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Demolitions in Um Al Kheir

By Hebron EAs

The tent village of Um Al Kheir lies next to the settlement of Karmel, established in 1978. The two communities are neighbours merely separated by a fence. The settlers' main source of income is from the chicken farms, which have air conditioning, water supply and electricity. The extended family of Hadalim that inhabits Um Al Kheir has none of these things. Instead, oil lamps provide some light in the evenings. Corrugated metal roofing sheets provide insufficient shelter from the autumn rains, despite the relief they provide for the parched earth. The members of the extended family are all registered as refugees by UNRWA since they fled from Arad in 1948. On **29 October**, the Israeli army demolished six homes and other structures in the village. The demolished homes belonged to the families of Suleiman and Salam Eid al-Hathaleen and to the brothers Ali and Salem Muhammad al-Hathaleen and their families. According to the residents of the village, two bulldozers started to demolish the houses at 9:00am and finished after two hours. They also demolished an animal pen that housed

Swinging Cradle, Hanging Rifle

By Hebron EAs

It's nine o'clock on Sunday morning and all we hear are leaves rustling and the sound of olives falling on the ground. We're sitting in the middle of the olive field in Tel Rumeida and are astounded by the peacefulness surrounding us. A cradle made out of a food-aid-bag, two ropes and some blankets is hanging on a maybe thousand year old olive tree. The baby in it is sleeping. When the two small boys of the family we are accompanying start fighting, the level of tension reaches its peak. Shortly after, some settlers pass by, their big rifles hanging down their backs, and the peaceful scene starts to fade a bit. We continue picking olives, dropping them in the

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the villagers' herds. A lot of the families' furniture was also damaged during the demolition. 45 Palestinians, including 30 children became homeless. The homeless families have been provided with three tents and other emergency supplies by the UNOCHA, UNRWA and the ICRC, who visited the village immediately after the demolition. The EAs also saw the tent which was provided for the family by the Palestinian Authority.



Homes demolished in Um Al Kheir on 29 October 2008.

bucket and talk about how different the harvest was at Wadi al Hussein two days ago. That day about 15 settlers effectively disturbed the 25 Palestinians and peace activists harvesting olives. They shouted at us, called us dogs and Nazis, pushed and kicked us and tried to dump the olives already picked. Our discussion halts for a minute when the father of the family brings tea that he has prepared for us and we watch one of the boys swinging his little sister in the cradle. Such a quiet harvest would have been impossible at the Wadi al Hussein trees as they are located 20 meters from the "tent synagogue."

The Village of Azzun 'Atma

By Jayyous EAs

We visited a secondary school in the enclosed village of Azzun 'Atma. The school also serves the village of Beit Amin on the other side of the Wall. The school is built adjacent to the settlement of Sha'are Tiqwa. It is a co-ed. school with grades 5-12, 240 pupils, 11 classes and 20 teachers. The main problem facing the school is that the pupils from the neighbouring village of Beit Amin have to get a permit to pass the checkpoint. Out of 20 teachers, 18 have to pass through the checkpoint when they go to school. Sometimes they are turned back to renew the permit as there is no expiry date on the permit. The parents could never visit their children's school and nobody from the Teachers Union or from the education authorities has been able to visit the school for



The school lies directly below the settlement of Sha'are Tiqwa.

the last four years. The soldiers come frequently to disturb the running of classes and the settlers living behind the school building often throw garbage down the slope. There have also been situations when the school has been fired on by live ammunition. We return to Jayyous together with an English teacher from the village. He spends more than one hour every morning to go to the school, a distance of about 25 km.

Settler attack on farmers from Kafr Qaddum

By Jayyous EAs

Kafa Shiteiwi takes a break from the olive harvest to tell us about the dramatic happenings that took place on the very same spot a few hours earlier. At 7.30 in the morning she had come to the fields outside of Kafr Qaddum to pick olives together with three British volunteers. When they arrived, more than 100 settlers, mainly young men of the age 16-19, came towards them "like a wall" from the top of an adjacent hill. The settlers threw stones at them and used very bad language. First they tried to catch the British and force Kafa to leave. She was however determined not to let her friends behind and refused to leave without them. The settlers then tried to lock the olive pickers inside their car and told them all to leave. The British volunteers called the police, but they did not arrive until more than an hour later. No one was physically hurt in the attack, but from the tone of Kafa's voice, it is easy to detect that she is

