

Ecumenical  
Accompaniment  
Programme  
in Palestine  
and Israel



# ChainReaction

Issue No 3, 2006

The quarterly magazine of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel



This Issue:

## Children and the conflict

The EAPPI is a World Council of Churches programme

# Editorial



**By Rifat Odeh Kassis**  
EAPPI International Programme Coordinator  
and Project Manager

## Dear friends and readers,

I warmly welcome you to this edition of ChainReaction, which is dedicated to the children and youth of Palestine.

Some of you may know that I have a particular attachment to children's issues, having set up the Palestinian Section of Defense for Children International some fifteen years ago and now being the elected President of that child rights' organization on the international level in my 'spare time'. Thus, given my personal involvement in this field, you will understand why I feel driven to underline a thousand times the imperativeness of shining the light on the plight of Palestinian children and youth in this edition of the magazine and through all other possible channels.

Children and youth are the first victims of any drawn-out conflict, and the kids in Palestine are no exception. For all the children and youth featured in this edition of ChainReaction, the daily grind of the occupation has unfortunately set the backdrop for their lives since birth. They have known nothing else but aggression and oppression through closures, curfews, collective punishment, violence, humiliation, abuse by Israeli soldiers and settlers, house demolitions and the Wall, etc. In short, the policies and

practices of the Israeli occupation since 1967 and especially since the outbreak of the second Intifada in September 2000, translate as the ongoing systematic violation of most, if not all, of Palestinian children's rights. To name some;

Their right to life - 734<sup>1</sup> children have been killed by the Israeli military or Israeli illegal settlers since September 2000. Only a small percentage of that figure was involved in armed clashes with the Israeli army and more than half of them were killed in their own homes, on their way to school or playing in their neighbourhoods. These unlawful killings of Palestinian children by Israeli armed forces are grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, not to mention punishable, in theory, under Israeli law itself. It is tragic and infuriating that the vast majority of killings are never investigated and the killers are rarely punished by the Israeli authorities.

Their right to education - During the first years of the second Intifada (2000-2004), severe closures resulted in children losing months worth of school. Since 2003, a new threat to Palestinian children's right to education has loomed - the

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Issue No.3, 2006

# The threatening sounds of silence

By Anja Reichel  
Ecumenical Accompanier  
and Sana'a Tawil  
Secretary of Tulkarem Refugee  
Camp Deaf Centre

Imagine not being able to hear. A child who has never experienced the voices of family members or the sounds of nature. A child that grows up learning not to be frightened if something happens all of a sudden; learning to sense things that everybody else 'hears'. Imagine not being able to hear whilst living under occupation.

Tulkarem Camp, with 18, 000 inhabitants and the second largest refugee camp in the West Bank, houses the only centre for deaf children in the whole district of Tulkarem. The centre was established in 1998. About 42 children come every day via bus, from throughout the district, to attend classes and extra-curricular activities.

Fifteen children from the Tulkarem Refugee Camp and the Nur Shams Refugee Camp come to the centre. One of them is 9 year old Odai from Nur Shams, who was born deaf. Together with a twin brother he is the youngest of six children. His father is deaf, as well as his two older brothers. One of them, Shaadi, is also a student at the deaf centre. His mother crosses into Israel illegally as often as possible in order to work as a housekeeper in Arab villages

inside Israel. It is a job that is better paid than anything she could get in Tulkarem and obviously worth the risk of being caught by the border police. Odai's father works from time to time, but with his handicap it is very difficult for him to find a job because unemployment is high in the region (according to locals it is greater than 70%). The family cannot afford to pay the monthly school fees of about \$20 for both Odai and his brother.

Odai has been coming to the centre since 2001, shortly after the outbreak of the second Intifada, to attend primary school. He was 5 years old at the time. From his older brothers and his father he has learnt some skills in communicating with other people whose hearing is reduced. However he was a very quiet and shy child. The centre was open throughout the Intifada, apart from when there was a curfew. The refugee camps were, and are, a particular target of the Israeli army. Therefore the tanks often came into the area of the school and soldiers started shooting. The children sensed the vibration of the tanks rolling up the street very quickly. Most of them heard only muffled sounds, and as a result the confusion was extremely frightening for them. Odai and his

classmates and friends often hid under the stairs or under tables, crying.

For Odai there was a dual pressure. Firstly, he was new to the centre in the company of children he barely knew. Secondly, he feared the army whom he had seen numerous times in the refugee camp. He had seen soldiers searching houses, arresting people and shooting, all in a world of silence. He didn't express his feelings to the teachers, except by crying and seeking solitude. Other students became more aggressive, they started shouting and hitting each other, but Odai continued hiding from the world around him.

Two months after his enrolment at the centre, his parents informed the teachers about their decision to keep Odai at home for several weeks. By that time he had started having severe nightmares, was afraid of going outside, and wet his bed at night. His mother told the teachers that Odai was afraid all the time. Two months later, Odai returned to the centre. His teachers took special care of him. They organized psychological treatment for him and other students. If the army threatened to come into the camp, he was the first to attempt to go home. The teachers comforted



him during stressful situations as well as they could. With his increasing skills in using sign language, he talked more about his feelings and slowly his fear seemed to decrease. He became a good student and developed a love for football.

Meeting Odai now, four years later, this story seems somehow surreal. He is very friendly and plays happily with his classmates. When the students are drawing in their free time, he doesn't draw violent scenes like the other children. Nor does he hide under tables anymore. Like his older brother, Odai wants to be a carpenter after he has graduated. The threatening sounds of silence will not stop him anymore.

Odai with his friends. Odai is the second from the left in the upper row.

Photo: Anja Reichel



Yara in her birthday hat

# Yara's Birthday

By **Silvana Hogg**  
Ecumenical Accompanier

Photos: Silvana Hogg

On 5th January 2006 little Yara Abu Haikal had her first birthday - a happy event to celebrate. Not such a big thing, a birthday party, you might think. Simply a case of getting lots of chocolate cake and other sweets, blowing up a few balloons, inviting the neighbours' children, and you have a party!

