

Jerusalem Journal – 24th March 2007

Greetings to you all from Jerusalem, a city which in the last two weeks has seen both glorious sunshine and snow! The Jerusalem Team of Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) has been busy over the last fortnight with our work including: English lessons with the Jaholine Bedouin and children in Shu'fat refugee camp (once again we witnessed teargas being fired into Shu'fat camp); discussions with students from Hebrew University who are making Aliyah (under Israel's 'Law of Return' any Jewish person has the legal right to immigrate and settle in Israel); accompanying the Augusta Victoria Hospital ambulance into Hebron; participating in the 'Women in Black' demonstration in West Jerusalem; monitoring four checkpoints in East Jerusalem; making a presentation on the Ecumenical Accompanier programme to a Swedish government delegation; participating in the International Palestinian Peace Bike Race; and making a solidarity visit to the village of Al-Nu'eman.

Al-Nu'eman is small village (around 25 houses) in south-east Jerusalem. The village has been caught on the Jerusalem side of the separation wall that Israel has been building for the last four years, however the Palestinian residents of the village have not been given Jerusalem IDs, and are therefore considered by the Israeli authorities to be living in their *own* village illegally.

Life for the villagers has been becoming more and more difficult. Villagers feel that they are under siege. All traffic in and out of the village has to pass through one entrance, which is for residents only – their families and friends are not allowed to enter. Plans have been developed to build a goods terminal and a road through the village to service nearby Israeli settlements.



The guarded entrance to Al-Nu'eman

Photo credit: Rónán Quinn/EAPPI

The residents of Al-Nu'eman have now turned to the courts, and in May this year their case will be heard in the Israeli High Court. They are arguing that either the separation wall be moved so that Al-Nu'eman is on the West Bank side, or the villagers are granted Jerusalem IDs. You can find out more about Al-Nu'eman and how you can support the villagers at: <http://al-nueman.tripod.com>

John Sharp – Ecumenical Accompanier, EAPPI

For more information on the Ecumenical Accompanier Programme in Palestine and Israel:
www.quaker.org.uk/eappi

On Friday 23rd of March we (Jerusalem and Bethlehem EAs) joined more than 300 cyclists from Palestine, Israel, and all around the world for the International Palestinian Bike race from Ramallah to Jericho.

I had been pleased to hear that the 50 kilometers from Ramallah to Jericho was mainly downhill, and was really able to enjoy whizzing down the roads as we left Ramallah. However our enjoyment was quickly brought to a halt, just about 25 minutes after passing the start line. We had only covered about 4 - 5 kilometers when all the cyclists were stopped at Jaba checkpoint (south of Ramallah). We were literally pushed back by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and police, and one cyclist was even detained for a while.

The Ecumenical Accompanier programme had been asked to provide a protective presence to the cyclists, so when we were stopped at Jaba we approached the IDF to find out what was going on. The soldiers at the checkpoint simply stated that they were following orders, and could not let us pass.



Cyclists taking part in the Palestinian International Bike Race are stopped at Jaba checkpoint

Photo credit: John Sharp/EAPPI

Freedom of movement, guaranteed under Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is severely restricted throughout the occupied Palestinian territory through the system of barriers, checkpoints and road-blocks which successive Israeli governments have established.

Take, for example the city of Nablus (northern West Bank), which I visited last Sunday on a day off work. No Palestinian man, aged between 18 and 25 can leave Nablus at all. When I left the city with another EA it took us more than an hour to pass through Huwarre checkpoint on the southern edge of the city, with my bag and clothes thoroughly searched. As we travelled on public transport back to Jerusalem we had to negotiate three more checkpoints before we finally arrived back.

As the cyclists were turned away from Jaba Checkpoint, and the International Palestinian Peace Bike Race was brought to a premature end, one man commented to me, *“there is no such thing as freedom of movement in Palestine, at least not for Palestinians”*

John Sharp – Ecumenical Accompanier, EAPPI

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