"More than 100 settlers came towards them 'like a wall' from the top of an adjacent hill."

seriously shaken. The settlers had come from the nearby Israeli settlement of Qedumim. On the before mentioned hilltop, overlooking the olive fields, a temporary wooden hut with palm leaves on the roof, maybe a sukkah, has been erected. It functions as a base for the settlers who also have pitched tents in the area. Kafa and her husband Muhammad stress that the attack this morning is not a unique incident. The problems started already two weeks ago. Every day, Kafa says, sometimes several times each day, the settlers come down into the village. Kafa tells us about many similar incidents; about sacks of olives and equipment for olive harvesting being stolen, and about damage done to olive trees after settlers have used large sticks to empty them. With another week of olive harvest on her family's land, she is fearful of what could happen. Other families need even more than a week to collect all the olives. Three children are playing under the trees. For a moment it is peaceful and quiet. But the wooden hut on top of the hill reminds us that it is all a deception and only a matter of time before the next settler harassment or attack will take place.

Checkpoint watch during Ramadan

By Bethlehem EA

We have been through four of these so-called Ramadan Fridays at the Bethlehem checkpoint, each time spending about six hours there, watching over 5000 people squeeze through bars and past each other. These people want to go pray; simply practice their religion in Jerusalem but instead they stand behind bars, push each other, step on each other and cry and beg and shout – sweat and tears always follow. There are so many disappointments on these days. As the prayer access time ends at 11:45am, often hundreds are left on the wrong side of the wall, not allowed to access their holy sites.

Each of these mornings we would arrive at 06:00am and already there would be 400 men and women clamouring to pass the first cement barriers that had been placed there temporarily. On top of these barriers, some three metres high, stand Israeli soldiers wielding assault rifles and full body armour. Behind me on a balcony of a Palestinian home lie two snipers who are constantly looking through their scopes. I haven't even had breakfast yet.

The heaving queues that develop are extreme and even with my head above the others I couldn't take a full breath and small quick breathing is all my lungs, squeezed to half their size, could do. You are immediately aggravated and then the man beside you still tries to squeeze in front. There is no space but he claws at your back and shoulders until you have to let him through. Tempers flare. If I could have raised my fist from my side I might have struck out. In front and to my right, there was a man shorter than me whose feet hardly touched the ground and was merely swept along with me, his head buried under my shoulder. I think he fainted at one point but I couldn't be sure.

Each morning I would share this experience in true accompaniment spirit. I got crushed in the queue, I was shouted at, I was pushed by soldiers, I supported myself on the bars of the ramp and the sun beat down on me and I got sun stroke and I wanted a drink but never took one as all the others around me were just as thirsty.

The last day of Ramadan was the first time this experienced scratched the surface for me. I had a hint of the frustration of the experience. Those who



Bethlehem Checkpoint on third Friday of Ramadan, 19 Sep. 2008.

don't get through are left there waiting and hoping that the terminal will open again. They won't make it to the prayer but just to complete the process of making their pilgrimage, they continue to try. They are denied their right to practice religion. They plead with me to help them across. They think I can tell the soldiers what to do. I was standing on the other side of the bars from the people and a soldier came and asked me to leave. Argument was futile and I eventually did so after a more forceful push on the shoulder. As I walk away I say, "It is entirely legal for me to be here, which is more than I can say for you."

He didn't get it.

The EAs have produced a video of Bethlehem checkpoint during Ramadan 2008. Check it out on:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JENfx0X47SA

A selection of photos of the checkpoints during Ramadan checkpoints can be viewed on:

www.eappi.org/en/photos-videos/photos.html.



Closed Military Zone in Hebron

By Hebron EAs

The policeman approaching us, sitting on Ja'abari land, says: "I saw you this morning, why are you still here? He had seen us in the olive groves in Tel Rumeida as we were harvesting olives. He and his fellow police officers arrived shortly after Abed Hashlamoun, a Palestinian journalist, and Janet Benvie, a British activist, had been attacked by male settlers passing between the trees. The settlers took a camera from Abed and beat him. When Janet tried to reclaim the camera, she got punched in the face. The police subsequently drove us off the land showing a copy of a military order saying that the area had been declared a

closed military zone. This same copy was shown to us on Ja'abari land in the afternoon and we were again forced to leave. The original, if not a new or different order, was presented to us also the following morning when doing the school run. The reason for closing the area is, according to the police, military and the Palestinians we have been talking to, the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. We believe military closures during Jewish holidays are motivated by the negative publicity Israel receives when holidaying settlers attack non-Jews in the area. The next update will reveal that the closed military zone has prevailed in the H2 area of Hebron in November.



