

CORNERSTONE

A PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



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Beit Iba checkpoint

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Good & Faithful Servant

Sabeel Bible Study Reflection

"Well done good and faithful servant... come share in your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21).

The Parable of the Bags of Gold (Matthew 25: 14-25), or "talents" as it is sometimes called, is a well-known story for those who are familiar with the bible. The parable has been used to promote good stewardship and to encourage us to use our gifts from God rather than hide them. *Don't be like the servant who buried his single bag of gold, and was chastised for not investing it wisely, we've been told. Rather, be like the two servants who doubled their gold bags and were given more in return.* In this popular interpretation, the parable becomes a tale of productivity.



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Palestinian workers holding permits may enter Israel through any of eleven checkpoints, including Tarqumia Checkpoint.

A contextual reading of the passage offers an alternative understanding of the text. Instead of a parable of productivity, it is read as a parable of ethics. Zilphozihle Siwa, the presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, gave such a reading of this text at Nelson Mandela's funeral.¹ Siwa tells us that the third servant's choice to bury his one gold talent is not, as we so often assume, an act of wastefulness or laziness. Rather, it is a statement of powerful civil disobedience against an unjust system. His action is akin to Mandela refusing to carry his pass, an identity document that limited the movements of black migrant labour, in protest against South Africa's unjust economic and political policies.

The third servant does not stop at burying his gold. He speaks the truth and reveals the character of his master: "I knew that you are a hard man,

harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed" (Matthew 25:24). The master takes what does not belong to him; he is not ethical with his resources. The servant highlights these injustices and refuses to participate in this corrupt system.

If we use this interpretation of the text, how can we understand it in our own context?

Who is the master? We see the master in unjust systems around the world that perpetuate poverty, strip individuals and communities of their rights, and profit by "harvesting where they have not sown" (Matthew 25:24). In Palestine and Israel, the unjust master is Israel's ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian land. This "master" controls and exploits the Palestinian people, steals land and resources from them for

the economic benefit of illegal Jewish settlements and the Israeli economy, and compromises democracy in the region.

Who is the third servant? The third servant is in those who choose not to participate in an unjust system: the young Israeli who refuses to serve in the army, the worker who refuses to add to the construction of the apartheid wall, and the consumer who chooses not to buy from companies that exploit the marginalized. The third servant is also in the Mandelas, the Ghandis and the Malala Yousafzais of this world who, use their position of *disadvantage* to expose the abuses of unjust systems.

Who are the first two servants, whom the unjust master calls faithful? Bishop Siwa points out that rather than standing for what is right, the first two servants chose to remain silent and cooperate

with the system. In doing so they strengthen it, turning five bags of gold into ten. In the Palestine Israel conflict, the second servant can be found in the actions that perpetuate the occupation. This includes businesses that directly benefit from the occupation through selling military technology and security systems. At times, the second servant is even found in humanitarian aid organizations, like those that provide charitable assistance but remain silent about the chronic occupation that keeps Palestinians living in poverty without their rights, and Israel's settlement building that is contrary to international law.

The second servant is also found in individuals when they buy settlement products, thereby strengthening an economy that oppresses and exploits another people. Whether in Palestine and Israel, or around the world, some go along with the status quo for their own personal economic benefit, others out of lack of knowledge about the situation, and many more out of fear and hopelessness.

Christ, the Servant-King, is the antithesis to the unjust master. At the end of the Matthew parable, the unjust master strips the third servant of the little he has and throws him out into the darkness (Matthew 25:30). Jesus does the inverse. He doesn't just opt out of the unjust system—he turns this oppressive system on its head.

This is poignantly revealed in Mark 11: 12-26, when Jesus overturns the merchants' tables in the temple. At that time it was a common practice for commercial activities, primarily controlled by the interests of the ruling class, to occur in the temple. Notably, Mark highlights that some of the tables Jesus overturned belonged to merchants selling doves, a commodity bought by the poor, specifically women and lepers, for ritual temple sacrifices. In this detail, Mark shows us that Jesus' actions go much deeper than simply protesting economic activity inside a holy space; he is overturning a *system* that discriminated against the poorest and weakest in society.²

Mark reinforces that Jesus is overturning the unjust temple-economy, when he writes that Jesus proclaims that his house is for *all* nations (Mark 11:17). The temple elite at that time would have recognized this as a reference to Isaiah 56: 1-8, when the psalmist declares that the temple is meant to be an inclusive community, accessible even to outsiders. Jesus, in both his words and actions, challenges a temple system that economically discriminated against the poor and marginalized. Jesus' actions at the temple challenge us not just to resist unjust systems, but to overturn them. *What does this mean?*

It means that instead of remaining silent, we boldly expose

the injustices we see with both our words and actions.