But things are not so easy if you live in the Tel Rumeida quarter of Hebron City in the West Bank. The Abu Haikal family of six lives here in a small house, the very last in Tel Rumeida street, at the top of a hill with great views over the old city of Hebron. Few Palestinian families remain in the area - many have moved away, because Tel Rumeida is also home to several extremist settler families. To get to the Abu Haikal house, you have to pass through the middle of the Tel Rumeida settlement which is strictly guarded by the Israeli army. Non-residents are not allowed to take this route - and even if the army does let you pass, it's not an easy route because there is still a risk of physical harassment by settlers.

Because of this, the most important guests of the party, the happy children, are missing. Instead, a bunch of international observers try to find their way to the Abu Haikal house

to visit little Yara and bring her cake and presents. We walk steadily up the hill towards the Tel Rumeida settlement. We are lucky - nobody stops us at the first checkpoint. A new unit arrived yesterday and the soldiers don't seem to know yet who is allowed to pass and who is not. As we approach the settlement, a small settler boy starts to yell at us; when this proves ineffective, he picks up some stones and throws them in our direction. We keep going to the second checkpoint, where a soldier asks us hesitantly where we are heading. We respond without stopping that we are visiting friends. His insecurity works to our advantage and he doesn't stand in our way.

Soon we find ourselves sitting in the Abu Haikal family living room, giving gifts and good wishes to the birthday girl, who immediately makes us laugh by biting into the balloons. Meanwhile, Hani Abu Haikal, Yara's father, starts to tell us the story of Yara's birth, exactly one year ago on a cold January night.

When Hani arrived home around 6pm that day, his wife Reema's labour pains had already started. After a while, Hani called an ambulance and they waited. Because the H2 zone, in which the family lives, is under Israeli control, it can take several hours before a Palestinian ambulance is allowed into the area. As Reema's pains were growing stronger and stronger, Hani decided at around 10pm to take her to hospital himself. Because Palestinians are not allowed to drive into H2, they would have to walk some distance to reach their car.

When they left the house, the soldier refused to allow them to walk down Tel Rumeida street, the only street leading from their home into the city. Reema and Hani had no choice but to take a long detour through the fields behind their house. By now, Reema's pains were very strong, so Hani had to carry his wife out into the icy winter night through a rocky olive field, crossing a narrow slippery embankment with drops of a metre or so on either side. After an exhausting half hour they reached the car and Hani was finally able to take his wife to the hospital. Only 10 minutes later, baby Yara took her first breath.

When the ambulance eventually arrived at the house of the Abu Haikal family, Hani had already returned home. It was 1 O'clock in the morning, and Yara was sleeping next to her exhausted mother in the hospital.

After the party, Hani lights our way with a torch. We follow the route

along which he and Reema struggled a year earlier. We don't talk much. We have to concentrate so as not to lose our footing on the rough ground and across the embankment. Each of us is thinking of that difficult journey a year ago; a journey which was necessary only because the ambulance was not allowed to enter H2 and because this peace-loving Palestinian couple weren't allowed to walk along the street in front of their home.

This story, so appalling to us, is sadly typical of everyday life for Palestinian families living under Israeli occupation. Ambulances are often delayed or prevented from passing checkpoints. Sometimes women are forced to give birth at checkpoints without skilled personnel and proper equipment. And sometimes they and their babies die as a result. Considering this, Yara's birthday is indeed an event to be celebrated.

Yara with her father, Hani





Shu'afat refugee camp can be seen on the left, and the settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev on the right.

# Behind the Wall

By **Mette Thygesen**  
and **Marisa Johnson**  
Ecumenical Accompaniers

Photos: Marisa Johnson

The Palestinian colours surround the name of Anata Boys' School above the gate, and the national flag flies proudly in the wind on this gray, overcast, January day. Since the start of the current school year, the school has become a 'cause celebre' – visitors have been coming here and articles have been written about it as far away as Canada. What is going on for the 725 boys, aged 11-18, who attend the school each day? The Jerusalem team of the EAPPI have come to see for themselves the conditions of the school, and to offer their help with protection and advocacy.

The story is that since the end of the summer break the school has been literally invaded by the Wall. The 'separation barrier', which Israel claims it needs for security reasons, is being built on the school grounds, and has halved the amount of space available to the boys for playing. 800 square metres have been taken, leaving 10m x 10m of concrete, surrounded by 9 metre high cement blocks. When we arrive, a class of 11-12 years old boys are taking some exercise in what is left of the yard – they face the concrete wall, which has been covered in drawings and paintings; the only way for them to



turn the tables and use the unwelcome gift to express their feelings and creativity.

With the Wall has come the noise of bulldozers and construction machinery, which disrupts school life. That, however, is insignificant, compared to the constant presence of armed guards, police and soldiers, who daily surround the school. During our visit we spot three military vehicles, one at the construction site behind the school, one down the hill and one up the hill, camouflaged by some rare green bushes.

Today is a quiet day, we only hear the distinctive beeping from the jeeps, which ensures the children become aware of the soldiers' presence. Yousef Ilian, the Headmaster, tells us through his interpreter Mai Rasas, the English teacher, that the soldiers taunt the children by ensuring that they know where they are, and some of the older boys respond by throwing stones. This has become a regular ritual, and

invariably results in the soldiers setting off sound bombs, firing tear-gas into the school, and, on occasions, even firing rubber bullets through the windows. We were shown a collection of these, kept in the Headmaster's office. The soldiers have also come into the school on many occasions, trying to arrest students and even teachers, and treating them roughly. Hot or dyed water and dogs have also been used against the children. The younger ones in particular are terrified and always look around when they are outside the school.

The toilet facilities are in the corner of the yard, but Mai tells us that many boys are afraid to use them, and even wet themselves for fear of going to the bathroom. The number of pupils coming to the school has dropped from nearly 800 to 725, as parents are afraid of what might happen to them. The school has very little by way of facilities and equipment – there are no computers, no central heating, no play apparatus. It is



The collection of rubber bullets which the headmaster keeps in his office



Left: The entrance to Anata Boys School  
Right: Boys taking exercise in what is left of the school yard

difficult for the children, and indeed the adults trying to work with them, to concentrate on lessons, whilst there is so much disruption to their daily lives. And what of the future?

