

September-October 2008 Newsletter
Number 25

28th Group of Ecumenical Accompaniers in Palestine & Israel



Group 28 at Lifta.

A group of 25 Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) began their three-month term at the beginning of September. Group 28 comprises 13 women and 12 men, from 10 different countries (Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA). The EAPPI welcomed the second Hungarian participant in the programme as well as seven priests/pastors, five students, three teachers, two journalists, two social workers, a businessman, a massage therapist, a caterer, a playwright and a nurse. Three South African EAs and one Swiss EA returned for another term. Profiles of the current EAs are posted on the EAPPI website, www.eappi.org. Group 28 will hand over their duties to the 29th Group of EAs on 17th November.



Bethlehem checkpoint during Ramadan. 19.09.08.
Photo by EA Simi Ann Solaas.

Ramadan 2008

On the first day of duty in their placements, which coincided with the first Friday of Ramadan, the 28th Group of EAs eagerly set out to monitor the checkpoints and entrances to Jerusalem in cooperation with UNOCHA and Machsom Watch. The EAs' statistics and reports from Qalandiya and Bethlehem checkpoints were shared with UNOCHA, UNRWA, ICRC, Machsom Watch, the *Waqf* and local media. While the EAs witnessed thousands of people who were let through the checkpoints to pray at the Al Aqsa Mosque, it is difficult to estimate the many more thousands who hoped to come to Jerusalem but were denied entry. EAs' photos of the checkpoints during the Fridays of Ramadan can be accessed on the website.

Countdown to the International Action Week – It's Time for Palestine – 4-10 June 2009

The countdown has begun to the fourth International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel (ICAPPI) – It's Time for Palestine, a World Council of Churches initiative that will take place all over the world on 4-10 June 2009. The ICAPPI Working Group met in London in mid-October to plan and agree on key areas of collaboration and responsibility. It was agreed that the goal of the action week is to *catalyse and coordinate new and existing advocacy action for a joint international witness for peace and justice in Palestine and Israel*. The Working Group will distribute a prayer and liturgy from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem as well as advocacy and educational resources for use in 2009. EAPPI intends to play a larger role in 2009, participating actively and publicly in the prescribed actions of ***Praying, Educating and Advocating***. If you would like further information or get involved in the week, please email the EAPPI Communications & Advocacy Officer on eappi-co@jrol.com.

Settler violence continues in the West Bank

The month of October saw a sharp increase in Israeli settler violence. OCHA reports at least 34 incidents of violence and vandalism by Israeli settlers during October.¹ Worryingly, several incidents have been reported in which clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians have led to Palestinian injuries inflicted by IDF soldiers.² EAPPI has been providing protective presence in and reporting about communities that have been subjected to settler violence and vandalism, such as Tel Rumeida and Wadi Hussein in Hebron, Susiya and Um al Kher in the South Hebron Hills, Kafr Qaddum near Qedumim settlement, Asira al Qibliya and Burin near Yitzhar and Bracha settlements and Yanoun near Itamar settlement. Check out the website for eyewitness reports.



A tense situation in Hebron. October 2008.

West Bank closures

During the Jewish feasts of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, Israeli Authorities imposed general closures in the West Bank. All Palestinians with valid permits were prevented from entering Israel and East Jerusalem, including non-emergency medical cases. EAs were also unable to access the Israeli-controlled H2 area of Hebron. These access restrictions have remained during much of the olive harvest in Hebron.



Harvesting olives in Kafr Qaddum under military surveillance. 24.10.08. Photo by EA Simon Kortjass.

Olive harvest

Across the West Bank, skirmishes between Israeli settlers and Palestinian olive harvesters have broken out when settlers have either attacked Palestinian olive harvesters or tried to prevent them from reaching their agricultural land. EAs are currently providing presence and complementing the workforce in several vulnerable areas in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Tel Rumeida, Battir, Nahalin, Al Walaja, Mount of Olives, Yanoun, Kafr Qaddum and Jayyous seam zone. Photos of EAs participating in the olive harvest can be found on the website.

Sheikh Jarrah eviction threats

The Jerusalem EAs have continued to monitor the situations of and provide presence with the Al Kurd and Hanun families in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, both of whom have been served with eviction orders. Half of the Al Kurd's home was occupied by Israeli settlers in 2001. If the orders are implemented, a dangerous precedent would be set that paves the way for further evictions. Although the Al Kurds contested the eviction order and the court ruled in their favour in September, the neighbourhood is not particularly hopeful that the settlers will move out, as ruled, on the 8th November. The EAs have contacted and guided local and foreign correspondents to the families and will continue to monitor their situation.

1 OCHA Weekly Reports on www.ochaopt.org

2 OCHA Weekly Report: 1-7 October 2008

EAPPI Annual Meeting

On 21-24 October, the National Coordinators (NCs) from eight countries, the Local Reference Group (LRG) and EAPPI staff participated in the EAPPI Annual Meeting. The Director of the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, Rev Elenora Giddings Ivory, was also present. The week began with field visits to Jayyous, Jubarah checkpoint, Shufa, Tulkarem and Asira Al Qibliya, Silwan, Bethlehem and Susiya in the South Hebron Hills, and continued with a further two days of meetings, discussing directions for the programme and learning best practice from each other. Some Annual Meeting participants assisted with the olive harvest at the Augusta Victoria Compound on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. When pressed, the oil is used to support health care for patients who cannot afford it themselves and is available from: www.lwfjerusalem.org/olive_oil.htm.



Some Annual Meeting participants with the LWF Representative, Rev Mark Brown, harvesting olives at Augusta Victoria. 25.10.08.

Talks and Meetings

There are almost 500 former EAs in the 16 sending countries who are ready to share their experiences. They are available to speak to groups and to offer help and encouragement to do advocacy work and mobilise local communities to work together to seek to realise the aims of the programme: an end to the occupation and a just peace for Israelis and Palestinians. Make contact with the National Coordinator in your country (contact details on the website) and have an EA speak to you.



The Hebron EAs receive the majority of the visiting delegations. Pictured here are Ashwin and Kristina guiding a German group.

Visiting Delegations

During the term of Group 28, EAPPI has had the opportunity to introduce almost 40 international delegations and individuals to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory by giving tours and presentations. Delegations included Swedish parliamentarians in Bethlehem and Hebron, a Tahitian group in Hebron, 120 French Catholic readers of *La Vie* in Bethlehem, 44 Austrian students in Bethlehem, a US United Church of Christ delegation in Jayyous, a Macedonian group in Bethlehem, CAFOD representatives in Yanoun and a German delegation in Hebron. This is evidence of the international community's growing confidence and trust in the programme. These delegations constitute an important part of EAPPI's advocacy work.

For more information, please contact:

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or check out the website: www.eappi.org

*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)**. The **WCC** is a fellowship of 347 churches, in more than 100 countries in all continents from virtually all Christian traditions. Its office is in Geneva, Switzerland.*

For more information on the WCC: www.oikoumene.org

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