It means that instead of supporting companies that maintain an unjust system, we divest.

It means making economic decisions that are not based solely on productivity and profit maximization, but consider the dignity of human life.

It means that instead of ignoring international law, we abide by it.

It means rejecting oppressive economic, social, and political institutions in favour of more equitable ones.

It means actively investing in organizations committed to justice and peace.

When we speak truth to power the powerful will try to silence us. When the third servant accuses his master of being a hard man, the master does not reject his accusation but becomes very angry. He takes what little the third servant has, and redistributes it to the first two servants saying, "Whoever has will be given more... whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them" (Matthew 25:29). For those who cooperate with the system, more is given. For those who opt-out of the system, everything is taken away. The master then calls the third servant terrible names and throws him into the darkness. Today those who stand with truth continue to suffer. Mandela was sentenced to 27 years in prison. Many Palestinian voices are systematically silenced when they engage in non-violent resistance, yet are labeled terrorists.

The way of Jesus is never easy, for it is also the way of the cross. The paradox of the crucifixion is that through suffering and death, we find life. Yet, this is not the same life we had before death. The resurrected life is new, full, and abundant. It is not the life of the old temple merchants, ignoring the poor and serving the rich. It is the resurrected temple, open to *all* nations and embracing *all* people.

Sabeel staff and volunteers contributed to this Bible study reflection.

¹ Bishop Siwa, Ziphosilhe, "The Funeral of the late former President: Tata Nelson Rohillahala Mandela," Qunu, South Africa, December 15th, 2003: <http://www.methodist.org.za/news/12152013-1129>

² Myers, Ched. "Chapter 10: The Second Direct Action Campaign: Jesus' Showdown with the Powers in Jerusalem." *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988. 297-304. Print.



A poor Bedouin village in the Negev stands in contrast to nearby modernity.

A foreword by Rev. William Roberts Sabeel Interim Executive Director

For this edition of Cornerstone we have invited several experts on the economy of Palestine Israel to offer their insights into what Liberation Theologians call the praxis, the context, the facts on the ground, and especially addressing the problematic of the 'wealthy and the poor' in the household, the oikos, of the just kingdom of God.

From a macro-economic analysis, Shir Hever argues that for the State of Israel the economic costs of ongoing military occupation of Palestine outweigh the financial benefits. His provocative article on this issue, and his book "The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation: Exploitation Beyond Repression" is essential reading. He also reminds us that 2015 is the one year that is 67 years after 1948 and 48 years after 1967.

Sam Bahour outlines the perverse incentives and impacts of western, neo-liberal economic policies on Palestine. Instead, he argues for sustainable, domestic economic development given all the resources a Free Palestine can marshal and mobilize. And Khaled Al Sabawi provides a perfect example of this sustainable domestic approach with his 'Keeping Palestine Cool' and MENA Geothermal's work toward an Independent Geothermal Palestine.

Nora Lester Murad's piece also lays bare the perverse results of well-intentioned charitable donor aid. She asks the penetrating question: *If Israel is responsible under international humanitarian law for rebuilding Gaza, why are the international donors paying, thus letting Israel off the hook completely for the costs of their damages?* Read her article and see her website to find out more, and what you can bring to a church near you.

And a year now after the 2014 onslaught on Gaza, Sami El-Yousef details the economic collapse for 1.3 million Palestinians forced by political repression, aggression and isolation.

Again the Sabeel Jerusalem staff offer their insights from a bible study - this time with a new twist on an old parable. Just why do you think the servant buried his talents? We also recently looked at Jesus in all four Gospels who turns over the tables of the money-changers in the temple. Just how radical economically is our Liberator Christ?

From all of these provocative articles I hear the rising up of voices demanding economic de-colonisation. From the household of God in this troubled holy land, and in solidarity with the prophets of economic justice working around the global household today, I see the rising up of young activists networking for more equitable sharing and stewardship of the Earth. Read on... and let us know what you think.



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Palestinians wait at the agricultural gate in the village of Zeita in the West Bank in order to access their land and livelihoods.

Israel's Addiction to Palestine's Economy

by Sam Bahour

Israel's planned and systematic actions to maintain full control of the Palestinian economy for over five decades has become a major hurdle in getting Israel to realize that its military occupation of Palestinians must come to an end. Like recovery from other addictions, this one will require external support. That support needs to be third states holding Israel accountable to save Israel from itself. Dumping more humanitarian and developmental funds into Palestinian coffers will not solve the conflict.