Anata was once a prosperous agricultural village. Before 1967, land for miles to the east belonged to the village – two thirds of it has been confiscated, and four large Israeli settlements were built on parts of it. More recently, Pisgat Ze'ev, another settlement, has been built on the opposite hill, separated only by the valley behind the school. From the windows the children can see the neat houses clustered together, so different from the poor quality buildings that cover the refugee camp of Shu'afat, just on the adjacent hill, to the left of the settlement. It is hard to imagine why these children should accept that the separation barrier has to be built in their own backyard – surely such a barrier could and should be placed around those who wish to have such protection. But it is clear that the barrier has been built here - and elsewhere - as a means of appropriating more land.

We ask how we can help to improve the situation for the school. The Headmaster shows us the front yard, covered in rubble, which they would like to improve and use as additional space. They need financial and other support to complete this work. We offer to publicise the plight of the school, and receive a wry smile; Mr Ilian shows us 43 business cards which he has collected from visitors



Boys from the Junior school next door.

– they are a veritable 'who's who' of the international media and human rights organisations: the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Reuters, Unicef, Le Mond, CNN, Orla Guerin of the BBC, The Times, International Committee of the Red Cross. "None of them has made any difference, everything stays the same", he tells us. We Accompaniers feel helpless – such an array of media and NGO power has not been able to dent the might of the relentless Israeli encroachment on the land and lives of the Palestinians. What can we do? Mr Ilian smiles kindly and says that for us to be here, to witness their distress, to share their situation is important, and they appreciate our presence.

As we prepare to leave, the breakfast bell rings, and the boys pour out of the building into the cold morning air. They greet us cheerfully, want their pictures taken, and to practice a little English. On our way out we pass the junior school next door. The pupils are out in the front yard as well, and shout greetings at us from behind a wire fence. Next to the yard is a completely empty playground, the gate locked so that the children do not have access to it. Beyond it we spot the upper part of a military jeep, camouflaged among some greenery. We look at it, and wonder what protection is needed from a few dozen 6-10 year old children, and what long-term effects exposure to such treatment will have on the minds of these youngsters.

# Reconciliation the only way

Interviews with Emmanuela Magen Cassouto and  
Ali Abu Awwad of the 'Parents Circle'

By **Tore Ottesen**  
Ecumenical Accompanier

Photos: Osten Gunnarsson

The 'Families Forum' is the operational part of the organisation 'Parents Circle'; a group of 600 bereaved families seeking to work towards the resolution of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict through dialogue and mutual understanding. We met two of their members, Emmanuela (Nella) Magen Cassouto and Ali Abu Awwad.

Like all of the members of the Families Forum, Nella and Ali have lost a family member as a result of the conflict. A need to sit down and talk with the other side in order to come to terms with their own story and to contribute to solving the conflict, is something else they have in common.

## Nella's story

Nella's story of violence and revenge started even before she was born. She tells us her story:

"My uncle was working in a large refinery near Haifa at the time when Israel-Palestine was still under British mandate rule after the Second World War. 200 British people, 200 Jewish



Emmanuela talking with the  
Ecumenical Accompaniers

people and 2000 Palestinians worked at this place. One day the Israelis provoked the Arabs and killed five of them. The next day the Arabs revenged and killed 39 Jews, and my uncle was among them. I was born a month later and I got my name Emmanuela after him”.

Being named after her uncle was not always a nice experience. Emanuela says; “My name does not sound very good in Hebrew and the other children used to tease me crying Manuela, Manuela! In addition I had to be smart and polite and always behave like my parents wanted me to; all of this because I was a candle of memory for a person who had died”.

But she never thought that something like this would happen to her again. After the Six-Day War in 1967, Nella married her boyfriend who served as a pilot in the Israeli air force. Four years later, Israel shot down an Egyptian aeroplane and the next day Egypt revenged this and shot down an Israeli plane. Nella’s husband was the pilot.

Nella started a new phase in her life, having two babies to bring up on her own; the oldest was two years old and the younger one was just one month. Since their father had died in combat, Nella had the right to prevent her children from being combatants when they were old enough to enter military service, and she used this right. When the children had grown up and left the house she decided to join the group of bereaved families.

Like all of the members of the Families Forum, Nella and Ali have lost a family member as a result of the conflict. A need to sit down and talk with the other side in order to come to terms with their own story and to contribute to solving the conflict, is something else they have in common.

She thought that the only option for her is to have dialogue with the ‘other’. “There is no other choice”, she says. “For nearly 60 years we have been killing each other. More blood is not needed to show the world that we are good fighters. We have to stop this bloodshed!”

#### Ali’s story

Ali is from a family who became refugees in 1948 and he grew up in the village Beit Ummar between Hebron and Bethlehem. He was raised in a political home and his mother was a Fatah leader who spent more than five years in prison. When the first Intifada started in 1987, Ali got involved in the struggle.

“I threw many stones”, he says, “.....and I thought this was the way to help my people achieve independence. They arrested me twice and I spent around four years in prison”. After the Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993 he was released from prison. Like many others, he thought that things would change after Oslo.

The second Intifada, which started in 2000, was more violent than the

first, and Ali’s family was one of many who paid a high price: “One day before they killed my brother I was going to Halful, a village next to us. An Israeli settler was driving on the road from Kiryat Arba to Jerusalem and he was shooting people through the window of his car. He shot and killed a man in Halful and I was hit hard in my knee. I was sent to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment and after I had been there around one month, I got a phone call from my brother, telling me that my younger brother Yusef had been killed by an Israeli soldier”.

