including the construction of a massive system of bunkers, walls, fences, minefields, “security crossings,” checkpoints and other fortifications.

All this is, of course, in direct violation of international law (especially the Fourth Geneva Convention) and UN resolutions. It raises serious questions about who is or is not actually a “partner” for peace. It certainly provides a context for understanding why a second Intifada has broken out.

### The Matrix of Control

The Matrix of Control, which Israel had laid over the West Bank, East Jerusalem



Beki Bateson, an Alternative Assembly participant, takes part in a Women in Black vigil in Jerusalem.

and Gaza since 1967—but increasingly since 1993—works like the Japanese game of “Go.” Instead of defeating your opponent as in chess, in “Go” you win by immobilizing the other side, by gaining control of key points of a matrix, so that every time your opponent moves, another obstacle of some kind is encountered.

In effect Israel has done the same thing to the Palestinians. The Matrix of Control

virtually paralyzes the Palestinian population without “defeating” it or even conquering much territory. It can even give the illusion of being fair and “generous,” which is what causes “confusion” when the matrix victims attempt to resist. “What are they resisting?” people ask. Israel offered them 95 percent!”

The matrix is composed of several overlapping layers. First is the actual physical control of key links and nodes that create the matrix of control—settlements and their extended “master plans,” a massive system of highways and by-pass roads, army bases, closed military areas, “nature preserves,” control of aquifers and other natural resources, internal checkpoints, control of all border crossings, areas “A,” “B,” “C,” in the West Bank, “H-1” and “H-2” in Hebron, Yellow, Green, Blue and White Areas in Gaza and much more. The second layer of the matrix is bureaucratic and “legal”—the myriad planning policies, permits and policies of enforcement that entangle the Palestinian population in a tight web of restrictions. These include political zoning of land as “agricultural” in order to freeze the natural development of towns and villages; a politically motivated system of building permits, enforced by house demolitions, designed to confine the population to its constricted enclaves, land expropriation for (solely Israeli) “public purposes;” restrictions of planting and the wholesale destruction of Palestinian crops; licensing and inspection of Palestinian businesses; closure; restrictions on movement and travel; control over water and other resources; the use of holy places as pretexts for a “security presence;” and more. The third layer of the matrix involves the use of violence to maintain control over the matrix—the military occupation itself, including imprisonment, the extensive use of collaborators to control the local

population, pressures exerted on families to sell their lands, the undemocratic, arbitrary and violent rule of the Military Commander of the West Bank and the Civil Administration, and more.

Israelis do not know any more of this system than anyone else, and what little they know they justify in terms of “security.” Palestinians, of course, are highly attuned to the presence of the matrix since they hit up against it every time they move, but they have not articulated it before world public opinion. Israel’s actions on the ground since Oslo and its virtual completion of the Matrix of Control comprise the background of the latest Intifada. The breaking point—the Intifada in September 2000, the Palestinian street’s orders to Arafat not to sign the Camp David agreements—came because Israel attempted to force the Palestinians to accept a “peace” with the Matrix of Control. Although the Palestinians claim only 22 percent of historic Palestine for their state, Israel desires to control the entire West Bank but seeks to “get rid of” its 3 million inhabitants by imposing upon them a non-viable bantustan enjoying only limited sovereignty—a kind of occupation by consent. This is unacceptable to the Palestinians, as it should be, and hence the current wave of repression, the last-ditch attempt to break Palestinian resistance, that is the only agenda of the Sharon-Peres “unity” government.

Only resistance from within Palestine and Israel (preferably effective non-violent resistance), coupled with international support, will prevent the establishment of a new apartheid state in the world.

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## Resurrection in the Land of Resurrection by Samia Costandi

The arrested gaze of the ten-year-old being carried by the young men to his final resting place made my heart leap. I am watching a French channel carrying news about the West Bank. The features resemble my own son's when he was ten, when we told him that we had to leave the war-torn Beirut and travel to Canada. When we told him that he had to leave behind his whole life, his friends, his home. When he realized that he had lost the ability to author his own story anymore. On the one hand, physical death incurred by the oppressor, on the other psychological death and great loss. Loss: the loss of life, the loss of home, the loss of hope, the loss of the ability to dream and create.

My Easter reflections have much to do with loss. The loss of a sense of belonging, the fragmentation, the shattering pain of my fellow travelers, our Palestinian people everywhere, and particularly in the West Bank, in their daily struggle to regain the freedom to breathe the air around them without being mutilated physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. There is no better metaphor than the crucifixion of Christ to capture what is happening to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine where Jesus lived and preached, the land of the prophets where spirituality took flight millennia ago. The greater loss is the loss of compassion in the land where Christ taught about compassion, where Christ died because of compassion. Christ resigned to compassion and not to oppression. Christ went into the temple and admonished strongly, with a whip, the perpetrators of evil. Christ did not die out of weakness, but out of strength. He chose to die in order to save humanity from engaging in needless wars, needless deaths. He could have kept walking into the desert and escaped the soldiers who were coming to get him. His compassion for humanity made him stay. He made a conscious

choice to take on the sins of the world and allow us to have freedom, that through his death we need not suffer anymore. Christ died because He did not want suffering to be incurred on anyone like the suffering being incurred on Palestinians today.

And the greatest hope He gave us is through His resurrection, which is all about hope. Without hope, there is chaos, there is no meaning, and there is no vision. Without hope, we would surrender to the vicious dictates of oppression and simply stop fighting. Without hope in resurrection, our struggle would be about revenge, vindication, and simply wiping out the "Other." Our fight is instead about regaining the human, civil, democratic, legal rights in an authentically human fashion. Following the example of Christ, we are not afraid to die for those rights, because we know that He promised us, all Palestinians of whatever faith, resurrection. There is no discrimination in the eyes of God, either of suffering, or of salvation.

