



palestine NEWS

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Spring 2006

A FRESH START —



OR THE END-GAME?



Zoe Mars:
A vote for change

page 4



Robin Kealy:
The future of UNRWA

page 8



Paul Hughes-Smith:
Music from the Motherland

page 21



Joseph Massad:
Spielberg's Munich

page 23

Activism: pages 16-20



Cover picture: Election Day in Qalqilya, © Zoe Mars

ISSN 1477 - 5808

Also in this issue...
Agrexo case page 13



PSC on the web



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Contents

- 3 What price democracy?
Hilary Wise sees hypocrisy in the response of Western governments
- 4 A vote for change
Zoe Mars reports on the conduct of the elections in Palestine
- 6 Breaching the iron wall
There are cracks in the wall of threats against Hamas, writes Graham Usher
- 7 Man of peace or war criminal?
Julia Richards asks how Sharon will be remembered
- 8 Tough challenges, immense prizes
Robin Kealy reports on UNRWA's ongoing work with Palestinian refugees
- 10 Trade Unions make a difference
Bernard Regan takes heart from the lessons of history
- 11 From kibbutz to Gaza
Kate Burton, kidnapped in Gaza, explains why she is staying put
- 12 Church of England divestment vote
Sue Plater comments on the recent Synod decision
- Architects stand up for justice
Report on the formation of a new organisation in the UK
- 13 PSC speaks to the BBC
Diane Langford reports on a meeting with the BBC's Independent Review Panel
- 14 Update on Mordechai
Ernest Rodker and Adeline O'Keeffe report on developments in Vanunu's case
- 15 Larf or cry!
Cartoons from East and West
- 16 PSC Annual General Meeting
- 17 Activism on all fronts
News from branches around the UK
- 20 Pioneers for Palestine
Riyad Tibi reports on the Al-Rowwad Theatre Group
- 21 Music from the Motherland
Paul Hughes-Smith reviews recent CDs from Palestine
- 23 Reviews
... of Spielberg's *Munich*, Hani Abu-Asad's *Paradise Now* and Kate Barlow's *Visit Palestine*

palestine NEWS

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Palestine Solidarity Campaign

- Campaigning against the oppression and dispossession suffered by the Palestinian people
- Supporting the rights of the Palestinian people and their struggle to achieve these rights including the Right of Return in line with UN resolution 194
- Promoting Palestinian civil society in the interests of democratic rights and social justice
- Opposing Israel's occupation and its aggression against neighbouring states
- Opposing anti-semitism and racism, including the apartheid and Zionist nature of the Israeli state

What price democracy?

Hilary Wise sees sheer hypocrisy in the response of Western governments

As soon as the results of the recent elections became clear, jokes started flying around Ramallah: half the barbers in the Occupied Territories would go out of business; all the taxis would have to be resprayed an Islamic green... and so on. Like many jokes, these undoubtedly mask an underlying nervousness. However, given that many Palestinian Christians and Muslims dedicated to a secular, nationalist political programme voted for Hamas, and even stood for election on their platform, one must assume they do not believe that an extreme Islamist regime will result.

The truth is that the Palestinian people have rejected the results of years of compromise and phoney peace processes. Instead of withdrawal they have seen settlement expansion, a tightening of the Israeli grip on their water resources, the building of the Wall on Palestinian land and of settler-only roads, and the deaths of thousands more civilians. Through all this, the Palestinian Authority had the trappings of government, but no power, leading not just to humiliation but also to infighting and widespread corruption.

This dead-end has been rejected by the Palestinian people, who have voted in a party committed, like the PLO before Oslo, to genuine liberation.

Khaled Mish'al, a political spokesman for Hamas, has made a number of clear statements about Hamas' position. They refuse to give up the armed struggle until a just settlement is reached (the ANC's position in South Africa), declaring that: "Resistance is a right enshrined by divine books and international laws and any people under occupation have every

right to self-defence until they liberate the homeland."

They see the end of occupation as a prerequisite to negotiations with Israel, but they are prepared to institute a truce — for years if necessary — in the interim.

Hamas has stated its intention of forming a broadly based coalition, committed to internal reform, the rooting out of corrupt practices and the pursuance of the rights of the Palestinian people according to international law.

For its part, Israel is seizing another chance to exploit western islamophobia. Netanyahu, leader of the Likud party, was positively euphoric at the results: "Today Hamastan has been formed, a proxy of Iran in the image of the Taliban." Olmert, head of Sharon's newly formed Kadima party, declared that they would formally annex all the major settlement blocs and the Jordan Valley to Israel. Neither our government nor the US administration saw fit to comment on, let alone condemn, this outrageous statement.

On the contrary, they lined up yet again behind Israel, making a series of absurd demands on the new leadership.