“Yusef was out driving his car when he was stopped at an Israeli checkpoint. At the checkpoint there were some Palestinian youths who were throwing stones at the soldiers. Yusef talked with the kids and convinced them to stop. But when he got back to his car, one of the soldiers started throwing small stones at him. It had provoked the soldier that a Palestinian guy could make the children stop throwing stones - something the soldiers could not manage with all their force. Yusef got out of the car and tried to talk to the soldier. Then the soldier shot him

standing 70 centimetres away from him, and killed him. He left us with one son and one daughter and his wife”.

“This happened on 16th November 2000. From that moment I didn’t want to talk with the Israelis. I didn’t want to see them, and I closed myself in”, says Ali. Eight months later, an Israeli father who had lost his daughter in a suicide bomb attack contacted Ali’s family. He was from the Bereaved Families’ Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, and they were searching for partners on the Palestinian side.

“We invited him to our house. I couldn’t imagine how a father who had lost his daughter could come and sit and talk with the enemy. I know this feeling very well, to loose somebody. So how was he able to accept the rights of the other side? When they came and started talking about the right of the Palestinians to have independence and freedom, and blaming the occupation, this somehow opened me up. It was the first time I saw the victims on the other side. I used to see the Israelis as soldiers, I used to argue with them. I wasn’t used to talking with them as humans and being treated by them as a human being. I have a story which illustrates this: One month ago I was coming to Jerusalem through Gush Etzion and a soldier stopped me at the checkpoint. He came to my car and he asked me: “What do you think about the checkpoint?” The way he asked made it sound like he was proud of the checkpoint. I answered that the



Ali talking with the Ecumenical Accompaniers

checkpoints are the worst thing in the world. So he told me: “Why, can you explain? What do you need to complain and cry over?” I told him: “Because you are suffering.” He was surprised and said: “How come? You are suffering, am I suffering?” I told him: “Yes, I’m in a jeep and it is warm and comfortable. You are out in the rain and suffering and I am sure you don’t want to be here.” After this he started talking to me as a human being”.

“So it depends on how you treat the other person”, Ali believes. “If I had mentioned myself and my anger to that soldier he would have reacted badly and maybe even with violence. But I talked to him as a human being and a rightful person. I don’t accept the checkpoints because of the suffering they are causing. And it doesn’t matter who is suffering! The question is if you are ready to give the other person a choice”.

## Meeting in groups

In the forum, people like Ali and Nella meet each other and share their stories. Nella says: "In the groups we reflect over what we see and hear and we are very empathic to each other. We are trying to help each other through the same issues of pain; whether it's a Jewish mother who lost her son or a Palestinian mother who lost her son. They have the same feelings, the same sadness, the same loss".

## Education

An important part of the Parents Circle's work is educational. Usually one Israeli and one Palestinian member of the forum go together to schools, high schools and universities in Israel-Palestine to talk with students, to share their stories and to discuss the option of dialogue as an alternative to revenge. Last year they had 1200 lectures in schools and universities, and through this they reached a substantial number of people.

The members of the forum receive different types of reactions from the young people. The pupils are often sceptical in the beginning, but during the sessions Nella and Ali often see that the attitudes change among the pupils: "I remember one student who said that my husband deserved to die because he was in the army. Ali told her to just think about it again. Afterwards the young lady who had told me this wrote a note and said

**"If there is somebody to blame for the situation in Israel-Palestine we have to start blaming ourselves. In my opinion everybody is guilty and everybody is a victim here", says Ali.**

that she was so sorry", says Nella.

"Another time I had a presentation for a group of Italians led by a Palestinian man. After the session this man asked if he could talk with me. He told me that his daughter had been to a presentation with two of our members at a school in East Jerusalem a few months ago. The Israeli person from the forum who had lost his 12 year old daughter in a suicide bomb attack in Jerusalem had made a particularly strong impact on her. And when she came home she told her father: "Dad I want to ask you something. If anything happens to me, please take this way of reconciliation, of dialogue. Go to this group and don't try to revenge me." I still can feel my hair rising when I think about this girl", Nella says.

## Summer camps for children

The Parents Circle also arrange summer camps for the children from bereaved families. "We have had these camps three or four times in kibbutzim for Israeli and Palestinian kids. It is really amazing to look at how they interact. In the beginning they don't even share a common language together; after a day or two you don't see who is who", says Nella.

The forum also tries to arrange gatherings for young people who have attended lectures and have become interested in meeting people from the other side. For a few years they have also run a telephone project where people can call and get connected with people from the other side.

## The way forward

"If there is somebody to blame for the situation in Israel-Palestine we have to start blaming ourselves. In my opinion everybody is guilty and everybody is a victim here", says Ali. "If you are not doing enough I cannot just blame you, I have to blame myself first because I don't do anything to encourage you to do more. If we look at the case this way, I think most of us would be active against the handful of extremists. We have some extremist elements in our societies and they are the ones pulling us in the wrong direction", Ali states.

Nella believes that it is up to the politicians to find a solution. She believes that one day they will. "In the meantime," she says, "we are building the foundation for dialogue. It will be easier to make peace when you know the people you are going to make peace with".



# Building Hope from Within the Heart of Bethlehem's Children

Interview with Ibrahim Issa, Co-Director of the  
Hope Flowers School, Al-Khadr, Bethlehem

By Mary O'Regan  
Ecumenical Accompanier

Ibrahim Issa gave me a very warm welcome when I arrived to interview him about the Hope Flowers School in Bethlehem. Ibrahim is a director of the school that his father established in 1994. So, he was well placed to explain how his father's personal background originally inspired him to establish this unique school.

Ibrahim's father, Hussein Ibrahim Issa, was born in a village north of Tel Aviv in 1947, but spent most of his life in

Children outside the Hope Flowers  
School. Photos: Mary O'Regan.

the Deheisha Refugee Camp is bethlehem as a consequence of his parents' expulsion from their lands in 1949. Ibrahim believes that because his father lived as a refugee and was a qualified social worker and teacher, working for many years with UNRWA,<sup>1</sup> "he recognized the deep impact of the occupation on the Palestinian children and the need for a safe and supportive environment for these children." Therefore, in 1984, Hussein Issa felt called to establish the Al-Amal Childcare Center. In 1994 the Hope Flowers School was opened in Al Khadr, as a means of further implementing his educational philosophy.

