

DENIED ENTRY/Getting to the point

The news about real war made on real people in the Occupied Territories of Palestine only floats to the surface in bits and pieces, like the debris left in the puddles of bulldozer tracks in countless scenes of home demolition across the land.

In the context of underreported news of war crime level violence in Palestine, I would like to address Israeli government response to the presence of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) in the Occupied Territories. As ISM and the other international non violence advocacy groups (Christian Peacemakers Team, International Women's Peace Service, and the International Ecumenical Accompaniment) live and work with Palestinians in nonviolent resistance to the violent Israeli occupation, we are witnesses to the assault on the people and land, the escalating strangulation, *the war crime level violence*. The response has not been favorable.

Of course, it is not only our physical support of the Palestinians that aggravates Sharon- it is the story, their story, that we witness and report to the media, that all of us tell when we return to our respective countries. What Sharon's government and its global supporters are afraid of is disclosure of the unadorned truth. And the truth is, the hell does exist. Fortunately the snowball in hell has a chance, rolling on, gathering size and strength as it goes, even though the heat has been turned up.

I was attempting to return to Palestine to work with ISM in October of this year when I was turned back at the Israeli border, as have been many other ISM activists. But refusal of entry is only a part of the official Israeli government policy toward those internationals who come to work in peace in Palestine. For those who are able to pass the border, the possibility of arrest, forcible deportation, and a varying level of injury (rubber bullets, real bullets, tear gas) or death (like Rachel Corrie), face them as international activists. In May the Israeli military attacked the ISM headquarters in Beit Sahour, trashing it and extracting vital records from the computer hard drives. For Palestinians- nothing new, this is life.

A major focus of the nonviolent intervention in which ISM participates is ongoing construction of the monstrous Wall of Separation now planned to confine what would remain of the West Bank into three large cantons/ghettos to the north, south and encompassing Jerusalem. The encircling Wall (s) will cut in from the east leaving the Jordan Valley in Israeli control, except for Jericho, which will have its own Wall (again). Major incursions farther in from the west now are including the settlements of Maile Shomron, Ariel and Qadumim. Facts on the ground, it is a massive theft of Palestine's most fertile land, tapping into water of the Western Aquifer and de facto annexation (thus far) of 16 villages.

The latest nightmare for the 12,000 people trapped in the gray area of those villages between the Wall and the 1967 line is a new Israeli government requirement for a special ID card; people who do not have one will be forced to leave. The Wall and the transfers it may force are breaches of the Geneva

Convention; the continued military occupation of Palestine violates international law (it was just supposed to be temporary). The thousands of deaths and injuries are a grave breach. Were it any other than Israel (US excepted), the government of this occupier would be standing trial in the International Criminal Court for 66 war crimes defined by the Geneva Convention.

But the unpleasant reality is that in the face of a concerted, long planned campaign by Ariel Sharon and right wing Zionists friends to solve "the Palestinian problem" these past three years, the Palestinian people are struggling to resist all this mostly alone. Suicide bombings in Israel continue as the Israeli military promotes more death and destruction in the Occupied Territories. There are armed fighters appearing sporadically. And, there is nonviolent resistance, peaceful demonstrations and noncooperation. Like everything else in Palestine, underreported by the Western press; it is in these nonviolent activities that ISM and other similar international groups participate with Palestinians.

The Israeli government, I believe, is making a grave error in not embracing the internationals who come to support the Palestinians in their efforts to work for peaceful change and relief from the daily terror visited on them. Does Sharon's government wish instead for the Palestinians just to leave their land? (Well, yes.) Does it want the Palestinian energy of desperation and loss to be channeled into more bombing deaths and injuries? Does it want Palestine to rise up in arms to be bathed in blood by the overwhelming Israeli forces that surround her on every side? (No comment.)

If it is peaceful solutions Sharon wants, why was my passport stamped, "Entry denied"? Why are I and various other internationals working with nonviolent NGO's called a "security risk" and prevented from working for peace through nonviolent intervention? It is obvious the state of Israel feels threatened by the growth of nonviolent actions and organizing in the Occupied Territories. After all, it is the implementation of their policies that Palestinians and their supporters are protesting and resisting. What Sharon and his ruling clique fear is the potential effectiveness of this nonviolent resistance in challenging the right of the occupiers to continue their occupation- and the wrong of it all laid out ever more clearly for the rest of the world to see. Who knows, maybe Sharon has read about Ghandi and the role of nonviolent resistance in obtaining freedom for British occupied India.

In order to discredit the International Solidarity Movement and its nonviolent support work, the Israeli government and rightists in the US have attempted to smear us for being an organization that supports terrorism, and claiming us to be such, we are called a "security risk". A sentence in the ISM mission statement explains it recognizes the right of the Palestinians to engage in legitimate armed struggle against an occupier, as provided by international law. Although we recognize this right, we choose to participate only in non-violent resistance and to work with those who likewise choose. Again, we do not support terrorism in any way, shape or form by any individual or government.

The Israeli government uses collective punishment against Palestinian society on many levels, including home demolition and deadly missile attacks on innocents. ISM opposes all forms of collective punishment; punishment of an entire group for the crime of one is a war crime, a violation of the Geneva Convention. And it is precisely because we oppose collective punishment and the gross violation of human rights that we continue our work. Internationals, including ISM, attempt to provide some measure of protection for Palestinians by accompaniment for ambulance runs, crop harvest, threatened homes and water sources and peaceful demonstrations. Protection for the latter is necessary because any protests against the multitude of home demolitions, the Wall construction, land confiscation, orchard and crop destruction are hampered, threatened or attacked by the Israeli military (and sometimes their civilian extension, the settlers).

ISM works together with other internationals, Palestinians, and invaluable Israeli peace activists to monitor, intervene, and dismantle that which restricts ordinary life. We are there to listen, witness, document, and record the daily injury and death that is visited on Palestine in every conceivable way- the loss of land, home, livelihood, antiquities, school records, automobiles, orchards, wells, villages; the destruction of human life and childhood and dreams.

In a true democracy, such activities as ours would not pose a threat to the State. But in a national security state, run by a military government like Israel's, any form of resistance, including non-violence, is perceived as a threat. It is for participating in nonviolent resistance to its policies that the Israeli government is trying to keep ISM out of Palestine. But we will be there somehow, continuing to peacefully advocate an end to the occupation because we know, as do the 27 Israeli pilots that refused to fly on bombing missions on Palestinian towns, as does an enlightened Zionist like Avram Burg, former speaker of the Knesset who has compassionately called for an end to occupation and the settlements. They know, and so do the four former head of Israel's General Security Service (Shabak) who made a statement November 14 calling for an end to the occupation to save Israel from destroying herself; as do the unprecedented one hundred thousand Israelis who demonstrated November 9 in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem for dismantling the Wall and the Occupation. **Peace and security and prosperity for Israel will come only when there is the peace, security, prosperity, and justice in the longed for homeland of their neighbors, the Palestinians.** Said many times, though never often enough, all these human lives are undeniably intertwined and to deny any part of that is to be less than human.

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Note: See www.stophthewall.org for photos and maps re Wall.