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Eviction of the Al Kurd family

By Jerusalem EAs (Group 29), Photos by Mats Svensson

Mohammed (Abu Kamel) Al Kurd and his family were brutally evicted from their house in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah by the Israeli police forces in the early hours of 9 November 2008. While Abu Kamel was hospitalised, his wife (Umm Kamel) moved into a tent, not far from the home from which they were evicted. Since the tent was first erected, both the owner of the land and the Al Kurd family have been fined a substantial sum every day by the Israeli

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authorities, who claim that the tents were erected without permission on state land. The Israeli authorities have also demolished the tent on several occasions. For example, on the 21st November, a representative of the Jerusalem Municipality arrived at 9:30 a.m. with an order stating that within two hours the tent would be destroyed. Only ten minutes after this warning, the bulldozer came to demolish the tent and rip up the fence that surrounded the privately owned land. Because of the lack of electricity, toilet facilities and heating system, Umm Kamel has been sleeping over at her son's house some nights.

The Al Kurd drama has continued. On 22nd November, Abu Kamel suffered from a heart attack and passed away in the hospital. Abu Kamel, a 1948 refugee, left behind his wife Fawzieh Al Kurd (Umm Kamel), five children and their families. He had for weeks been hospitalised due to diabetes and related health problems. However, for the last couple of months people around him stated that he had been in a better condition than he had been for a long time. However, the Israeli authority's forceful evacuation of him and his family from their house, where they had been living since 1956, put him under severe pressure and affected his condition.

Sunday 23rd November, at the location where the Al Kurd family has been living since their eviction, numerous family members, neighbours, international peace supporters, EAPPI, ISM, some Fatah members and religious figures came to pay their condolences for the passing of Abu Kamel.



Umm Kamel speaking at the press conference on the day of her family's eviction.

The body of Abu Kamel arrived and after the coffin was placed in a tent where all the women were waiting, the men went with the body up to the edge of the lot of the family's home, where Umm Kamel was waiting. Unfortunately, due to the Israeli authorities, it was not possible for the mourners to reach the home of the Al Kurd family. The Al Kurd family situation is quickly becoming a symbol of the Palestinian struggle. During the funeral procession, slogans for Palestinian unity and liberation were chanted. When asked to give 'her message to the world,' Umm Kamel thanked everyone for their support and said that she would remain steadfast until the end. "I will stay here until I get my rights - even if it takes a million years." She continued, "This country is afraid of a woman in a small tent. What kind of country is that?" She concluded, as always, with thanks to Allah for his protection.



International, Palestinian and Israeli supporters gather at the protest tent in Sheikh Jarrah.

The future of the Al Kurd family is still unknown. The family has not received a new evacuation order for the tent in which they currently reside, although an eviction order is still pending. According to the Jerusalem Municipality, there are plans to use the privately owned land on which the Al Kurd family protest tent stands as a parking lot.



Umm Kamel.



EAs interviewing Umm Kamel inside the protest tent.

The struggle of the Al Kurd family has been covered by local and international media.



"The Al Kurd family situation is quickly becoming a symbol of the Palestinian struggle."

Demonstrating against the Wall in Jayyous

By Jayyous EAs (Group 29), Photos by EA Kerstin Gollembiewski

Since Israel started re-routing the Wall in Jayyous, the villagers of Jayyous have been demonstrating against the Wall and the re-routing of it, after the prayer in the mosque each week. The first demonstration took place on a Sunday, but the following two demonstrations took place on Fridays. As EAs, we have accompanied the demonstrations.

The first demonstration escalated in a violent way as soon as the procession reached the south gate. The youth of Jayyous broke and destroyed the gates and the military responded with teargas, sound bombs and rubber bullets. The situation became chaotic and a curfew was imposed. The military forces remained in the village all evening, searching for children that had thrown stones at the military. The curfew was finally lifted at 9 pm.

The second demonstration started very well. People were told not to throw stones and not behave violently. There were some tendencies among the youths to throw stones but the older men did a good job trying to stop them.



This demonstration, as well as the first one, headed to the south gate, but was stopped by the soldiers before reaching it. After a while the demonstration turned back and at a certain point everyone started to sing and dance. For us, this was a moving moment, experiencing the joy, the music and dancing from the villagers completely surrounded by the soldiers. The demonstration moved slowly and unfortunately the stone-throwing started and the situation went out of control, again. What in the beginning was a great demonstration, now developed to be a fight between mainly the youth of the village and the Israeli soldiers.



Meeting with patients from Gaza

By Jerusalem EAs (Group 28)

At the end of our term, we had a meeting with female patients from Gaza at the Augusta Victoria Hospital. We felt that meeting with them is not only important in order to hear their stories but also to reflect on our possible roles as EAs in relation to Gaza. We encourage the next EAs to explore what might be feasible and practicable in the future. [This has been done and EAs are now continuing to meet with patients from Gaza.]