Ibrahim states that his father believed that the best way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was to create a new generation of Palestinians and Israelis who believe in peace and co-existence. The first stage of peaceful coexistence would be a process of healing for the sufferings caused by the Israeli occupation. Secondly, the Palestinian people must increasingly empower themselves and rely on their inner selves to overcome the effects of military occupation.

Hussein Issa's original hopes are still alive in the school's programme today. Ibrahim explained that the school is firmly established on the principles of non-violence and the importance of undertaking different levels of peace education. Firstly, teachers are trained to act as positive role models for the pupils. Teachers are specially trained



to compassionately listen and positively empower pupils to overcome their fear of the 'other', and to recover from the psychological traumas that accompany the Israeli occupation. Secondly, Ibrahim states that the school also supports parents because the family plays a crucial role in children's development. Thirdly, the school's principles of peace education are directly integrated into its day-to-day activities with the children. Ibrahim explained that: "Our peace education is not so much based on theoretical material. Peace is not something that you learn from a book and pass in an examination. Instead, peace is a way of life. You have to integrate and adopt it in your daily life. And my father used to say that we have to provide peace education to our children with their mother's milk, because it has to start so early."

Within this educational philosophy, all children have the potential to become a contributor to positive social change within their community and family. Ibrahim argued that the success of this

philosophy is illustrated by the fact that none of the Hope Flowers School's past or present pupils have been involved in Intifada-related violence. Ibrahim also argued, however, that the true potentials of peace education are not that they produce greater acceptance of, or justification for, the occupation. Instead, peace education truly gives people greater options to struggle against repressive violence and to resist occupation.

In practical terms, the school has always sought to bring as many children as possible together from both sides and to teach them to go beyond fear and stereotyping the other. However, because of the ongoing occupation, Ibrahim explained, "The gap now between the two people in general is wider. The building of walls especially means that the children of both sides will grow up in an atmosphere of hatred and limited beliefs and stereotyping of the other. There will be no human-to-human connection because of this closure policy." Specifically, the Israeli closure

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency was established in 1951 as the official UN Agency with responsibility for the Palestinian Refugee population.



policy and the separation barrier have forced the school to cease the exchange programme that it organized between its pupils and Israeli Jewish pupils before 2000.

Notwithstanding these human barriers, however, Ibrahim remains hopeful that the school will intensify its positive contacts with Israeli society. The school continues to teach subjects such as the Hebrew language, in order to “promote dialogue, prevent stereotyping and minimize fear.” This is significant precisely because the Hope Flowers school was the first Palestinian school in 1990 that started to teach Hebrew. Now, after 16 years, many schools in Bethlehem have started to teach the Hebrew language. The school has also maintained links with Jewish educators and religious leaders, and it keeps its inter-faith programme alive by integrating Muslim and Christian students within the school and by teaching religion holistically. The school also relies more on outreach programmes in order to overcome the movement restrictions and closures imposed by the occupation.

The biggest difficulties faced by the Hope Flowers School, as a result of Israel's policies over the past 5 years, have been financial difficulties. The rate of enrolment in the school decreased dramatically from 500 pupils in 1999 to 120 pupils in 2000. Many parents cannot now afford to pay the school's tuition fees, because they have lost their employment. The school was forced to close its secondary school and now it no longer provides classes from

Grade 7 to Grade 12. The road to the school was blocked in 2002, further restricting access to the school. Moreover, Israel's current plans to continue with the construction of the separation barrier into the village of Al-Khadr means that all Palestinian homes located within the area earmarked for the wall's construction will be demolished. The Hope Flowers School's cafeteria has been issued with a demolition order too and the school is actively enlisting the support of concerned organizations and individuals to petition the Israeli authorities not to execute this order.

However, looking into the future, Ibrahim believes that his father's ideals are as relevant for the future as they were in the past, and that the only way forward for the school is to proactively overcome the difficulties imposed upon it by the Israeli occupation. He explained that the human spirit is such that people will always seek to overcome the victimization imposed on their lives: “Sitting as victim, as someone who doesn't have power to shape his or her life is a really big problem. People will lose hope and start to see themselves as victims and we don't want people to have this victim feeling. Even though we are an occupied people, our education system is based on the principle that even through non-violence, we still have the inner power of the human being..... I want to ask you a question”, says Ibrahim: “What is the alternative? Are we to remain the victim, or do we move ahead and shape our lives more positively?”

For more information on the school, please visit their website, [www.hope-flowers.org](http://www.hope-flowers.org)

# Growing up among sheep and settlers

The life of students and young people in a small West Bank village

By Sara Lindblom and Christiane Gerstetter  
Ecumenical Accompaniers

Photo: Christiane Gerstetter

*Sara Lindblom and Christiane Gerstetter have spent three months since December 2005 as Ecumenical Accompaniers in Yanoun. Having gone through adolescence not so long ago; a life of going out to cafés, cinemas and other places, they find the lives of the young people in Yanoun very different from their own and wondered how it felt to grow up in a place like this.*

The word 'idyllic' seems to have been invented for the very purpose of describing the village of Yanoun, located close to the West Bank city of Nablus. Looking over the valley, seeing olive trees and villagers as they graze their sheep, one is tempted to forget that the occupation is still in place. Lifting the gaze a little to the surrounding hilltops that carry the outposts of the nearby settlement of Itamar, one is sharply reminded that life might be less peaceful in Yanoun than it seems at first.

Some 15 to 20 families live in Yanoun, most of them with five or more children. Children and teenagers of different ages thus constitute the majority of the village population. Around half a dozen young people from Yanoun study in Nablus, or want

to do so after they have finished high school in the nearby town of Aqraba. Those who study in Nablus live there during the week, mostly in flats together with other students, coming home only on the weekend. The reason for this is the checkpoint at Huwara which people have to cross nowadays to go from Nablus to Yanoun.