The Palestinian private sector knows only too well, today, that for Palestinian economic development to gain traction it does not require billions, or even millions. For Palestine's economy to stand on its own two feet and serve the emerging Palestinian state, what is required is that third states, the U.S. at the forefront, have the political will to act in holding Israel accountable for its daily violations of international law. Here, in addition to human rights, we speak of economic

rights too: our rights to our economic assets and the ability to employ them within a Palestinian-defined economic development plan, free from Israeli or donor agendas.

Structural dependency

From the start of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip 48 years ago, Israel systematically linked the occupied territory's economy to its own. Before the Oslo Peace Accords, this forced linkage was most apparent in Israel's restriction of Palestinian business and its control of the freedom of movement of Palestinian labor. For nearly a decade prior to Oslo, Israel issued work permits to tens of thousands of Palestinian workers to allow them to enter Israel to find work. Palestinian labor was found in Israeli construction, agriculture, hotels and the like.

Dealt with as a second class labor force, Palestinian laborers were exposed to working conditions that allowed Israeli businesses to benefit from offering lower wages without having to stringently apply Israeli Labor Law. Many Palestinian workers even found themselves building the illegal Israeli settlements that were threatening the sheer existence of Palestinian communities. For Palestinians, being able to work, anywhere, while under Israeli occupation, was a matter of survival. For many, it still is.

The Israeli occupation authorities also levied taxes on the occupied people and used a portion of these taxes to flood the Palestinian areas with Israeli made infrastructure and goods. This created further Palestinian dependence on the occupier's economy.

Contrary to the obligations embedded in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the signatories of this key Convention - the U.S., U.K. and Russia (previously the U.S.S.R.) included - allowed Israel, the occupying force, to create a structural economic Palestinian dependency, while at the same time applying a maze of restrictions on the Palestinian ability to become economically viable. Instead of demanding that Israel apply international law, these countries and others continued only reporting, year after year, these Israeli violations of international law, while simultaneously footing most of the costs of occupation.

Underwriting occupation

When the Oslo Peace Accords were signed in 1993, an economic arrangement followed called the Paris Economic Protocol (signed in Paris on 4th May 1994 and later incorporated into the Oslo II Accords, formally known as the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 28th September 1995). Just as the Oslo agreement itself

kept intact the ultimate Israeli control over all key aspects of Palestinian life, the Paris Economic Protocol institutionalized the occupier's economic interest in this bilateral agreement with the Palestinians.

After the Oslo agreements, state donors' role in funding Palestinians' "development" turned into an international underwriting of the Israeli occupation, reducing, and many times removing, the financial costs of military occupation from Israel. In short, knowingly or not, donor funding had an accomplice-type role in allowing the situation to reach the place it is in today.

Separation

Although donor money fuelled the Palestinian economy, at no time did donors view the development of the private sector as the highest priority in building a viable Palestinian society. Donors assisted in the creation of sector associations and provided a certain level of assistance, but a strategic approach to the private sector never materialized.

Many in the international community were quick to criticize the growing number of Palestinian public sector workers, but few, if any, had the foresight to see that a strong Palestinian private sector was the only way to provide an alternative to public employment. Those who did realize this ignored it for the most part, since it would mean challenging the Israeli occupation and the restrictions placed on the Palestinian economy that come with it.

All the while Israel was going forward with its unilateral separation plans and illegal settlement enterprise, which damaged the Palestinian private sector severely. Being, for the most part, dealt out of the developmental paradigm, the Palestinian private sector was left on its own to deal with the Israeli restrictions on Palestinian society.

After being structurally linked to the Israeli market for decades, Israel's decision to unilaterally separate, or 'disengage' as it was called, from the Palestinians came at a time of instability. The elimination of Palestinian labor that was employed in Israel increased the unemployment rate in the West Bank and Gaza overnight. The Separation Wall's land grab separated farmers from their lands, causing great strain on Palestinian agriculture. The Israeli military and political actions to weaken the nascent Palestinian central 'government' left the economy in freefall.

Viability

The viability of any future Palestinian economy must come within the context of a sustainable private sector, one that can



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Shehada Street in Hebron's Old City was previously a busy center for Palestinian trade. Now, it stands quiet, closed to Palestinian pedestrians.

create sustainable job opportunities and develop competitive products and services for the local market first, and then for the export market. The Palestinian private sector must be able to absorb Palestinian university graduates in a knowledge-based thrust in our economy, while also absorbing the tens of thousands of construction workers that Israel dumped into unemployment after forcing them to be linked to the Israeli economy for decades. Similarly, a viable Palestinian economy must be able to feed itself, which requires land and water resources to be free from Israel's control.