A Pleasant Experience at the Checkpoint

By Tulkarem EAs

Of the two checkpoints at Jubarah, the one nearest the village, the villagers say, is the worst. Our first encounter with the soldiers was strange. As we walked up, the soldiers, who all looked very young, had just turned away a car, so we wondered how we would fare.

"Why do you want to go to Jubarah? It's dangerous there." We said we wanted to see Farouq whose mother had died two weeks previously, and we'd only be an hour. A phone call was made to get clearance... The next moment one of the soldiers exclaimed, "Johnny Walker!" and put his hand into a bag, producing a slice of bread. Coming from the direction of Jubarah, was an old Palestinian man riding a grey donkey, Johnny Walker. There seemed a genuine feeling of mutual goodwill between the two men, and I asked if I could take a photo. I was surprised by the "Of course" reply. I was about to 'shoot' when the soldier in charge ran out to be photographed as well. Soon, all was back to normal and we just presumed we would pass and said we'd see them in an hour, and walked on, hardly believing our luck.

We located Farouq, met some of his family, wandered around the desolate village, and made our way back to the checkpoint. The soldiers were not busy and seemed to want to talk. We told them about our work and asked them how they

felt at their age being stuck at a checkpoint, not being able to enjoy themselves. "But we must defend our country" one of them said earnestly. "I'd really like to take a photo of you all, but I suppose it's not allowed," I said. "Come on," said Johnny Walker's friend, and lay down on the ground, rifle poised to shoot.

The soldier in charge joined in with knee bent. Finally the third took a stance and all three laughing, I captured the moment. Truly they were normal youngsters, enjoying a brief moment of respite from their duty.

The one in charge then escorted us the 200 or so metres to the next checkpoint, asking us searching questions about the conclusions we had reached in stay in Tulkarem. He was quite subdued when we said we wouldn't like to be a Palestinian with the lack of freedom of movement and the humiliation of having to prove one's identity. We approached the checkpoint and the commander came out and asked the soldier if he wanted supper that night in such a way as to mean "what are you doing talking with these people?" The soldier's attitude changed immediately. He was back in the real world. A service came by and we left, hoping he would get his meal that night.

The text has been shortened but the full length version can be accessed on the website, www.eappi.org.

Is it a military manoeuvre?

By Yanoun EA

A Land Rover from the Israeli military District Coordination Office, the DCO, comes into the village of Yanoun. Three armed officers climb out of the car and look down the valley. They are pointing and giving directions and parameters. At the same time, troops are landing at the international airport near Tel Aviv. The last weeks have been filled with meetings for planning and discussions about strategy. Is a major military manoeuvre in progress?

No, it's olive harvest time. What is the Israeli DCO doing? They are travelling around the villages informing the farmers of the dates that they are allowed to pick their olives in so-called "sensitive areas." The phrase refers to areas close to settlements or areas that the settlers want to claim as theirs. In these areas, it is the army that decides when it is time to pick the olives, not the farmers' preferences.

"There I am, a Christian minister from a country in the north, together with a Jewish rabbi from Israel, picking olives with a Muslim family in Palestine."

Since the time given for picking the olives in these sensitive areas is often too short, every extra hand that can be given is important to save the harvest, which is the basic income for many of the farmers. Troops of volunteers from all over the world come to Israel and Palestine to pick olives together with the Israeli organisations that want to help with the harvest. One of the coordinators for these troops of volunteers is the Israeli organisation, Rabbis for Human Rights, a group of "ecumenical" rabbis from different Jewish denominations who want to help the people in the societies that are vulnerable or threatened.