Eighteen year old Muhammad Murrar, a first year student of pharmacology, says it takes between one and three hours every time he crosses the checkpoint to come home, too much time to do it every day. His older brother Munthir, who finished his studies about 2 years ago and has since been a teacher in the local school, sometimes had to walk through the hills to go to university, instead of using the road, and was, together with his co-students, occasionally detained by the Israeli army for several hours while doing so. At one point, Al-Najah university in Nablus was closed for several months due to the occupation, but for the last year it has been able to keep open without interruption.

Even for those who manage to complete their studies under such conditions, the future holds some



Muhammad Murrar

difficulties. The economic situation in Palestine is bad. Several men from Yanoun who used to work in Israel have no longer been able to do so since the beginning of the second Intifada. Ashraf Abu Hania, a 23 year old from Yanoun, studying Arabic Literature in Nablus is, however, quite confident that he will be able to find a job as a teacher. His status as a refugee opens the possibility of working at one of the UN run schools in the West Bank.

Ashraf's sister, Heba, who will finish high school this year, is going to get married this summer. She plans to move in with her husband in Bethlehem and study English at university there. Explaining her fluent English she says: "The girls are all quite good at school. The boys go outside to play in the streets. The girls just stay home and study." She would like to be a professor at university and is quite determined to go ahead with it. Muhammad, in turn, is more pessimistic about his future as a pharmacist. He is not sure whether he will be able to find a job in the West Bank and thinks he might have to leave for one of the countries in the region. "Life there is easier than here", he says. One of his older brothers has just left for the Emirates, not having been able to find a job as an engineer after completing his studies in Nablus.

Most of the families in Yanoun get at least some of their income from farming – sheep and olives are the two main sources of income.

Everybody has to help. One sometimes sees the adolescent sons going with the sheep on the hillside, while the older girls have to work in the house and look after their numerous siblings. The village is too small to have any kind of youth club or café. Visits to and from neighbours and relatives from the village or outside are the main social activity, besides staying at home with the large family.

Eighteen year old Lubna Abdelatif is not quite sure yet whether she would like to move away from Yanoun to a bigger place once she gets married. "There are some good things in all places", she says and smiles. Ashraf, on the other hand, is quite certain that he would like to live and work somewhere else, maybe in Nablus.

To most of the young people we talk to, the settlement outposts close to their village and the settlers who have harrassed the villagers repeatedly, by walking through the village, destroying property and even injuring people, are by far the worst aspect of the occupation. They describe how they and their sisters and brothers have been afraid of the settlers, how they sometimes had to stay inside their houses while the settlers walked through the village. Otherwise the occupation is not always in their faces, and is felt more when they leave the village for the outside world. When we ask what the young people would like to change in Yanoun, several of them answer: "The settlers should go."



EAs Elin and Vera with young people from Aida camp by the wall in Bethlehem

# Reflections from Bethlehem

Compiled by **Vera Scherrer** and **Elin Vaernes Anthonisen**  
'Accompaniers'

Photos: Elin Vaernes Anthonisen

The Bethlehem team of Ecumenical Accompaniers run a conversation class for young people in the Lajee Centre (a cultural centre) of Aida Refugee Camp. As part of our activities we asked them to explain their situation for ChainReaction readers and write something about their hopes and dreams for the future. This is what they wrote:

My name is Nimer. I'm 14 years old. I live in Azzeh camp, but I'm originally from Beit Jebreen village. My favourite colour is blue and my hobby is playing karate and football. I'm in 9th grade.

The future is very far from me. But I hope it will be peace in Palestine. And I want to study to be a doctor in another country. I want to return to Palestine to help the people. And these things will not happen if we don't have peace. So I want peace very much. And I want a big family and a big house in the West Bank in Palestine. And I hope my dreams come true.

My name is Mohammed Al-Azzeh. My home village is Beit Jebreen and I live in Aida camp. I have got two sisters and four brothers. I like playing football and biljard. I study in a school in Beit Jala and I'm in 10th grade. I am a member of Lajee Center. My ambition is to be a clown. My dream is to travel. I wish to have freedom and peace.

I'm Samar, 16 years from Palestine. I live in Bethlehem. I live under the occupation and the control of Israeli soldiers. Because of this occupation the communication between the people and other countries has ended. I dream to be a designer. My hobby is playing basketball. I hope for Palestine to get her freedom and independency. I hope to withdraw occupation and the racism wall which divided the cities and the people. I hope for all prisoners to get their freedom and all refugees to come back to their homes which the Israelis took in 1948 and 1967 and to return to Jerusalem.

I am Marwan. I am 19 years old. I live in Aida Camp in Bethlehem. First of all I wish to live in peace like other people in the world. Second, I wish that all the prisoners come out from prison and live with us in our land in peace. Third, if all of us live in peace and freedom I would like to finish my studies and serve my country and the people.

My name is Hamza from Aida Camp in Bethlehem Palestine. My age is 18 years. I like to finish my studies and I like to live in freedom in Palestine without any soldiers.

My name is Linda. I am 16 years old, and I am originally from Beit Jebreen village where my family used to live before 1948 the year that the Israeli soldiers confiscated our land and expelled the Palestinian people. After being deprived of our homeland, we were forced to live in Azzeh camp. I spend my time in Lajee Center as I am a member of this center and I like reading. Since the second intifada began, the people have faced many obstacles. Soldiers are everywhere, curfews most of the night and checkpoints at everywhere. All these things make our life hard. This situation fills me with sadness and pain. I hope to live in peace and to have freedom. My dream is to finish my study and find a job.

I am Ibrahim. I live in Aida camp and I am 17 years old. I wish to finish my studies and choose what I like to study later. If I don't have a chance to study what I like I wish to become a policeman and to stop the violence.

My name is Layan. I am 15 years old. One day the Israeli soldiers were shooting at boys and girls in the youth activity centre when the youth were playing in a band. The soldiers start shooting and every boy and girl were frightened for hours. The soldiers stop shooting for 5 minutes and then started shooting again after two minutes. I want to have peace in Palestine. I love peace!