Our fight is not only about land; land is a concept that cannot capture the mammoth struggle of our people, or any people for freedom, autonomy and liberation. As a Palestinian Canadian, I do want to re-gain the right to not only return to my homeland, but the right to carry its passport, the right to build a home there, the right to re-create those parts of my story which have been arbitrarily torn away from the book of my life. As a Palestinian, I want my people in the West Bank, in Gaza, inside Israel, and everywhere, the millions in Diaspora and who have lived in refugee camps until today--and still have the keys to their homes since 1948--to re-gain the right to author their stories, to have self-determination, to be masters of their own fates. My Palestinian brothers and sisters must regain the right to live in dignity,

integrity, with the same civil and human rights accredited to all nations of the world by international law.

Having said that, however, what needs to happen in order for that to take place? Who Will Roll Away the Stone? Who will be courageous enough to stand up and speak out from among the leaders of the Western world and say, "Nay, stop, enough, No More!" Christian fundamentalists and Zionist Christians in the West have done much damage to the Palestinians by espousing a literal interpretation of the Bible and of concepts such as the Chosen People and the Promised Land. In adhering to a literal denotation instead of metaphorical connotation of Biblical text, they have aided in the oppression of Palestinians to a great extent. They have de-humanized the Palestinians and rendered them into an "It" instead of a "Thou" as the late Israeli philosopher Martin Buber would have said.

Buber was one of the first Jews to recognize the de-humanization of Palestinians by the Zionist. Israelis and Zionists, he said, must engage in a relationship of I-Thou with the Palestinians, where our people are treated as Subjects and not Objects. Otherwise, the whole notion of religion and spirituality will die in the very place of its inception.

The key word is compassion. Compassion is the umbrella word under which all the other values will fall into place. If we operate out of compassion, then it is unlikely that we will be sectarian, cruel, and fundamentally debase and de-humanize the "Other." Who Will Roll Away the Stone in Israel and North America and have the moral courage to denounce racism against Palestinians and the terrible demolition of houses, the systemic and systematic annihilation of

(continued on page 11, RESURRECTION)

## The Last Passover by Marc H. Ellis

This week Jews all over the world celebrate Passover, the ancient festival commemorating the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The narrative of liberation is read within the context of food and fellowship. As Jews we are commanded to place ourselves in the original struggle to be free, to experience the suffering and hope of the ancient Israelites as they did, to see this ancient liberation as our own. Despite the plagues and death, the wanderings in the desert and admonishments of God, Passover is a festive holiday. Food and wine are plentiful. Family and friends come together.

How we celebrate our freedom in the past with the complexities of the present is always a challenge. Over time as Jews became free, struggles of other peoples were mentioned in the Seder meal. As a child being raised in the 1950s and 60s, at Passover we incorporated the civil rights struggle into our narrative. In the 1980s and 90s there were specific Passover narratives featuring the struggle of women, freedom movements in Central America and elsewhere. And in some Jewish homes and synagogues, Palestinians were featured as a people struggling for liberation.

There is hope in remembrance applied to the present. If we are there in Egypt demanding our freedom, the Passover story accompanies us as we demand freedom now. Freedom is interdependent, across time and community boundaries. No one is truly free if others are not also free.

Today, with Israeli gunships daily firing rockets into defenseless Palestinian towns, cities and refugee camps, it is difficult to accept the Passover narrative in its deepest implications. We as Jews are free, are "in Jerusalem," but is that freedom at the expense of others? If

Palestinians are being taught the "lesson" of opposing Israeli power and standing up for their rights and dignity, if the message from the Israeli government to the Palestinian people is surrender or die--a message not unfamiliar to Jews--do we repeat this story at the Passover table?



A Palestinian villager near Bethlehem.

Most Jews will be silent about the helicopter gunships at Passover. Since the beginning of the most recent Palestinian uprising in November, Jewish organizations have placed full-page paid statements in newspapers around the country. They trumpet Israel's desire for peace, call for Jewish unity and castigate Palestinian terrorism and the deficiencies of Palestinian leadership. These statements will continue to be published during the Passover season.

The call for Jewish unity is a caution against Jewish dissent and the dissent of others who see the Passover story as embodying their own struggle today. Should we as Jews celebrate our own liberation while being silent about or even denigrating the Palestinian struggle? Are the helicopter gunships guarding Jews in Israel and Jews around the world on these Passover nights? Or are these gunships a symbol of our own need to reconsider the road we as Jews are traveling?

War is war, and in the midst of war few rules of civility are left unbroken. But is

the expansion of Israel through settlements, land confiscations, assassination squads and the terror of exploding rockets, a war Jews want to fight, should fight or can be silent about under the guise of unity? Can we recall the ancient struggle for freedom as our own and praise the violence of Israel as justified? As our own? Or are we, while speaking of our liberation struggle, undermining its essential meaning, that we and all peoples should be free?

During these days of celebration, I will remember my first Palestinian friend, Na'yla Ayed, who was murdered in Jerusalem in 1999. A health advocate and planner who studied in the United States and was known by all as a gentle and principled person, I last saw Na'yla in Jerusalem in 1998 and spent many hours speaking to her about her life and the future of her people. I also visited the land

*Freedom is interdependent,  
across time and community  
boundaries. No one is truly free  
if others are not also free.*

her family owned in Jerusalem that Jewish settlers coveted. These settlers were willing to pay large sums of money for a small piece of land that would then forever be removed from Na'yla's family and from her people. The Ayed's refused to sell the land. A short time later, Na'yla was murdered, a single stab wound to the heart, a professional execution.