Gaza is a horrific story of its own. In a report by the United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian territory in August 2012 entitled, "Gaza in 2020: A Liveable Place?" the UN describes the horrible situation of Gaza's economy and environment under the siege and questions if Gaza will even be livable by 2020! In other words, deep structural damage is being wrought on the Palestinian economy by maintaining the status quo.

Unfortunately however, internal Palestinian politics are often being put in the limelight as if the continued Israeli

military occupation is an innocent bystander in creating the conditions for Palestinian social collapse.

The international community has a historic responsibility to Palestinians, especially after so many years of observing the Israeli occupation from afar and a decade of footing the bill as Israeli violations continue unabated. The challenge today is to remove Israeli military occupation and allow the Palestinian private sector to assume its natural role of becoming the foundation of a future state.

Sam Bahour is a Palestinian-American business consultant from Ramallah/Al-Bireh in the West Bank. He is Chairman of Americans for a Viable Palestinian Economy (AVPE) and serves as a policy adviser to Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network and is co-editor of "Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians" (1994). He blogs at www.ePalestine.com.



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School children pass a flying checkpoint set up by the Israeli military on their way to As Sawiya School.

The Cost of 48 Years of Occupation

by Shir Hever

The year 2015 is the year in which the state of Israel turns 67 years old. Sixty-seven years since the state was established in the midst of the massive ethnic cleansing of 1948, and also 48 years since the military occupation of 1967. This symmetry will only occur once, and it is a worthy time to reflect upon the significance of the occupation of the Palestinian territory to the very essence of the State of Israel. This essay will attempt to do just that, but that is not to say that the occupation is mainly an Israeli question, for its effects on the lives of Palestinians are much more invasive than they are on the lives of everyday Israelis.

For 72% of its history, the State of Israel ruled over the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT). This occupation has shaped the Israeli culture, politics, and military. But I wish to write about how it shaped the Israeli economy. Though very few Israeli economists admit this fact, the occupation of the OPT has been the largest economic project in Israeli history.

State subsidies financed the settling of the OPT with about 10% of Israel's Jewish population, covered the OPT with military bases, walls, fences and surveillance cameras, and continuously keep thousands of political prisoners in Israeli jails. What Israeli economists (most of them, at least) do agree upon, is that the occupation has not been profitable to the Israeli economy. If, as the economists say, the occupation has been a growing burden on the Israeli economy, why has it been forcefully continued, and why have all Israeli governments since 1967 dedicated their efforts to fortifying it and deepening it?

The colonial nature of the Israeli economy, both inside its international borders and especially in the OPT, alludes to a colonial exploitation model. Indeed, Israeli companies have used the occupation to gain access to an easily-exploitable Palestinian workforce, unprotected by Israel's labor laws. They used the occupation to turn the Palestinians into a captive market for Israeli products, which reach every nook and cranny of the Palestinian market. Meanwhile, Israeli companies pump water from under the Palestinian land, strip the West Bank of its stone for construction, and illegal colonies strategically poised on the hilltops use the stolen water to irrigate their agricultural fields on stolen land.

Is that not exploitation? And yet, the economic value of this

exploitation to the Israeli economy remains a mystery, and only a handful of studies shed light on several aspects of that exploitation.

When attempting to measure the extent of the exploitation, Israeli economists have shown that the Palestinian wealth has not been a low-hanging fruit for the Israeli economy to pick up, but has required a massive investment of effort in order to open up the possibility of exploiting the Palestinian economy. The effort has not been to develop the Palestinian economic potential, but rather to crush the resistance of Palestinians to this exploitation.¹ Especially after the first Intifada, which broke out in 1987, the occupation became the most demanding task of the Israeli military and its security forces. The economic damage inflicted upon the Palestinian economy is almost unfathomable, but the economic burden on the Israeli economy cannot be ignored either.

The effects of this burden include turning Israel into one of the most unequal economies in the world,² and the unparalleled expenditure on security has left public services in a state of under-funding crisis.³ Israel has one of the highest poverty rates in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development),⁴ and many young Israelis leave the country, or become frustrated and disillusioned if they cannot.

Israel's paralyzed political system partially explains why the occupation was not ended by the Israeli government. The occupation became a symbol for the Israeli military and political strength, and giving it up would be a terrible blow to national pride. The international community plays a significant role here as well. It has turned a blind eye to Israel's violations of international law, and continued to improve its trade relations with Israel. The economic reasons which explain this will also shed light on what role the occupation plays for the Israeli economy.