## About the Lajee Center

Lajee' means 'refugee' in Arabic. The Lajee Center was established in Aida Camp in April 2000 by a group of 11 young people from the Camp who wanted to serve the community. It is an independent, Palestinian, non-governmental organization, registered with the Ministry of NGO Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority in 2001. The main aim of the Center is to provide refugee youth with cultural, educational, social and developmental opportunities. Its programmes are designed in response to the particular needs of the children and the skills and abilities of its members. ([www. http:// www.lajee.org/main.html](http://www.lajee.org/main.html))



# Bil'in a microcosm of the Occupation

By **Andreas Hedfors**  
Ecumenical Accompanier

5-year old Mohammed Iyad playing in the construction site on the lands of his native village Bil'in, west of Ramallah. The settlement can be seen in the background. Photos: Andreas Hedfors.

On February 20, 2005, the men and women of Bil'in (near Ramallah) took their children by the hand and walked the familiar road towards the western olive groves of this West Bank village of some 1,700 inhabitants. Construction of the Israeli 'separation barrier' as well as a massive new settlement was underway, and the village committee had opted for nonviolent resistance. One year of weekly protests and inventive defiance followed.

Since the end of 2005, Ecumenical Accompaniers have been accompanying the non-violent demonstrations which take place every Friday. Almost a year to the day since the resistance began, three EAs from the Ramallah team arrive at a makeshift cement house in the olive groves.

Children are playing in the quarry heaps nearby, fragments of conversation in Hebrew, Arabic,

English and other languages drift in our direction and an inviting fire is crackling in the campsite next to the house. We find ourselves inside the new Israeli settlement of Matityahu East, still under construction, but also inside an inventive non-violent movement from the village and its Israeli supporters. In the early hours of December 26 2005, they built a stone house beyond the separation barrier, in a ravaged olive grove which stands on village lands but is simultaneously included in the settlement plan, known as 'urban plan 210/8/1'.

That plan may sound only theoretical, but its consequences are very concrete, taking the form of a neat row of newly built apartment houses. And here is the catch. Not only have the apartments been built on Occupied Territory and are thus in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, but they all lack even valid Israeli building permits. A recent High Court appeal initiated by the Israeli peace movement has proved that the authorities were aware that the construction lacked permits, but refrained from enforcing the law and stopping it.

So the villagers and members of the Israeli peace movement wanted to highlight the issue of selective law enforcement in the Occupied Territories. And EAPPI was called on to help them.

When the flag-wielding children and joking Israelis and Palestinians have left, we remain at the house where we

will stay overnight. A rowdy group of teenagers and men in their thirties and forties greet us with broad smiles out of their kafiyas; shawls in red and white or white and black. Burlly chatter, laughter and smoke fill the air. Our Arabic works well for pleasantries, but soon the words all float together in a long sonnet of different voices lost to us.

The villagers try to ensure that a constant presence is kept at the stone house to prevent any attempts by the Israeli army to demolish it. Because of the well-argued High Court petition, spelling out all the violations of the authorities in this matter, so far they have not been able to do so. Instead, in what campaigners have called an unprecedented move, the High Court on January 6 temporarily stopped settlement construction at the site. This was a huge achievement, demonstrating that non-violent resistance can work.

However the human cost of the villagers' activism has been



## Fact file

In 1999, urban Plan 210/8 was validated by a sub-committee of the 'Supreme Planning Council of the Israeli (military's) Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria'. It contained plans for 1,532 housing units on land confiscated from the nearby Palestinian village of Bil'in in 1990. The plan, however, detailed construction in areas outside the jurisdiction of Upper Modi'in; the Israeli settlement which is situated on a hill overlooking the village.

In March 2005, Gil'ad Rogel, who is the legal counsel of the orthodox Upper Modi'in settlement, wrote to colleagues as well as to the Civil Administration's planning bureau head, Shlomo Moskowitz that "construction violations of colossal dimensions" were being carried out. But Moskowitz was already aware of the illegal construction - and had been since the end of 2004.

But there was more to come. In November 2005, construction of a road north of the building site alerted villagers to the fact that the work was not following Plan 210/8 but a more ambitious version named 210/8/1, which envisages no less than 3,008 housing units instead of 1,532. This plan draws upon a long-term guiding document for the area, the 'Modi'in Illit Master Plan', made in 1998, which sets a goal of 150,000 inhabitants by the year 2020. The Master Plan is unofficial, ignores jurisdictional areas and even makes plans for building on privately-owned Palestinian land.

In a recent report entitled 'Under the Guise of Security', Israeli organisations B'Tselem and BIMKOM compared the Master Plan with the route of the separation barrier. They write that: 'The aerial photo of the Modi'in Illit bloc shows that the outline plans...was a primary consideration in setting the barrier's route. ... In the eastern section, the route follows the eastern borders of Outline Plan 210/8/1 (Matityahu East) [i.e., the unapproved plan which is now being illegally implemented]... The state admitted that these two plans were taken into account in setting the route.'

'Under the Guise of Security, Routing the Separation Barrier to Enable the Expansion of Israeli Settlements in the West Bank,' December 2005, Bimkom and B'Tselem.

considerable, with many injuries occurring from tear gas and plastic or rubber bullets. Since mid-February 2006, thirteen young men from the village have been in prison. One of them is 24-year old Asrar Samara, who has at present spent some four months in detention without trial, according to the village committee.



So far, the route of the barrier has not been altered, and following the suspended construction work at Matityahu East, the High Court was set to reconvene in late February.

But most probably, as you read this, come Friday noon after prayers, the children, women and men of Bil'in will bring their Israeli and international supporters with them along the muddy path leading to the site, in yet another defiant move towards justice for the village. So far, despite attempts to prevent them from reaching the stone house, they have always been able to do so. To grieve for their olive trees. To celebrate the bonds of joint Israeli-Palestinian resistance. To have tea in the garden. And to play in the quarry heaps.



# Editorial

*Continued from Page 2*

Wall. Hundreds of school pupils and university students have been cut off from their schools by the Wall. In this edition, read the article on Anata Boys School in East Jerusalem, where the Wall is being built on their school grounds! And then there are the checkpoints. This edition also features an article on the young people of Yanoun and the difficulties they experience in reaching their university in the nearby city of Nablus.