It was during Passover last year that I learned of her death and visited her mother and sisters one morning in the same home where I had previously visited with Na'yla. In the afternoon, I went to Na'yla's grave just outside of the walls of the old city. In ancient understandings of Islam, those buried there are to be among the first resurrected in the last

*(continued on page 18, PASSOVER)*

## U.S. Responsibility and the Pro-Zionist Lobby *by Justin Rhodes*

Approximately one year ago, presidential hopeful Al Gore stood before the participants at the annual Policy Conference organized by the pro-Zionist American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Gore told the audience about a bizarre meeting that had occurred several decades earlier between Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and the then-U.S. ambassador, Ogden Reid. Apparently, the ambassador walked into Ben-Gurion's office and on finding the prime minister standing on his head, decided to follow suit. What's the moral of this tale? According to Gore: "Even if the world is turned upside down, the United States and Israel will see eye to eye."

Gore's obsequious words are painfully clear today. The world has been turned upside down in the Occupied Territories, and the U.S. and Israeli governments are in complete agreement that the Palestinians are to blame, which was aptly demonstrated during a recent news conference in which President Bush proclaimed, "The signal to the Palestinians is to stop the violence. I can't make it any more clear." The fact that Israel's colonial occupation has continued for more than three decades is irrelevant to the president. Instead, he seems intent on propagating the "Palestinian equals violence" doctrine, which is vital to Israel's public relations campaign.

Of course the Bush administration's support for Israel is more than just verbal. The president will continue to push for economic and military aid to Israel, which has been estimated between \$3 and \$5.5 billion per year. I've seen countless examples of how this military aid has been used to terrorize innocent people. On one occasion, while in the Palestinian town of Beit Jala, I visited an apartment complex owned and inhabited by three brothers and their families--a total of

twenty-five people; it had been hit by three rockets, destroying a kitchen, a bathroom, and part of the building's foundation. An elderly man showed us the remains of one rocket, on which we found the following inscription: "Made in the U.S.A."

Furthermore, President Bush will steadfastly uphold the U.S. tradition of giving Israel diplomatic support; this was recently illustrated when the U.S. vetoed a UN resolution that would have allowed an unarmed international observer force into the Occupied Territories.

Currently the U.S. is using its diplomatic muscle to make sure that Zionism is not discussed during the UN's World Conference on Racism in August. However, if it is discussed, the U.S. has threatened to boycott the conference. A U.S. State Department official explained his country's reasoning to the *Toronto Globe & Mail*: "There have been two previous conferences on racism [in 1978 and 1983] and we didn't go to those

*"Even if the world is  
turned upside down, the  
United States and Israel  
will see eye to eye."*

because they were about Zionism being a form of racism and about the apartheid regime in South Africa, exclusively. They were country-specific polemic-fests, that's what they were foreseen to be and that's what they turned out to be." He then promised that the U.S. would attend if, and only if, the conference addressed racism as a "world-wide phenomenon" and not as a country-specific issue.

Let me attempt to translate what he just said:

"We boycotted the other conference because we had good relations with the Zionist regime in Israel and the apartheid regime in South Africa, and by condemning them we would have been condemning ourselves. We will attend this year's conference as long as it doesn't vilify our ally, Israel, and as long as we speak about racism in an abstract and irrelevant manner."

Essentially, Israel's 34-year occupation has nothing to fear from the current U.S. government. Israel will continue to expropriate Palestinian land, demolish Palestinians' homes, build and expand settlements and bypass roads, and isolate and suffocate the Palestinians in their reservations, I mean, cities. The U.S. will respond to these colonial policies with meaningless rhetoric or silence.

Regarding the United States' actions during this conflict, one thing is certain: its vociferous support for Israel and its indifference in the face of Palestinian suffering are a direct result of an ideological occupation that has gripped the U.S. government. This occupation is based on the internalization of Israel's arguments vis-a-vis the current conflict, and if its institutions are not challenged, then the lifeblood of the Israeli occupation of Palestine--U.S. economic, military, and diplomatic support--will continue to flow freely. The success of this ideological occupation is partly the result of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), considered one of the top five most influential lobbying organizations in the United States. As Bill Clinton once said, "AIPAC has done a magnificent job, better than anybody else lobbying in this town [Washington, D.C.] You have been stunningly effective." This effectiveness could be seen by the sheer



number of policy makers who attended its annual Policy Conference in March—103 members of the House of Representatives, 43 senators, and 15 officials (including Secretary of State Colin Powell) from the Bush administration.

AIPAC's ongoing mission (which can be found on [www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org)) is to "nurture and advance the U.S.-Israel relationship" by advocating strong U.S. "economic, military and political support" for Israel. According to Paul Findley, author of *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby*, the organization's strength is based on its ability to tap "the resources of a broad nationwide network of unpaid activists" who are prepared to rally their communities, write letters to the media, provide financial resources to AIPAC, and contact their representatives in the government. (AIPAC's website even provides the e-mail address for those who want additional information on how to develop contacts with members of Congress.) The organization uses its formidable lobbying abilities to maintain the U.S. government's unwavering support for Israel and to make life difficult for any public official who dares to challenge the status quo.

In addition, AIPAC is very active on college campuses throughout the U.S. It has a Political Leadership Development Program (PLDP) whose goal is to get college students involved in pro-Israel activity. Five regional "Field Organizers" recruit students who are then trained as activists during regional workshops and conferences and are kept updated through newsletters, e-mails, and legislative alerts. According to Findley, during the mid-1980s, AIPAC had its student activists fill out reports on faculty members and college organizations that criticized Israel. The information was used

to produce the *AIPAC College Guide: Exposing the Anti-Israel Campaign on Campus*, which gave Israel's apologists plenty of targets to harass.

Findley also reports on the student activists' use of "creative packaging" to try to silence Israel's critics. During a speech at the University of Washington, Professor Edward Said witnessed "creative packaging" firsthand: "They stood at the door of the auditorium and distributed a blue leaflet which seemed like a program but it was in fact a denunciation of me as a 'terrorist.' There were quotations from the PLO, and things that I had said were mixed in with things they claimed the PLO had said about murdering Jews." Basically, AIPAC not only tries to strengthen ties between the U.S. and Israel, but its activists also work to intimidate and defame those who are critical of Israeli policy.