D-day is here. We are up early, together with the villagers, to be ready to begin picking. We have 10 days to harvest all the olives in the sensitive valley close to the settlement. At about eight o'clock, everybody is in place. Suddenly, a military jeep comes along the road. It turns onto the field and

heads toward us. An officer opens the window of the car, puts his head out and screams at us, "You have to leave this area before four o'clock this afternoon!" Even the working hours are decided by the army. I stay with one of the families together with my colleague to pick some olives. After a while my colleague and I decide to split up; she will stay with the family and I will walk further into the valley, closer to the settlement, to help the families picking in that area. I work my way slowly through the valley. I stay an hour here and an hour there, helping and becoming acquainted with various people. About 1 km in to the valley, close to the settlement, I find some women picking olives by themselves. I decide that this is the place to be. It has a good overview of the area and these are the people that seem to need my help the most. After about an hour, the DCO arrives in the Land Rover. The driver spots me in a tree and hits the brakes. "You are not allowed to be there!" he shouts through the window of the car. I approach him and ask if it concerns the whole valley. He tells me that it is just that side of the road closest to the settlement that is a "no go" area for me. I have to move to the other side and abandon the women in their tree. On the other side of the road, I bump in to a group from the Rabbis for Human Rights. I join them in their picking for a while. There I am, a Christian minister from a country in the north, together with a Jewish rabbi from Israel, picking olives with a Muslim family in Palestine. A moment of holiness fills my body. Perhaps it was meant to be like this in the Holy Land; that we help each other with our daily bread without considering race, religion or nationality.

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A Palestinian Cookbook, A Leg Without an ID and 2 Washing Machines

By Jerusalem EA

In the theme of this article there is a strong hint of the bizarre! It highlights the absurdity of some of the things that happen at checkpoints and customs barriers here and which reflect the day to day experience of Palestinian people. Let me say straight away that I hope I never lose my capacity to be shocked by what I see and hear at these soul-destroying places. According to the latest figures from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), there are now over 600 checkpoints of various shapes and sizes around Jerusalem and the West Bank. It is almost impossible for a Palestinian to travel anywhere without going through one or more of these barriers, which means quite simply that you can never plan to make and keep an appointment. Many precious hours of many lives are lost, simply in waiting. Some months ago an NGO worker was returning to Norway and was carrying in her luggage a Palestinian cookbook. Going through customs, her bags and cases were thoroughly searched. In the course of this investigation, the officials came across the object in question, scrutinised it, consulted, then said to her, "we will have to confiscate this item. We can't give you an explanation but you will understand that it is for security reasons."

Even more bizarre, was the experience of the Palestinian family who were returning from Jerusalem to a West Bank village, carrying with them an item in a long wooden box. When they were questioned by the soldiers at the checkpoint they explained that they had been with their father who had just undergone major surgery in a Jerusalem hospital which had involved the amputation of a leg. They had left him in hospital, where he was making a good recovery, but they wanted to return home to bury the leg in the family grave. The soldiers demanded that the box be opened; they examined the leg, then asked the family if the limb had an ID. They said, naturally enough, that as the leg belonged to their father, the ID was with him in Jerusalem. After some discussion the soldiers decided that they couldn't allow the leg through without an ID. So the family had to

return to Jerusalem, recover the papers, make their way back to the checkpoint and then travel home. It was almost dark when they arrived at their village and the journey had taken eight hours – four times the length of its normal duration. I relate these stories not to ridicule Israel nor to deny the state's proper security concerns, but to point out the nonsense of this extreme, inhuman inflexibility and to illustrate the daily humiliations to which Palestinian people are subjected under this Occupation.

And what about the two washing machines? Ghassan Burquan, a stonecutter, living in the Israeli-controlled side of Hebron saved up for months and bought a washing machine. Since he is not allowed to drive a car to his home – Palestinian vehicles being banned on that stretch of the street – he parked nearby and carried the machine on his head accompanied by his wife, five children and his brother. Border police stopped him and asked to see what was inside the boxed appliance. His brother got upset and before long, the checkpoint was surrounded by armed men; Ghassan ended up in jail badly bloodied and accused of trying to steal a gun from the Border Police. Unusually, he was released on bail by the Appeals Court.

But the washing machine had disappeared. The incident, reported by *Haaretz* journalist Gideon Levy was read by two Israeli friends, Gershon and Elliott, who live in Jerusalem. They decided that in memory of a friend who had just died, they would buy a washing machine and deliver it to Ghassan, a man who was completely unknown to them. They made arrangements, and Yehiel, an acquaintance who works with Rabbis for Human Rights offered to drive the washing machine to Hebron. At the various checkpoints, soldiers concluded that the three men were Jewish settlers and waved them through. Ghassan and his brother met them in Hebron and they crowded into the back seat of the car. They arrived at the small apartment where Ghassan lives with his family, and as they shared food and drink together the three Israelis explained that they had brought the machine, not only in memory of their friend but that it was what their faith required of them.

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