Through the occupation, the Israeli government sought to integrate itself in the global economy. Right-wing governments in democratic countries and military dictatorships have come to see Israel as a model for effective repression, and became political supports of Israel as well as willing customers of Israeli weapons and of repression technology. Through those connections, Israel reached the top 10 arms exporters in the world in 2000, and climbed to the sixth place by 2012.⁵

The other side of this has been that people fighting for freedom around the world developed solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. Palestine became a symbol for freedom movements from all over the world. The main economic

result of this solidarity movement is the BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) which emerged in 2005 and whose impact on the Israeli economy has not yet been fully studied, because Israeli companies refuse to advertise the extent of how the BDS movement affects them.

In 2010, my book on the political economy of Israel's occupation was published, and there I have tried to measure the costs and the income from the occupation. I came up with an estimate that the net cost of the occupation to the Israeli society is 3 billion US\$ annually for the civilian costs, and 6 billion US\$ for the security costs (after the profits from the occupation have been accounted for).

These numbers look terribly outdated today. Since 2010, the siege on Gaza has intensified and Israel has perpetrated two brutal attacks against it. The destruction of Palestinian life and property is unprecedented, but at the same time the price paid by the Israeli society has also increased, with the tourism industry paralyzed in the summer of 2014.⁶

Many Israelis now realize that the occupation has become unsustainable, and yet they are incapable of transforming this understanding into political action. They are trapped in a colonial paradigm, like so many colonial populations have been in the past. The economic crisis in Israel also brings hope, however, because it is a non-lethal weapon in the hands of Palestinian activists to create their own political movement in the vacuum created. When the Israeli government will no longer have the resources to oppress the Palestinian resistance, Palestinians will have their turn to create a democratic and egalitarian reality in Palestine.

Shir Hever is an Israeli economist and an economic researcher at the Alternative Information Center, a Palestinian-Israeli organization in Jerusalem and Beit Sahour. His book is "Political Economy of Israel's Occupation: Repression Beyond Exploitation."

¹ [http://www.adva.org/uploaded/aa-full%20report%20-%20latest%20november%202008\(1\).pdf](http://www.adva.org/uploaded/aa-full%20report%20-%20latest%20november%202008(1).pdf).

² <http://money.cnn.com/2015/05/21/news/economy/worst-inequality-countries-oecd/>.

³ <http://972mag.com/fighting-the-collapse-of-social-services-in-israel/5853/>.

⁴ <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Report-Israel-has-highest-poverty-rate-among-OECD-countries-345785>.

⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.531956>.

⁶ <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4637746,00.html>.

Glimpses of Our Activities



Children from the Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas enjoy an event, including an egg hunt, for low income and high risk children during Lent.



Sabeel launches its book “The Bible and the Palestine Israel Conflict” at the Dominican Church in Jerusalem.



Women meet in Nazareth to discuss the Nakba and the Armenian genocide.



Women gather at St. Andrews Church in Jerusalem for a talk by Gloria Nassar about how to live the joy of the resurrection.



Women discuss in small groups at a spiritual retreat in Ein Karem reflecting on Mary’s Magnificat and the recent canonization of two 19th-century Palestinian nuns.



Sabeel Jerusalem and Nazareth youth take an educational tour of the Old City in Jerusalem.



The Sabeel community stops to pray along the Old City's Via Dolorosa for Sabeel's Contemporary Way of the Cross during Lent.



Children's program in Nazareth, "Who am I in my society?"

Glimpses of Our Activities



Nearly 200 people gather in Nazareth to hear Sabeel co-founders Rev. Naim Ateek and Cedar Duaybis talk about the ministry of Sabeel and liberation theology.



Sabeel Nazareth trip to visit and pray in the Carmelite monastery in Bethlehem



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Gazan children in the neighborhood of Shojae'a

A New Aid for Palestinians

by Nora Lester Murad

Global citizens who care about justice often complement their social activism with financial gifts to organizations they believe in; and they often support their government's use of tax funds to provide bilateral aid to developing countries. "Aid" means "help" and good people want to be helpful. They give from a sense of obligation, which is often grounded in faith, and in response

to the opportunity to make a positive difference in the world.

Palestinians are among the highest recipients of international aid from governments and have been for decades, making them among the most aid-dependent peoples in the world. While most of us would consider aid a good thing, it is obvious that being *dependent* on aid is a bad thing. But the majority of concerned global citizens don't realize just HOW bad it is. If they did, they would make aid accountability a priority among their Palestinian solidarity activities.

On one level, the problems with international aid in Palestine are just like the problems with aid that are reported in many parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia – aid is unpredictable and uncoordinated; it reflects priorities

of donor countries not necessarily the recipients; it distorts the agenda of local governmental and civil society groups; it undermines accountability to communities in favor of bureaucratic accountability to donor institutions; much aid is repatriated back to donor country economies; and aid is often wasted on consumption and activities that don't lead to real, long-term development.