Overall, AIPAC has been successful because it is well organized and, most importantly, there has never been widespread criticism of its work; it has been able to conduct its business with very little popular resistance. Nevertheless, as more Americans begin to speak out against the Israeli occupation of Palestine, they must also condemn institutions like AIPAC, whose influence is greatly responsible for the U.S. government's unconditional support for Israel. Those struggling for a just peace must expose and isolate the pro-Israel lobby by associating it with occupation, colonialism, racism, and violence. It can no longer be allowed to escape public scrutiny. For far too long it has arrogantly attacked individuals and organizations that have had the courage to criticize Israeli policy. It's time to resist.

*Justin Rhodes is a volunteer at Sabeel.*

(continued from page 8, RESURRECTION)

the youngest sector of our population? Who Will Roll Away the Stone and speak out against the torture of Palestinians in prisons, the detaining of Palestinian women and men without cause and due process of the law?

Who Will Roll Away the Stone and come in full humanity and humility to the Palestinian people and say, "We are sorry, we acknowledge, we have committed crimes against you, we have dehumanized you, we have uprooted you, we have stripped you of your dignity and your integrity, and we had no right to do that, and we have no right to continue doing that?" Who Will Roll Away the Stone and bring Israeli military and political leaders who perpetrated and continue to perpetrate massacres against Palestinians to an international tribunal in The Hague?

A few dissenting voices like Israel Shamir in Israel and B'tselem (an Israeli human rights organization) have begun to Roll Away the Stone. Will others join them? Will the Christian Churches of North America finally take a moral stand and take the blinders off their eyes as they come to visit the Holy Land and see the suffering of those indigenous inhabitants of the land? Or are their visits going to continue to be token gestures and their silence become a conspiratorial affirmation of a colonial occupation of our land?

Muslim and Christian Palestinians alike are calling for resurrection in the Land of Resurrection.

*Samia Costandi is a Palestinian Canadian academic, a lecturer, and free-lance writer residing in Montreal.*

## Statement of Participants in Sabeel's Solidarity Gathering

We Christians, Jews, and Muslims from over 20 countries have come to Sabeel's Alternative Assembly in Palestine to stand in solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters who are enduring the yoke of occupation.

Sabeel is an ecumenical Christian center for Palestinian liberation theology, which seeks to make the Gospel contextually relevant. Sabeel, which in Arabic means both "the way" and "spring of



Participants from the Alternative Assembly hold a candlelight vigil outside Jerusalem's Old City.

life-giving water," strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. In doing so, it encourages us to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth.

"We have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears..." the pattern of the pervasive control and domination by Israel, which is causing widespread suffering and reflecting the injustices faced by the Palestinian people. The Oslo "peace process" has failed.

Deepening our understanding and gaining fresh insights, we can only conclude that peace is a real possibility if, and only if, justice is achieved. Toward this end, we affirm the timely *Principles for a Just Peace in Palestine-Israel*, that is, *The Jerusalem Sabeel Document* of May 2000.

We therefore note with deep sadness that the failed "peace process" has resulted in:

- \* Entrenching a new and harsh form of occupation of Gaza and the West Bank (which includes East Jerusalem). The occupation is violence.
- \* A dramatic increase in the expansion of settlements, construction of by-pass roads and control of territory by settlers, and other "facts on the ground."
- \* Allowing, in practice, through closure and rapid settlement building in East Jerusalem, the isolation of Jerusalem from Palestinian life in Gaza and the West Bank, and her transformation into a closed city.
- \* A de facto apartheid system of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories, with the populated areas carved up into "Bantustans."

- \* Gross violations of basic human rights, intensified in recent months.
- \* A new phase of extreme Israeli violence, including use of heavy artillery against civilians, causing over 15,000 injuries in addition to over 400 deaths in only the last five months.
- \* Severe damage to the Palestinian economy while giving Israel control and domination over that economy.
- \* Further threat to the continued existence of the Christian community in Palestine by creating circumstances that encourage emigration.

The continued occupation, control, and oppression by Israel of the Palestinian people are in themselves the greatest risks to the security of the state of Israel, while justice offers the only hope for both Israelis and Palestinians. Justice undergirds a durable peace, which will offer security for all the people of the region. A new and just process must be established which returns to the principles of international law, resulting in:

- \* The immediate implementation of the IV Geneva Convention, to which Israel and most of our countries are signatories, and which applies to the West Bank and Gaza, to be upheld by international peacekeepers.
- \* Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, and 1322, which will terminate the occupation and its violence.
- \* The return and compensation of all refugees who so choose, in accordance with UN Resolution 194.

Justice also requires an acknowledgement by Israel of al-Nakba (the Catastrophe of 1948), followed by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an instrument of healing.

We pledge ourselves to identify and then challenge the structures of domination in Israel and Palestine and in our own countries, including those that supply armaments as well as financial and political aid which supports the injustice in Palestine.

We affirm our commitment to strive for the realization of a just peace, in solidarity with all who seek a just peace, based on our faith that all can be redeemed and reconciled in Christ. With Sabeel,

*We will stand for justice. We can do no other. Justice alone guarantees a peace that will lead to reconciliation and a life of security and prosperity to all the peoples of our land. By standing on the side of justice, we open ourselves to the work of peace; and working for peace makes us children of God.* (The Jerusalem Sabeel Document)

Jerusalem, February 24, 2001



## If Only We Were Buddhist Relics! by Samia Khoury

How chivalrous of the international community to rally to salvage the stones of Afghanistan, and I have no problem with that; I even signed a petition for that purpose. But what about the living stones of Palestine? Is not the Israeli occupation destroying every aspect of those living stones in this so-called "Holy Land"--holy to the three monotheistic faiths? The stones have cried out, and they had to bleed to death before anybody listened to their cries. When will the U.S. administration and the British government and their allies have the courage to persuade Israel to end this brutal and destructive occupation?