Presence with the Da'ana family

By Hebron EAs (Group 28)

A week has passed since the Kharsina settlers attacked the Da'ana family home. We arrive early on Saturday the 8th of November. The mood is quiet. A crisp autumn breeze ripples gently along the canvas of the newly erected "Internationals' tent" in the Da'ana's back yard. Empty tea cups, a nargila, and a chess set bear testimony to the troops of foreigners who have visited the Da'ana's over the previous week. I smile and greet a woman who offers me chai. She squints into the morning sun, her gaze distant and jaded, but cordial nonetheless. As I sip carefully on the sweet tea I realise that she has seen many activists visiting her house over the last week. They come and go, like tourists browsing through a curio shop.

For the Da'ana household, chores continue as normal— a woman sweeps as children play on the veranda. Life must continue as normal, despite the unusual circumstances. Away from the domestic activities of the household, I look towards the vineyards. The carefully cultivated rows are criss-crossed with pathways trodden by the many

visitors who have come to see from where the settlers have attacked. Between the vines, razor wire spins a foreboding web midway through the vineyard. The Da'ana family has laid it there to protect themselves from trespassing settlers. Despite the peaceful pastoral scene, the razor wire before me is a jarring reminder of the violence of the preceding week.



Razor wire prevents settlers from trespassing into the Da'anans' vineyard. Photo: EA Ashwin Pienaar.

Restricted access in Hebron

By Hebron EAs (Group 29)

Since we arrived in Hebron, we have not been able to do anything as planned. Wherever we have tried to go, the police and/or the soldiers have always denied us entrance or asked us to leave. The H2 area will apparently remain a closed military area until 31 December 2009.

We have tried to provide a presence with the Da'ana family but it is proving increasingly difficult to get to them. The school-run has also been impossible to do. Every morning, we have been denied entrance at Checkpoint (CP) 56. To be able to get to the Cordoba school at all, we took a taxi to another part of the city and snuck in over a graveyard from behind. During the days, we stayed at the school so we could be present when the school ends. One day, we decided to split up after we were denied entrance again and two of us went to the school from behind over the graveyard. The other two of us stayed and monitored CP 56 from the "outside" and after the children and teachers had passed the CP 56, we went to see Hashem in Tel Rumeida. Coming from

CP 56, we also had to go through the cemetery to reach Hashem's house. Just before 10:00 am, passing Issa's garden, we noticed that the entrance that we usually took was newly blocked with barbed wire. On the alternative way, we were stopped by an IDF soldier who pointed his M16 at us, asking for our destination and suggesting a way that they were not familiar with. However, after a brief explanation (and his "good luck"), we were allowed to go. We reached Hashem's house and the rest of the team who stayed at Cordoba School joined us later. During the day, Hashem, who wanted to go and get an "International" into H2, was caught at the cemetery by the police officer. The "International" had to leave immediately and so did Hashem. Thus, he found out that there were many policemen in the area and therefore, he had us stay all day in his house before we were able to get home through CP 56. Unfortunately, we have not been able to monitor, or even get close to, the Ibrahimi Mosque CP, the old meat market or the old vegetable market on Shuhada Street. Evidently, our first weeks in Hebron have mostly been about mobility and access!

Settler attack in Wadi al-Hussein

By Hebron EAs (Group 29)

Yesterday there was a big incident in Wadi al-Hussein and we happened to be eye witnesses, as we were visiting families in the area. More than 150 settlers from the Occupied House and Kiryat Arba attacked the Abu Seifen's house, as well as a few other houses on their way to that house. About 30 Palestinian cars were damaged. Until we saw stones being thrown at us from the Occupied House we did not realise we could be targeted as well. We heard a lot of shooting that, as we discovered later, was mostly coming from the soldiers and aimed into the air, trying to make the settlers move away from the house. According to one eyewitness from the family, there were also a few armed settlers.

The settlers usually "get active" on Shabbat, since it is their day off, however, this time it was different, according to Palestinians we spoke to. The whole event seems to have been planned. The night before, the fence between Kiryat Arba settlement and the valley was cut in preparation. Also, according to the Palestinians, the number of police and army people present was more than usual, and so was the number of settlers taking part in the attack.

One of the internationals present, trying to understand the motives for the settler action, asked for the reason for their behaviour:

"You want to know why they do it? First of all, because we are Palestinians and secondly, because God gave them this land," was the reply.