Because of these problems, and because of the dialogue around the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals, activists in aid-recipient countries are working together to protest both the methods and the politics of international aid. They are moving beyond a technical critique that implies that we just need more aid, more transparent reporting, more harmonized procedures, and

better use of data about what kind of development works. Instead, they are talking about “development justice” and integrating aid issues with other aspects of global inequality such as third world debt. Some are even talking about aid as a form of neo-colonial intervention designed to maintain inequality rather than challenge it and suggesting that poor people reject aid.

In Palestine, aid is such a prominent and visible part of life that even non-experts tend to be quite sophisticated about how it works. Perhaps this is because nearly everyone is directly or indirectly supported by aid. The largest employer, the Palestinian Authority, can't pay salaries without international aid, and the Palestinian elite and middle class (upon whom the consumer and service industries depend) are nearly all employed by United Nations agencies, international

non-governmental organizations or local non-governmental organizations that depend on grants from the internationals. There is really no part of the economy or aspect of life that isn't affected by international aid.

For this reason, it doesn't take long for a conversation about aid among Palestinians to turn to a gripe session. Unfortunately, complaining isn't very effective in making change. Some people feel they should be grateful for donors' generosity, so although they aren't happy with aid, they silence themselves. Some people are fearful that if they complain, donors will stop giving, so they only make vague suggestions that can't be implemented. Others talk about the problems with aid, but don't address their complaints to the right parties, or don't understand how to frame their complaints in terms of rights, so they aren't taken seriously.

To help Palestinians understand the aid system and their rights in it, a group of Palestinian and international activists are launching Aid Watch Palestine, an initiative to start a conversation about aid that is honest, critical and constructive. We want to connect the issue of aid with the struggle for national liberation and with human rights.

For example:

- If Israel is responsible under international humanitarian law for rebuilding Gaza, why are the international donors paying, thus letting Israel off the hook completely for the costs of their damages?
- If international actors are intervening because of a humanitarian imperative, how can they justify the shamefully slow pace of rebuilding in Gaza?
- If international actors truly wish to



Palestinians in Gaza build makeshift homes while the shortage of building materials such as cement continues due to Israel's blockade.

prevent further violence, why do they allow Israel to profit so much from occupation and war?

- How can international actors credibly claim to be helping while they are simultaneously supporting the Israeli war machine?

By posing questions like these to Palestinians, aid actors and global citizens, Aid Watch Palestine hopes to challenge people who say, “We are doing the best we can under difficult circumstances.” We want to challenge ourselves to think more creatively about how international intervention can *actually* help – not by throwing money at the problem, but by addressing root causes of the conflict and further long-term solutions that respect human rights and international law.

Wanting to help isn’t good enough. After 67 years of “aid,” Palestinians are still occupied, dispossessed and colonized and vulnerable to violence, poverty and hopelessness. Where is the accountability? Concerned global citizens should still give, but we think they should ask harder questions about their government’s aid programs:

- Is aid intended to further the donor government’s foreign policy objec-

tives? Or is it intended to respect the priorities, rights and agendas of recipient communities?

- How are decisions about aid allocations made? Who makes them? Who chooses the decision-makers?
- Does aid only address the symptoms of suffering or does it address the root causes, fundamentally changing power relations?
- What kind of global economic and political system is advanced by international aid and is it contributing to the kind of world we want to live in?

We also need a critical approach to our own charitable contributions:

- Are we giving to international organizations when there are local organizations doing the same work? If so, why are we doing that, and what impact does it have on the capacity for local self-reliance?
- Are we giving to “emergency” needs (like food aid) instead of to longer-term (and harder) efforts to prevent food insecurity in the first place? If so, are we being fooled into supporting simplistic and ineffective approaches?

- Are we making charitable contributions when what is really needed is our political intervention so that we can find just solutions? If so, how can we combine every act of financial giving with a call to a representative, letter to the media, or public statement of support for a government policy that will lead to self-determination and peace with justice?

Nora Lester Murad, PhD, is an American writer of fiction and social commentary living in Palestine. Her blog, "The View From My Window in Palestine" (www.noralestermurad.com) addresses issues of development, international aid, and daily life under military occupation. She was also a co-founder and executive director of Dalia Association (www.Dalia.ps), Palestine's first community foundation, which helps Palestinians claim their right to self-determination in development by promoting philanthropy and reducing dependence on international aid. Nora is also a founder of and volunteer with Aid Watch Palestine, a new initiative to re-envision aid and make it accountable to Palestinians (info@AidWatch.ps).