The Taliban, who destroyed the Buddhist relics in Afghanistan, are seen by the international community as a benighted people, so nobody expects anything better from them. But when the perpetrator of

destruction is the "civilized" State of Israel, which claims to be "the only democracy in the Middle East," it has to be challenged by the international community for its actions as an occupying force.

When Palestinian houses are demolished, their olive groves bulldozed, and when trenches are dug in roads to isolate Palestinian areas from each other, it is indeed not civilization or democracy. It is violence. Israel should not be allowed to justify all its actions because of its security paranoia. Causing all that destruction and inflicting so much suffering on the Palestinian people will certainly not provide Israel with the security that it continues to demand from the international community. On the contrary, it will only exacerbate the situation. The security of Israel will only be guaranteed

once it abides by United Nations' resolutions and ends its occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

Stop pampering Israel and help us get rid of this brutal, destructive occupation before it destroys the living stones of the whole region. Whoever you are and wherever you are--in the West, East, or in the Arab world--we appreciate your concern and understanding of the situation. But please take time to work with a grassroots organization that will turn into a driving force to bring about a change in the policies and actions of your governments, churches, and institutions. We appeal to you to spare us the fate of the Buddhist relics.

*Samia Khoury is treasurer of the board of Sabeel and president of Rawdat El-Zuhur, a coeducational elementary school for the lower-income community of East Jerusalem. This article was first published in The Middle East Times International Edition.*

### Voices of the Intifada

- For all those who have fallen victim to hatred and inhumanity, for those loved ones who are left behind to mourn, for the souls of those whose hearts are cold,
- For the children who are being born into this world of conflict and violence, for women and mothers who suffer needlessly,
- For all those who have been forced into unemployment, who long to return to work, for all those who struggle to support their families,
- For the soldiers who are misguided in thinking that their bullets will bring about peace, for those who feel called to conscientiously object to military orders,
- For the children who cry in their beds at night and wonder, "What have I done?", for the mothers and fathers who must try to explain the unexplainable,
- For all the children who have died before their time, for the soldiers who allow their uniform to strip them of their humanity, for the healers who are denied the opportunity to use their gifts,
- For the redemption of souls of both victim and perpetrator, for those who commit themselves to the forgiveness of sins,

**Lord, in your mercy  
Hear our prayer**

*Prayers from the opening session of Sabeel's Alternative Assembly.  
The order of worship is available in full at [www.sabeel.org/conf2001](http://www.sabeel.org/conf2001)*

## Reflections on the Alternative Assembly

*Sabeel's Alternative Assembly had a personal and powerful impact on everyone. The following reflections, prepared by Janet Davies, Elizabeth Barlow, and Robert Assaly, illustrate the diverse experiences of those who attended the assembly.*

### A Normal Life

by Janet Davies

As I held in my left hand a piece of stone from one of many demolished Palestinian houses, and in my right hand, a piece of bread (food for the journey), at the closing service of the Sabeel Alternative



Assembly participants, prevented from passing through a checkpoint outside Ramallah, wait as an Israeli soldier tries to figure out what to do. Eventually, they were allowed to enter Ramallah.

Assembly in Jerusalem, the phrase that rung in my ears then, and continues to haunt me, is simply this: "All we want is a normal life."

People from some 20-plus countries had witnessed the utter abnormality of everyday life for the Palestinian people, as we converged on checkpoints to enter Bethlehem and Ramallah (to name but two places). In challenging the young Israeli soldiers to lay down their guns, the response was: "We're only carrying out instructions."

To walk through the village of Beit Jala, where house after house had been shelled and often destroyed by Israeli tanks, semi-hidden by camouflage in the illegal settlement of Gilo.

To weep with families and see the frightened and traumatised eyes of the children and the scars on their bodies from a variety of weaponry.

To hear the story of the 10-year-old child who was prohibited from passing through a checkpoint to get to a hospital, and who subsequently died from a burst appendix.

To say nothing of the woman who on finally delivering her baby in a taxi, having been prevented countless times from passing through checkpoints to get to a hospital, was ordered to get out of the taxi--the baby still attached to her--whereupon the soldiers just laughed!

And yet...and yet..."We do not hate the Jews, we love them!" thundered Father Elias Chacour, at the assembly's opening ceremony. "What we hate is

the oppression and the injustice being done to us." A state worse than "apartheid" declared a South African delegate. What an indictment, I thought, laid upon Israel.

Against such a backdrop, I was moved to tears by the Sabeel staff's abiding faith and trust in the God of peace with justice for two nations and three faiths, that together (Christian, Muslim, Jew) can roll away the stone of oppression so that all can live a normal life.

*Janet Davies is Coordinator of Friends of Sabeel - UK.*

### The Role of the United States

by Elizabeth Barlow

In the United States, the general view is that the problem with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is either that the Palestinians did not understand what a "wonderful deal" they were offered by Barak last summer, or that problems exist because the two sides won't "compromise," despite the "best efforts" of the U.S. to bring an end to the conflict. For anyone of us who wasn't already aware of the true U.S. role in prolonging the conflict, it was certainly apparent at Sabeel's Alternative Assembly last February.

Visits were planned to communities before, during and after the assembly, and speakers at the assembly focused on what was in fact happening to Palestinian people under occupation. In Beit Sahour we saw American-built tanks, part of the annual U.S. \$6 billion plus gift to Israel every year, which hit the people of Beit Sahour and the YMCA. In Bethlehem American-built Apache attack helicopters bombed homes, killing innocent civilians. In Beit Jala, we saw American-built tanks on the hillside which had the previous night lobbed American-made ordnance into the bedrooms of children. At each home visited, children brought out the family collection of ammunition used on their home--bullets, rockets, and even an anti-tank missile. On some you could even see the labels, showing they were made in the U.S.A.