One key demand is that Hamas should 'recognise Israel'. Setting aside the fact that Israel has never recognised Palestine, but has striven to make a Palestinian state physically impossible, which Israel is being referred to? The Israel within the UN-approved borders of 1948 (54% of Palestine)? The area occupied after the ethnic cleansing of 1948 (78% of Palestine)? The area including the current settlements (85%)? Or the area claimed by many Zionists as the Promised Land (100%)?

A second demand was to 'renounce

violence' — addressed solely to Hamas. And yet Israel's crimes over the years — hundreds of thousands of refugees, tens of thousands of deaths, thousands of homes demolished, land expropriated, livelihoods destroyed — make Hamas' efforts at retaliation appear positively puny.

Finally, Hamas is being called upon to ratify all the agreements the previous government signed with Israel — the very agreements which have led to the present parlous situation. The fact that Israel failed to honour the Oslo Accords — which presumably renders them null and void — is passed over in silence. Moreover, one of Israel's immediate responses to the election results was to tear up the agreement by which it is obliged to pay \$54 million a month in tax revenues to the PA. So much for existing agreements.

The Israeli leadership have also joked, but with deadly intent. At a meeting of the Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, advisor Dov Weissglas, and security and military chiefs, everyone agreed on the need to impose an economic siege on the Palestinian Authority. Weissglas provided the punch line: "It's like an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but won't die." The participants reportedly rolled with laughter (Ha'aretz 19.2.06).

"Israel is seizing another chance to exploit Western islamophobia"

Will Europe really fall into line with Israel and the US, and try to starve the Palestinian people into submission, after such strongly supported and well-run democratic elections? If so, what sort of message would that send to the world about our respect for democracy? They would certainly not get Hamas to capitulate; as they have stated clearly: "We will not sell our people or principles for foreign aid".

The new Palestinian leadership have put the ball firmly in Israel's court. It will of course refuse to play — unless there is international pressure, either at government level, through sanctions, or from the grass roots, through boycott and divestment.

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A vote for change

Zoe Mars reports on the conduct of the elections in Palestine

Four of us from PSC went to join the large band of international observers of the recent legislative elections. We were there to support the Palestinians, to judge the legitimacy of the process, and to report on Israeli obstructions.

Some of us had visited Palestine recently, but seeing the changes of even the last few months was shocking. However much you read about the wall, the checkpoints, the relentless de-Palestinisation of East Jerusalem, actually seeing the ground that is being lost and the ruthless apparatus of oppression is chilling. We spent our first night in the wonderful dilapidated Palestinian New Imperial hotel, near Jaffa Gate in the Old City. This is the hotel whose ground was sold a couple of years ago by the Israeli-recognised Orthodox patriarch. Now the Israelis are attempting to evict the manager, and some 18 shops in the same area are affected too. With such events, and continuous house demolitions, Palestinian East

Jerusalem is shrinking inexorably.

Another searing experience is Kalandia — the big checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah. A couple of years ago it was a chaotic wasteland, a seething mass of queueing people and vehicles. Now it is a technologised corridor of bristling steel turnstiles and remote guards who watch screens and bark orders, all under the menacing presence of the Separation Wall with its ugly watchtowers.

The electoral process

For the international observers, there were three stages to the election process. First, very good briefing meetings with the UN-supported Palestinian Central Elections Commission where the new system for these second legislative elections was explained. In 994 polling centres in the 16 electoral districts (5 in Gaza, 11 in the West Bank, including Jerusalem), all voters were given two ballot papers, each relating to half the 132 seats in the Legislative Council. On the first, people voted for one of 11 national party or group lists, including Fatah and Hamas (standing as 'Reform and Change'), with names from the lists elected by proportional representation, and each list containing a proportion of women. The second paper listed individual local candidates, either from parties or independents — with a varying number to be elected by majority vote for each district according to population size, and with a total of 6 reserved for Christians (2 each in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and 1 each in Ramallah and Gaza).

The second stage was Election Day itself. We were not directed where to go, but given a rough indication of which areas needed more coverage. Our PSC group decided to go to Qalqilya — the journey from Ramallah inevitably made circuitous by road closures but negotiated pragmatically by our taxi driver. We spent an average of 40 minutes in each of 8 polling stations — four in the town and four in the villages of Habla, Azzun and Jayyous (where we also saw the

devastating effects of the wall, so valiantly resisted but now entrenched and brutally cutting off so much agricultural land).

We had already seen evidence of election fever everywhere: posters, rallies, long and animated TV and radio debates. Campaigning was supposed to stop 24 hours before the election, but in fact it did not. (It was noted afterwards by the CEC that perhaps this rule needs to be re-thought — there are certainly other countries where it does not apply.) There was a national holiday for 'Democracy Day' and we found a universal festive atmosphere and seas of flags and banners, most prominently the brilliant green of Hamas and lemon yellow of Fatah.