“We want to challenge ourselves to think more creatively about how international intervention can *actually* help – not by throwing money at the problem, but by addressing root causes of the conflict and further long-term solutions that respect human rights and international law.”

2015 SABEEL WITNESS VISIT

November 3rd - November 11th 2015

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center invites you to join us for

9 nights to experience the reality of life in the land of the Holy One

led by the Rev. Naim Ateek, founder of Sabeel

- Worship with Palestinian Christians
- Meet and reflect with Palestinian Christians and Muslims as well as with Jewish Israelis and internationals who partner with Sabeel in non-violent resistance against violations of international and humanitarian law
- Experience the realities of the Palestinian community living under Israeli Occupation: the Wall, settlements, checkpoints, confiscated and demolished homes, refugee camps, and environmental degradation
- Learn about the loss of civil and property rights of Arab Israeli citizens

WHEN: November 3rd - November 11th 2015 inclusive (9 nights)

WHERE: Nights in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Nazareth with side visits to other sites within the West Bank and to the Sea of Galilee holy sites

**COST: 1600USD per person in a double room
1900USD per person in a single room**

This cost includes a non-refundable registration fee of 300USD, all accommodations and meals for 9 nights, all transportation and honoraria during the visit. It does NOT include airfare, transportation to and from the airport, personal expenses and souvenirs, or travel insurance.

For more information please email World@sabeel.org : +972 2 5327136

An additional 100USD for registration after the 20th of September 2015

The registration form is available on the Sabeel website (www.sabeel.org)

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A RIGOROUS TRIP THAT INCLUDES CLIMBING OF STAIRS AND MUCH WALKING, SOMETIME OVER ROUGH TERRAIN.



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A boy carries water in the Shajaia neighborhood in Gaza.

Gaza: Economy of Disaster

by Sami El-Yousef

The last war on Gaza ended on 26 August 2014, and within days I was again in Gaza most importantly to be in solidarity with our people there, but to also survey the damages and map out an emergency intervention. Though I have witnessed firsthand the damages of the earlier two wars, what I saw this time around was truly shocking.

No sector was spared during the war. It was not only the numbers that were shocking – 2,131 people killed and

11,231 injured– but also the widespread destruction to every aspect of life in Gaza. As many as 18,000 homes were destroyed and an additional 37,650 were severely damaged. The damage to the water infrastructure left 450,000 people unable to access municipal water. Then there was the destruction of the sole power plant and the damage to the health sector that left 62 hospitals and primary health centers damaged, with two hospitals completely destroyed. The damage to the education sector

included 220 schools damaged, with 22 completely destroyed.

Economic activities were greatly affected with 419 businesses and workshops damaged and 128 completely destroyed. Hostilities forced farmers and herders to abandon 17,000 hectares of cropland and agricultural infrastructure including greenhouses, irrigation systems, animal farms and fodder stocks. Fishing boats were completely prohibited from accessing the sea for 51 days. Consequently, by the end of the war unemployment in Gaza reached 70% for youth ages 20-24. This was a truly bleak picture immediately after the war!

Nearly a year after the ceasefire was declared, the situation in Gaza has not seen any improvement and the desperation level is at an all-time high. None of the demands of Hamas, including lifting the blockade that started in 2007 and opening an airport and seaport, have been met. On top of this, the borders linking Gaza with Egypt have been completely sealed since October 2014, which has made a very difficult situation even worse. This has resulted in major price increases given that the only goods going into Gaza are those supplied from Israel at double and triple the going rates. Adding to the difficulty is the inability of Hamas to pay salaries for months at a time.

A recent World Bank report¹ states that Gaza's exports virtually disappeared and the manufacturing sector has shrunk by as much as 60%. Also, the real GDP per person has dropped by a third in the last 20 years and the closure of tunnels with Egypt shaved some \$460 million off of Gaza's economy, leading to a 15% contraction of its GDP. Unemployment increased by 11% as a result of the latest war, reaching its current 43% unemployment – probably the highest in the world.

The report concludes by saying that "Poverty in Gaza is also very high. This

is despite the fact that nearly 80% of Gaza's residents receive some aid. These numbers, however, fail to portray the degree of suffering of Gaza's citizens due to poor electricity and water/sewage availability, war related psychological trauma, limited movement, and other adverse effects of wars and blockade."

To date and despite the fact that the international community committed over 4 billion dollars to reconstruct Gaza, not a single home has been reconstructed! Building materials continue to be prohibited, including high-grade cement, metal bars and welding rods. More recently, wood was added to the list as Israel is concerned that wood may be used in the construction of tunnels! This has negatively affected some projects to construct temporary shelters made of wood as a temporary alternative at a time when reconstruction is not possible.