In addition to the military aid, the U.S. continues to supply substantial economic aid--which has been used to support the building of the illegal settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, in violation of international law and the UN call for Israel to withdraw forthwith from occupied territory. We also provide diplomatic



Christian and Muslim leaders head a solidarity rally in Ramallah during the Alternative Assembly.

support for the state violence Israel has undertaken against the Palestinian people. In the words of Pogo, a comic strip from my childhood, "I have met the enemy, and it is us."

Fifty-three years after the Nakba, it is galling to accept the fact that many people in the U.S. still do not understand what is happening, and their role in it. I was extremely grateful to Sabeel for holding the assembly, even in adverse times; to the speakers--Palestinian, Israeli and others--who shared with us so much important information, and above all to the people from 21 countries around the world who came despite the difficult times--perhaps I should say because of the difficult times--to express their solidarity and their determination that this injustice would not stand.

Now that we have returned, we need to share what we have learned with our religious communities, our friends, the media, and political leaders. What the U.S. is doing is not only not in the interests of Palestinians and Israelis, it is not in accord with either our Christian perspectives or even longer term U.S. interests. Thanks to the assembly, our movement is growing!

*Elizabeth Barlow is Coordinator of Friends of Sabeel - North America.*

## Worlds Apart

by Robert Assaly

My first impressions of Palestine, having been educated on the subject by our North American media, led me to wonder if I had really arrived at my destination. For the Palestine I experienced was a world apart from the one I knew through the media. That was fifteen years ago. Sadly, not a whole lot has changed. In this light, the Sabeel assembly in February was all the more profound, exposing participants to the harsh reality of Palestine today, offering rich insights both into the obstacles standing in the way of peace and fundamental principles which, if adhered to, offer fresh hope.

In bringing the assembly into Bethlehem and Ramallah, participants were exposed to the newer features of daily life under occupation. One didn't have to go very

far into the Occupied Territories to witness the roadblocks, harassment, and overwhelming methods of Israeli military control and domination of all aspects of Palestinian life. During one day of the pre-assembly tour, we witnessed house demolitions, a curfew being put into effect in Hebron, dozens of blockaded villages, destroyed olive groves, and the destruction of the Palestinian transportation and communication infrastructure in the face of a flourishing infrastructure for illegal Jewish settlers.

Speakers at the assembly articulated what visitors witnessed: the occupation is the violence. Voices as diverse as South African and Israeli Jews, in response to the assembly's title inviting all to speak the truth, compared the emerging reality of the life under occupation to an apartheid-like situation. The fundamental idea that peace can only come with justice was a common thread of presentations.



A Palestinian girl stands near the remains of Osama Qurabi's home in Beit Jala. Osama (18) was killed when Israeli tanks shelled his home a few days earlier.

Clear articulation of these principles of justice left participants, both local and from abroad, with a sense of vision for the future. A palpable sense of solidarity in the assembly was thus a most inspiring feature. The power simply of the truth spoken, the story told, and justice envisioned sent shock waves through the silence. We came away with a strong sense of being equipped with this power to impact another world to which we would be returning. This challenge to "the powers and principalities," and then offering of this to God in the worship services, ultimately left us confident in the hope set before us.

*Fr. Robert Assaly is Coordinator of Canadian Friends of Sabeel.*



## Snapshots of Our Activities

For the past seven months, since the eruption of Intifada II, Sabeel has tried to adapt to this new phase in the struggle of the Palestinians against the ongoing occupation. Surviving in our ministry without losing hope has indeed been a challenge.

As the siege constricted movement and disrupted our lives, Sabeel pushed on with its programs and at the same time found new ways of meeting the growing needs of Palestinian society. The shelling and economic strangulation increased calls for assistance, which pushed Sabeel to send out appeals to churches and friends abroad. Thanks to their support, and the assistance of local clergy, Sabeel channeled relief and emergency funds to over 100 families in 11 villages and cities.

Amidst all this chaos, Sabeel ended the year 2000 with a Christmas dinner at the YWCA of Jerusalem. Despite the heavy hearts, the spirit of the nativity prevailed through the carols and fellowship of over 150 people. The charming eloquence and humor of Afif Safieh, the Palestinian special envoy to the Vatican, who addressed the audience, ended the evening in a glimmer of hopeful anticipation!

The challenge for 2001 was the Alternative Assembly. With much determination, all of the Sabeel staff, board and friends prepared for the "Speaking Truth, Seeking Justice Alternative Assembly." From February 21 to 26, over 400 activists, church representatives and members of Friends of Sabeel from 21 countries participated in the four eventful days of the assembly, followed by trips throughout the country. Participants had a first-hand experience of the daily suffering of the Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Galilee region.

The impact of the interaction between the

visitors and the local inhabitants was tremendous. The local friends of Sabeel, clergy, women and youth volunteered their services, and several organizations received some badly needed business by catering for meals or providing other services to the visitors. Even more important was the feeling among locals that they did not have to stand alone in their quest for justice. Many of the participants left the country convinced about the need to mobilize their communities and work to bring the occupation to an end.

### Local Department

#### Youth Work:

The youth continued their monthly meetings, Bible studies and visits to the shelled areas in the Bethlehem area, though the closures prevented Estephan Salameh, the youth coordinator, from fully implementing programs in the Nablus area. The Jerusalem group met regularly twice a month and organized inter-group visits and activities. Several of the youth groups were involved in the assembly, taking part in the worship services and serving as guides.

On March 24, at the invitation of the



The youth spend a day in Beit Jmal.