Visiting the polling centres was a very impressive experience. We saw the old and the young, the occasional disabled person, and large numbers of women — most coming confidently to vote alone. And we were warmly welcomed everywhere. We were not surprised to learn afterwards that the participation rate was 78 per cent.

Our overwhelming impression, as reported by all the other observers, including big delegations from the Carter Commission, the EU and the Canadian government, was that the process was meticulously well organised everywhere, with four or five staff — usually teachers — overseeing the checking of IDs, the inking of fingers, the issuing and explaining of the ballot papers and the voting behind screens. We encountered only one query by a local person in one polling station — over the numbers of voters registering as illiterate and coming to vote with assistants. But we had no means of judging this, and, as the CEC observed, it is an individual's right to register as illiterate, so this must be catered for. The individual concerned was helped to register a formal complaint.

The CEC de-briefing with other observers after the elections seemed to show that specific (as opposed to routine) Israeli obstruction was largely not evident, and checkpoints could mostly be passed on this one day. The extreme exception was the Old

Results

Change and Reform (Hamas)	74
Fatah	45
Martyr Ali Abu Mustafa	3
The Third Way	2
The Alternative	2
Independent Palestine	2
Independents	4
Total	132

Marwan Barghouthi, serving a multiple life sentence in an Israeli jail, came top of the Fatah list. In all, 15 political prisoners were elected, 11 of whom were Hamas candidates.

Of candidates well-known in the UK, Mustafa Barghouthi was elected as a member of Independent Palestine and Hanan Ashrawi as a member of The Third Way.

For detailed results see:
www.elections.ps/template.aspx?id=291



Ramallah on Election Day

City of Jerusalem. Not only had the majority of the Palestinian population not even been allowed to register by the Israeli authorities; those who were allowed to vote had to do so in six Israeli post offices, where capacity was very limited and privacy non-existent. This of course is a grotesque abuse of political rights, unfortunately explicitly agreed in the Oslo accords (just one more gross flaw in that disastrous document). This meant that voting was again low in the Old City, as Jerusalemites feared having their residential status jeopardised if it was known by the Israelis that they had voted, and how they had voted.

Finally, there was the count, which took place in the polling stations themselves. As observers we were allowed to watch this along with the observers from the parties, as long as we were prepared to stay behind closed doors for the long and painstaking process. We watched a count in Ramallah, after we arrived back from Qalqilya, and it was a riveting experience. The votes for the lists were counted first, with each ballot paper shown to all present, and the votes marked up on the blackboard in 5-barred gates. So we could see

very clearly the accumulating largest total for Hamas, which was then also reflected in the candidate voting. We emerged 2½ hours later convinced that we had seen the early evidence of a general Hamas lead. But when we went into a café in town and reported this news, no-one believed us and we were told this district was unrepresentative.

In fact it was only during the next day that the real situation of Hamas's victory became clear, a result which was received with the force of a seismic shock — to Fatah candidates in particular. We had talked to a good many people before the election and no-one predicted less than a small Fatah lead or a neck-and-neck result. Clearly a good many traditional Fatah supporters and a significant number of Christians in the event voted for Hamas.

The election results

Our observer group all felt that it was and is a very positive outcome: genuinely democratic elections supported by the vast majority of the population. It is also an act of resistance and a howl of anguish against the pain and injustice of

occupation. Inevitably the Palestinian Authority is judged to have been unable to deliver, both politically and in terms of improved living conditions for ordinary Palestinians, over more than a decade. The widely voiced protests at corruption, besides being aimed at particular individuals, are also a product of deep anger at the paralysis and semi-collaboration which occupation creates.

As many have pointed out, the visible capacity of Hamas to organise welfare services, and to make a difference to many people's lives is immensely attractive, whilst Hamas's promised refusal to have dealings with the Israelis must hold out the prospect of renewed self-respect and means of resistance. This again focuses a very bright light on the nature of government under occupation. As Fatah is beginning to say: 'Let them try — let them find out you can't have anything under occupation, not electricity, not water, transport or minimal movement of goods, without negotiation and accommodation with the Israelis'. This is certainly a bitter truth, an exposure of what occupation really means, and a desperate challenge to a new government in the coming months.

Breaching the iron wall

Since its election victory Hamas has been threatened with sanctions and destabilisation — but there are cracks in the wall, writes **Graham Usher**

On 13 February, quoting officials and diplomats, the New York Times stated that the US and Israel were “discussing ways to destabilise the Palestinian government so that the newly elected Hamas officials will fail and elections will be called again”.