Various aid agencies have come to the rescue during and after the war in order to relieve the suffering and the grave injustice. However, soon after the war ended, many other parts of the greater Middle East started boiling, which naturally shifted the attention elsewhere. This unfortunately put Gaza on the back burner and now there is no sustainable political or economic solution on the horizon. This has further been exacerbated as reconciliation between the various Palestinian factions continues to be far off, and the new far right-wing government in Israel was formed.

Despite the harsh conditions our people in Gaza have to deal with from every conceivable angle, there is a certain determination to carry on with life despite the difficulty. Jobs are in short supply and the most urgent need now is to kick start the reconstruction, provide jobs, and allow people a dignified income to sustain their families. Gazans are hardworking, creative, patient,

resilient and resourceful people and given the right opportunity, they can bring Gaza back to its old glory in no time. Keep Gaza and its people in your prayers.

Sami El-Yousef is Regional Director for the Pontifical Mission for Palestine (PMP), Jerusalem Field Office. PMP provides support to the clinics of the Near East Council of Churches (NECC) in Gaza.

¹ World Bank. 2015. *Economic monitoring report to the ad hoc liaison committee*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2015/05/24525116/economic-monitoring-report-ad-hoc-liaison-committee>

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Keeping Palestine Cool

by Khaled Al Sabawi

In 2007, I first arrived on my simple quest to bring green energy to Palestine. I am the son of Palestinian refugees who were fortunate enough to immigrate to Canada. I was raised on the imperative that if we Palestinians, who were lucky to grow up in one of the most progressive societies in the world and receive education in the best institutions in the world, if we don't come back to Palestine to help out, who will?

Thus upon graduating from university in Canada, I traveled to Palestine and immediately recognized a reality that was very concerning. Currently, Palestine has one of the world's highest population densities – higher than any country of similar geographic size and significantly higher than most countries around the world. In 2020, Palestine's population density will increase dramatically, due to Palestine's extremely high population growth rate. In 2050 it is expected to surpass Bangladesh. To make matters worse, the Palestinian people pay amongst the highest energy prices in the entire Middle East and North Africa region. Energy in Palestine has become unaffordable for Palestinians. This is a situation that is unsustainable.

The high population growth rate in Palestine will require hundreds of thousands of new homes to be built. More building means more energy will be demanded, as buildings account for the majority of the energy consumed in Palestine. Buildings consume lots

of energy for lighting, appliances, and mainly, for heating and cooling. Considering that Palestine imports 93% of its energy and is highly dependent upon Israel for supply, we have no choice but to think outside the box and look to alternative forms of energy to meet the demands of Palestinians. At the same time we must build more efficiently and sustainably. Where shall we look? How about down?

For who would have thought, that simply two meters below our very feet, there lies a clean renewable energy, known as geothermal energy, which can provide a source of heating and cooling for any type of building? Well, this is because the earth naturally absorbs 50% of the sun's energy and stores it as clean renewable energy, and because the temperature in the earth, simply two meters below, remains constant throughout the entire year.

At MENA Geothermal, we have installed 3 geothermal systems in Ramallah, in a house, an apartment and an office building. They've been operating successfully for over 2 years. Each geothermal system is saving 70% on energy consumption and has eliminated the carbon dioxide emissions that would have been produced by the standard fuel burning heating systems used widely in Palestine.

We were driven by our belief that developing countries are in fact in a unique position to incorporate renewable energy in their new constructions and actually build *right*. Our vision of building right was finally realized on a massive scale when we were awarded the contract to install a 1.6 MW geothermal system at the American University of Madaba in Jordan, the largest geothermal system in the region.

The American University project is saving a combined 300,000 kWh of electricity, 140,000 liters of diesel fuel, and 310,000 kg of CO₂ emissions every

single year. This is the impact of a small green energy company in the Palestinian territories.

Though we as Palestinians face many obstacles living under occupation, *building our community sustainability is not one of them*. In spite of the obstacles that we have faced, we continue to install geothermal systems and work towards creating a more sustainable economy in Palestine. We are working towards our own solution for Palestine – not the two-state solution, nor the one-state solution – but the Green State Solution.

While we may have known that the will to build our communities right is in our own hands, I hope we now know that the energy to do so has always been under our feet. Welcome to the underground movement to create an Independent Geothermal Palestine.

Khaled Al Sabawi is the first certified geothermal engineer in the Middle East. He is founder and president of MENA Geothermal, a Palestinian company specializing in geothermal heating and cooling systems.

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PURPOSE STATEMENT *f* SABEL

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, nonviolence, 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.

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