Their right to an adequate standard of living† - Between 40-50%<sup>2</sup> of Palestinians live under the official poverty line (on US \$2 a day or less). Around 1.4 million Palestinians live on humanitarian handouts. Children make up 65% of the population, so there is no need to guess which group is most susceptible to poverty in Palestine.

Their right to a good standard of health. Some 2,800 Palestinian children die every year from mainly preventable diseases; 10 percent now suffer from chronic or acute malnutrition and about one in five is anemic<sup>3</sup>.

Their right to safe and secure housing - Since the beginning of the second Intifada, over 5,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished by the Israeli authorities<sup>4</sup>, rendering thousands of children homeless.

Their right to freedom of movement- To move in or out of any major town in the West Bank and Gaza, you have to pass through an Israeli military checkpoint. Permission to leave or enter any place is ultimately in the hands of the soldiers on duty and Palestinians, especially male youths, are often turned back arbitrarily. Freedom of movement is also curtailed

by other factors, such as when a violent radical Israeli settler community is occupying your neighbourhood, as is the case in the article on page 6 related to one-year old Yara Abu Haikal and her family, who are surrounded by the illegal Tel Rumeida settlement in Hebron.

Their right to development- Obviously the daily onslaught of child rights' abuses by the Israeli Occupation heavily curtails a child's ability to develop to the best of his/her potential. When that child's development is already challenged by a disability, living under occupation in Palestine can take on horrific proportions, as is reflected in the article that relates the perspective of 9-year-old Odai from Tulkarem refugee camp, who was born deaf.

Their right to liberty - Currently approximately 394 children are in detention in Israeli prison facilities, most of them either charged with offences they did not commit or serving sentences that are disproportionate to their misdemeanours. Torture by Israeli forces is unfortunately a common practice inside these prison facilities.

Despite this dismal picture of child rights' abuses in Palestine, this edition is not just about showing the hardship of Palestinian children and youth living under occupation. It also aims to highlight stories of hope and creativity, optimism and resilience among children and young people. Therefore, in this edition you will find other interesting pieces, such as two interviews- one with the Families Forum; an Israeli-

Palestinian group which brings together people on both sides who have lost loved ones in the conflict and educates young people on reconciliation, and the second, an interview with the Director of Hope Flowers School in Bethlehem which incorporates non-violence and peace education into the curriculum. Pages 20-21 contain the dreams and hopes of several young people from the Lajee Cultural Centre in Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, while the closing article talks about the weekly non-violent protests against settlement expansion and the Wall by families in the West Bank village of Bil'in, which children are often the protagonists of, heading the marches and chanting songs of freedom.

With a new government currently being formed and mobilized, everyone talks about a turning point in Palestinian history. Palestinian children and youth today are waiting for that turning point, hoping it will lead to the creation of better living conditions and an improvement in the status of their rights. They stand at a unique crossroads, where everything hangs in the balance. But in the meantime, life goes on. This edition provides a snapshot of how 'life is going on' for a number of children in Palestine. I hope you enjoy it, but I also hope the landscape of that snapshot will have changed for the better by the next issue of ChainReaction.

For more information on Defense for Children International, please see: [www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org) or [www.dci-is.org](http://www.dci-is.org)

1 Source: Defence for Children International/Palestine Section (DCI/PS): [www.dci-pal.org](http://www.dci-pal.org)

2 Source: Palestinian Centre for Human Rights: [www.pchrgaza.org](http://www.pchrgaza.org)

3 Source: Unicef Donor Update 08 December 2005 †[http://www.unicef.org/oPt/Final\\_DU\\_8\\_Dec\\_12-22.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/oPt/Final_DU_8_Dec_12-22.pdf)

4 Source: Israel' Committee Against House Demolitions: [www.icahd.org](http://www.icahd.org)

### **World Council of Churches (WCC)**

is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity.

The WCC brings together more than 340 churches, denominations, and church fellowships in over 100 countries and territories throughout the world, representing some 400 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of denominations from such historic traditions of the Protestant Reformation as Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed, as well as many united and independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific.

The Roman Catholic Church is a full member of many national ecumenical and several regional ecumenical organisations and has a regular working relationship with the WCC.

### **The Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA)**

comprises 30 people nominated by churches and regional ecumenical organisations to advise the WCC in international affairs. The staff of the WCC International Affairs, Peace and Human Security team - experienced professionals from around the world - engages with and supports churches and ecumenical bodies on these urgent priorities:

- peace-making and peaceful resolution of conflicts
- militarism, disarmament, and arms control
- human security and the root causes of terrorism
- human rights, religious liberty, and intolerance
- impunity, justice, and reconciliation
- international law and global governance

### **The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)**

supports Palestinians and Israelis working for peace by monitoring and reporting violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, offering protection by accompanying local communities in daily activities, and by advocating with churches for a peaceful end to the Occupation. The programme, which began in 2002, is coordinated by the World Council of Churches (WCC) within the Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA).

#### OTHER PUBLICATIONS FROM THE EAPPI

- **ChainReaction** No.1: "The EAPPI Confronting violence with presence"
- **ChainReaction** No.2: "While The World was Watching Gaza"
- *Sawahreh Against the Wall - The Struggle of a Palestinian Village, dealing with the Infringements on Freedom brought about by Israel's ever-tightening Occupation*
- *Separated Families: A Report by Anna Seifert, Ecumenical Accompanier (September-December 2004) [www.quaker.org/eappi](http://www.quaker.org/eappi)*
- *The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel: Two Years of Nonviolent Witness and Active Presence for Peace*
- *Security or Segregation? The Humanitarian Consequences of Israel's Wall of Separation*
- Video: *End the Occupation - Voices for a Just Peace* (21 minutes)

All the above can be ordered by writing to [eappi@wcc-coe.org](mailto:eappi@wcc-coe.org). More articles and further information on the programme can be found by going to [www.eappi.org](http://www.eappi.org).



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