Ramallah Orthodox Youth group, Rev. Naim Ateek spoke in Ramallah about "Christian Zionism and Fundamentalism." The highlight of the youth activities was

a one-day retreat held in Beit Jmal on April 1. Twenty-five young people met in the secluded monasteries of the Catholic priests and nuns of the order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to pray and reflect on the gospel, to explore the meaning of lent and the crucifixion, and to participate in the Eucharist service together. It was a special but sad occasion in which the youth bid farewell to their coordinator Estephan, who would be leaving to the U.S.A. to pursue his studies.



Estephan Salameh  
Sabeel is grateful for all the work that Estephan has been able to do in bringing together 58 youth groups from all over the country. The large gap that Estephan leaves will be temporarily covered by the Local Department, with the help of volunteers, until a youth coordinator with the same dedication and enthusiasm joins the Sabeel family.

#### Clergy:

Some of the Sabeel clergy were instrumental in the outreach program to needy families. Others actively participated in the Alternative Assembly, but because of the difficult situation, the regular monthly clergy gatherings were reduced to only one, which was held on February 2 at the Lutheran International Center in Bethlehem.

The second meeting of clergy wives was also held at the same time and place. While the clergy discussed the Church's role during this time of crisis, Dr. Nuha Khoury spoke to the women about the role and impact of Palestinian women throughout the history of Palestine.

#### Theology and Our Daily Life:

Sabeel has started a series of monthly ecumenical sessions entitled "Theology and Our Daily Life." The third session, like the previous two, was conducted by Naim Ateek. There was a presentation about the historical development and divisions of the early church, hymns were sung, and there was a discussion about how we could live out our faith ecumenically.



The day of fasting ends with prayer at St. Stephen's Dominican Church.

#### Post-Assembly Outcome:

At a simple thank-you gathering at the Sabeel Center on March 16, Naim Ateek expressed his appreciation to all those who contributed to the Alternative Assembly. Without the leadership of Hilary Rantisi, the assembly coordinator, and the hard work of board and staff members, special committees, volunteers, travel agents, hotel employees and guides, the assembly would not have been a success. As a token of appreciation, everyone was presented with a small gift. Refreshments were then served in the garden.

Another outcome of the Alternative Assembly was the formation of a local regional group, known as the "local action

group," which is concerned with organizing non-violent actions. At the three meetings held at Sabeel (in addition to others in different regions) the importance of media, alternative tourism, exchange visits and non-violent resistance was discussed.

#### A Day of Prayer and Fasting:

On March 31, Sabeel held a "Day of Prayer and Fasting to End the Siege of the Palestinian People." Friends and supporters joined the Sabeel family and discussed their understanding of the meaning of suffering, lent and crucifixion. The day ended with an ecumenical worship service at St. Stephen's Dominican Church. The Roman Catholic choir and several Armenian Orthodox representatives sang hymns focusing on the cross. A large cross representing the occupation was surrounded by seven smaller ones, each one representing a specific injustice caused by the occupation, including the siege, innocent loss of life, house demolitions, imprisonment, unemployment, emigration, and uprooting of trees.

#### International Department

##### Hilary's Speaking Tour:

Hilary Rantisi, coordinator of the International Department, was recently on a speaking tour in the U.S., which was organized by the International Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Church, USA (PCUSA). Throughout the tour, she presented the Palestinian perspective of the conflict in order to raise awareness about the injustices we face daily.

##### Ahlan wa Sahlan and Visitors:

Despite governmental warnings against travel to this area, it is wonderful to still welcome groups, individuals and formal delegations to Sabeel.

A special thank you to the delegations from the Mission Covenant Church and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and representatives from the World Conference on Religion and Peace, the US Institute of Peace and the National Council of Churches, Australia (NCCA).

#### Sabeel's Website:

If you haven't looked at our website since the last *Cornerstone* (now also available online), you have missed over 40 new pages, including Sabeel's Easter message, three months of Sabeel's calendar of activities, prayers and worship resources from the Day of Prayer and Fasting, and an appeal to end the siege. We continue to add daily links to articles and reports that present news and views not seen in much of the mainstream media. We appreciate the increasing number of friends who already link their websites to ours--please spread the word by encouraging your church or organization to link to [www.sabeel.org](http://www.sabeel.org)

#### Speaking Truth, Seeking Justice:

The majority of the recently added web-content comes from Sabeel's Alternative Assembly. We were unable to broadcast live audio from the assembly over the internet, as planned, but are continuing to add audio and text from the sessions. The statement of the participants, worship materials, and photos complete the coverage so far. Go directly to the Assembly page at [www.sabeel.org/conf2001](http://www.sabeel.org/conf2001)

#### Our Story Online:

The slideshow of the photos from Our Story: The Palestinians can be viewed at [www.sabeel.org/ourstory](http://www.sabeel.org/ourstory) Premiered during the assembly's opening worship, it includes all the pictures from the photo exhibit, plus those in the book, which is now in its second printing (both are available from Sabeel and Friends of Sabeel).



(continued from page 2, SERMON)

that apartheid in South Africa was there to stay, it crumbled and fell. The three women went at dawn to pay their last respects and wondered who would roll away the stone; but when they looked again, the stone was moved. God had rolled it away.

Today, we know without any shadow of a doubt that the name of the stone that is the impediment for peace is OCCUPATION. To lift the occupation does not mean the destruction of Israel. On the contrary, it means a new life and security for Israel. To lift the occupation is to end the injustice, the violence, the humiliation, and everything that oppresses and dehumanizes. Indeed, to end the occupation is the beginning of the humanization of Israel. We must work with God to end the occupation. We must free Palestine. We must take Palestine out of the tomb. We must pronounce the death of occupation and oppression. We must throw them in the tomb and place the large stone to shut them in and seal the tomb forever. The boulder is to shut the occupation in and not the Palestinians. It is for the structures of domination and not for the structures of peace, freedom, and development.