Nablus visit to Yanoun

By Yanoun EAs (Group 28)

On 9 November, Father Ibrahim from the Anglican church in Nablus brought the women's circle to Yanoun for a visit. It was a group of 30 people, and they wanted to come to support the locals and EAPPI. They also wanted to learn more about the situation with settlers and the work of EAPPI. The village of Yanoun welcomed the group with open arms, and Mayor Rashid told the group about the situation and showed them around in the village. After a fantastic lunch, of course prepared by the locals, the EAs had a presentation about the work of EAPPI. The group was impressed and grateful. Father Ibrahim also puts a lot of effort in advocacy for the EAPPI within the Palestinian society. For the EAs this visit and its results felt like very positive advocacy work!

"Were the Palestinians throwing stones?"

"Of course they were."

"So settlers and Palestinians were hurling stones at each other?"

"Oh no. Not *at each other*. If someone throws stones at you and your house, you have a right to defend yourself. That makes a big difference."

In the evening, one of us called a TV station trying to convince them that what had happened on that day was an "interesting" piece of news, worthwhile to be covered. "Were there people killed?" was the question we got from the TV station. When we told them that "No, no one was killed," they responded with "Hmm, ok, then we will see..."

So this is the usual story. Palestinian houses are attacked by a mass of settlers and nobody does anything. None of the settlers were arrested. Already by tomorrow, most people who heard about the incident will forget it and the story will repeat itself as it has been repeating itself for several years now. Families from Wadi al-Hussein will continue to live in fear, asking the Palestinian Authority for the last three years in vain to at least get some kind of roof protection. Their children are afraid to walk on the streets coming back from school.

"We don't need any money from the Palestinian Authority or the international community, all we need is for them to feel with us," one of the affected persons told us.



EAs Paul and Gabriel I with Father Ibrahim and Mayor Rashid on the day of the visit from Nablus.



The women's group from Nablus visited Yanoun on 9 November 2008.

Demonstration in Umm Salamuna

By Bethlehem EAs (Group 29)

Together with Marwan Fararja from the Holy Land Trust three EAs went to the demonstration in the village of Umm Salamuna. The land of this village is threatened by the planned route of the wall, and non-violent demonstrations have been going on there for some years. The last months, soldiers have prevented demonstrators from marching down to the land. Local people, NGOs, journalists and internationals (approx. 20 people) took part in the demonstrations this day. We only marched a few metres before we arrived to the point where twelve armed soldiers had blocked the road with barbed wire. There were speeches and prayers made by both local leaders and internationals. Children showed their flags and posters to the soldiers and were asked by the leaders to stay calm. One elderly

*Stand-off in
Umm
Salamuna on
21 Nov.
2008.
Photo: EA Urs
Rybi.*



woman tried to remove one end of the wire, but was decisively stopped by one of the soldiers. When a shepherd with his sheep came along on the soldiers' side, the absurdity of the situation was perfect. This was a well organised non-violent demonstration, trying to appeal to the soldiers' common sense.

Acclimatising ourselves with the gates and checkpoints

By Tulkarem EAs (Group 29)

On Tuesday morning, all was not well at Attil Agricultural Gate. We arrived at 5:50 am for the scheduled 6:00 am opening. The gate did not open. The farmers called both the District Coordination Office (DCO) and the Humanitarian Hotline, and at 6:30 am, we also called the Hotline. At 7:05, soldiers arrived, taking their time opening the gate. The farmers were very angry and began arguing amongst themselves as to who would go first. This, in turn, angered the soldiers who then closed the first gate until it appeared there was order amongst the farmers. We will be keeping a close watch at this gate over the coming weeks.

On 30 November 2008, we had two different experiences in conversations with soldiers at checkpoints (CPs). At Anabta CP, when we saw that there was a queue forming of 30 to 40 cars, we left the *servis* we were riding in and approached the

soldiers. We were met with friendly, polite soldiers who told us two different stories when asked why there was such a delay. One told us that it was a heavy volume of traffic and told us he had called for reinforcements, i.e. more staff to assist the two soldiers who were doing their best. The other told us that they were looking for someone.

When we arrived at Beit Iba CP, there was no one waiting to go through but a soldier approached us immediately. He wanted to share his frustration with us with respect to the Palestinian taxi drivers who blocked the way towards Nablus out of the CP. He said that earlier the drivers' vehicles had blocked the path of an ambulance. He told us that he had confiscated their car keys in an effort to make them understand that they cannot block the road but returned the car keys when we arrived. We engaged in a conversation for quite a while and when I suggested it might be better without the Wall and CPs, he said that they were important to defend his country. Another soldier then joined us and showed us a video of the ambulance incident.

In both of these cases, we felt that we were able to have very positive conversations with soldiers who showed us their human sides. The soldier in Beit Iba even thanked us for the good humanitarian work that we do.



*Attil
gate on
20 Nov.
Photo: EA
Susan Palmai.*

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