I would like to end with a story that happened at the end of the First World War. In the 1919 Paris Peace Conference sat the heads of the victorious states, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States, Prime Minister Lloyd George of Great Britain, Prime Minister Orlando of Italy, and Premier Clemenceau of France. Clemenceau confronted the other leaders

***We must work with God to end the occupation. We must free Palestine. We must take Palestine out of the tomb. We must pronounce the death of occupation and oppression.***

by saying, "Gentlemen, I hear you talking about your wish to have a permanent peace in the world. You want a peace that will end all wars." He looked at the heads of state and asked them whether they really meant it, whether they really wanted a genuine and permanent peace. All of them nodded their heads that of course they did. Clemenceau began to list the cost of peace. He said, "If we want peace, we must give up our empires. You, Mr. Lloyd George, you have to give up India. We French will have to come out of North Africa. You Americans, Mr. President, will have to relinquish your dollar rights in the Philippines, Mexico, and

Cuba. We the dominant powers will have to give up our empires, tear down our tariff walls, free our colonies, and open up the world." The heads of state looked at each other and quickly informed him that this was not exactly what they had in mind. Then Clemenceau of France sat up straight, banged his fist on the table, and said, "Then you don't mean peace, you want war." Within twenty years, there was a more devastating world war.

The Israeli occupation must end for peace and security to prevail. The stone must be rolled away. Indeed, it has been rolled away before in Jerusalem and it will be rolled away again. We are God's witnesses to this. Tonight, at the end of this conference, we affirm in hope the end of the occupation and the beginning of the resurrection. Because Christ is risen, we are people of hope and we work with God for the resurrection of all oppressed people, including the Palestinians. With this hope, we can return to our homes with greater determination to continue in our work for justice, peace, and reconciliation.

*Sisters and Brothers, let us affirm the resurrection: ALLELUIA, CHRIST IS RISEN.*

(continued from page 9, PASSOVER)

days, in contemporary Palestinian life Na'yla was designated a martyr, her grave sealed with the love of a grateful people.

This Passover I remember Na'yla and all those Palestinians known and unknown to me. As helicopter gunships reign terror on a defenseless people, I remember the faces and cries of a people whose freedom is integral to my own and to that of my people. Is this the last Passover that I will celebrate? My heart is not in

the celebration this year. And it can never be again until freedom for Jews is also freedom for Palestinians.

What do I answer my children when they ask the simple and difficult questions they are commanded to ask as we gather to tell the story of our origins thousands of years ago? That helicopter gunships are like the parting of the sea? That Ariel Sharon is like Moses leading us through the difficult times of desert and rebellion? I no longer have the answers to their

questions. But I will respond as a Jew in the only way possible today. That the Palestinians are part of our story of liberation and until they are free, we are not.

*Marc H. Ellis is University Professor of American and Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for American and Jewish Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. This article was first published in the Houston Chronicle on April 13.*



**"Don't worry, you're not the target. The little children are the target." by Dan Richards**

Since the beginning of the Israeli-imposed siege, the only way from Ramallah to Jerusalem has been through Qalandia refugee camp, the site of regular clashes. Recently, while driving back from Ramallah with family and friends, including Sabeel's Swedish volunteer, Mi Helen, we were "caught in the crossfire." It took us over an hour to get through the camp, due to the new Israeli checkpoint by Qalandia airport.

As we passed through the camp, we witnessed "clashes" between 5 young boys hiding behind a shipping container and 2 Israeli soldiers, who were positioned behind the airport fence in their protected guard tower about 100 meters away. The boys were playing a dangerous game, poking their heads out from around the container, waving and making faces at the soldiers. In the beginning, the two soldiers responded to the boys' taunts by firing rubber-coated steel bullets in the direction

of the boys as well as hundreds of cars and pedestrians trying to pass through the camp. The boys, aged about 10-13 years old, posed no risk to the heavily armed soldiers. They did not throw stones; even if they had thrown stones, they would not have reached the soldiers anyway.

After we passed the shipping container, we heard a loud bang and felt something hit our van from the direction of the soldiers. Our friend, Mirvette, who was sitting closest to the place where the rubber-coated steel bullet had hit, screamed out loud. As soon as I was sure that everyone in the van was ok, I kept going for fear of being hit again. When we reached the Israeli army checkpoint, we stopped and inspected the damage. Thank God that no one was hurt, and there was only a scratch on the van. The soldier at the checkpoint asked us if we were hit by a stone. When we told him we were hit by a rubber-coated steel

bullet coming from the direction of the guard-tower, he reassured us, "Don't worry, you're not the target. The little children are the target," making a sign with his hand to show that the "target" only reached up to his chest. At about this time, the snipers in the guard-tower switched to live ammunition, so I shouted at the soldier to stop them from shooting, that no one was even throwing stones and even if they did, they could not reach the guard-tower. He just shrugged his shoulders and waved us on!

*Dan Richards is Sabeel's webmaster.*

Cornerstone is the quarterly newsletter of Sabeel. We welcome any comments or inquiries you may have. (Email us at [cstone@sabeel.org](mailto:cstone@sabeel.org)) Cornerstone is made available at no charge, however, we do request a voluntary annual subscription to cover publishing and distribution cost. (Note: Friends of Sabeel membership includes subscription costs).

We ask for your prayers as we seek each quarter to serve you by providing news and information from within a Palestinian theological context. We also welcome donations for the development of our local and international ministry programs and conferences. *Many blessings and thanks for your prayers and support.*

For North Americans only, please note that checks should be made payable to the following tax-exempt organization:

**Friends of Peace and Justice in the Holy Land, Inc.**  
P.O. Box 4214  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106  
USA



A group of Palestinian refugees gather outside their school in Battir village (near Bethlehem).



## Purpose Statement of Sabeel

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

*We would encourage those who feel led to make a financial contribution to any aspect of our work. We too are encouraged when we know that others believe in what we are doing.*

For more information on Friends of Sabeel groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.

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