The preferred means were not (as yet) dirty tricks and coups of Chilean and Iranian vintage. Rather they were campaigns of economic sanctions and political isolation that would either force Hamas to surrender to Israel's terms or collapse through being unable to govern. “The point is to put this choice on Hamas's shoulders. If they make the wrong choice, all the options lead in a bad direction,” said one Western diplomat quoted in the New York Times.

The plan rests on questionable premises. The first is that Palestinians voted for Hamas for reasons of governance rather than out of appreciation for the armed struggle it waged or that successive Fatah-led “peace processes” had only deepened Israel's neo-colonial control of their lives.

Another is that while Hamas won a majority of parliamentary seats, it did so with a minority of votes, with the implication (or hope) that Palestinians will have little tolerance for a government that brings only economic hardship and political ostracism. The third premise is that Abbas and Fatah will be party to this barely disguised scheme to subvert the democratic will of their people.

The first two assumptions smack of wishful thinking. But there are ominous signs that Israel and the US may be on to something with the third.

Since the elections on 25 January, Abbas has amassed power in his hands of almost Arafatian dimensions. In a series of “presidential decrees”, he has placed the Palestinian Authority's security, financial and media institutions under his ultimate authority, despite a Palestinian constitution which states that all must be shared with the elected prime minister.

“Since the elections Abbas has amassed power in his hands of almost Arafatian dimensions”

In the last session of the outgoing Fatah-dominated parliament on 13 February, two more decisions were taken to tighten Abbas's grip. The first was the appointment of four Fatah loyalists as heads of the PA's personnel, salaries and pensions, government comptroller departments as well as the new post of “administrative chief” of the parliament — all critical portfolios for Hamas if it is to be true to its election promise of bringing “change and reform” to government.

The second was to grant Abbas the prerogative to appoint a new nine-judge constitutional court with the power

to resolve any dispute between the presidency and the parliament, including the right of the president to “cancel any law approved by the new parliament on the grounds that it is unconstitutional”. Newly elected Hamas member for Hebron, Abdul-Aziz Dweik, was limpid as to the political motive behind the move. “This law means giving full powers to President Abbas to dissolve parliament any time he wishes,” he said.

For now, Hamas appears to be meeting the threat of destabilisation and Abbas's “bloodless coup” with diplomacy, seeking “a firm Arab and Islamic position to confront the challenge”, says Hamas MP for northern Gaza Musher Al-Masri. It has already scored one triumph, though not yet from the Arab and Islamic position.

On 8 February Russia broke ranks with the US-led moratorium on Hamas by announcing it would invite a delegation from the newly elected Palestinian government to Moscow, probably before the end of the month. “Our position concerning Hamas differs from the American and Western European position. The Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation never declared Hamas a terrorist organisation,” said Russian President Vladimir Putin. Hamas expressed its “deepest appreciation”.

Putin has reportedly assured the US and Israel that Russia will use the meeting to impress on Hamas the importance of meeting their conditions. Hamas will listen, while reasserting its condition, rehearsed by its political leader Khaled Mesh'al in an interview with a Russian newspaper on 13 February. “If Israel recognises our rights and pledges to withdraw from all occupied lands, Hamas, and the Palestinian people with it, will decide to halt the armed resistance.” But the critical achievement for Hamas is that the meeting is unconditional.

As such it strengthened Hamas's hand as its delegation embarked on a tour of the Arab and Islamic world that included stops in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran as well as Jordan and Malaysia. It may even open the doors to non-Islamic countries like France, Spain and South Africa. At the very least it will serve as leverage with Fatah as the two parties discuss the formation of the next Palestinian government: will Fatah agree to unity in line with the Palestinians' democratic choice and nationalist sentiment? Or will it subvert that sentiment by agreeing to be a small cog in a larger Israel-US wheel?

In a statement from his prison cell to the Palestinian Legislative Council, Marwan Barghouti, leading Fatah member, emphasised the need for unity:

“This is not only for us here, but for our national homeland, the exiles, and our ability to democratically coexist. We must remember the holiness of Palestinian blood and it must never be shed among us.

“We aspire to creative cooperation between the deputies and the different blocs, for the sake of achieving what our great nation, which granted us this privilege and confidence, wants of us... We will be fair and work as partners, as we were raised to be: partners in the field, and partners in the Parliament.”

(For full statement see PSC website)

A longer version of this article was published in Al-Ahram Weekly, 17 February.

Man of peace or war criminal?

Julia Richards asks how Sharon will be remembered

On 9 September 1994, on the front page of the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, a photograph was published of an order to ethnically cleanse the village of Qibya in 1953. It included the sentence: "Objective: to attack the village of Kibiya and cause maximal damage to life and property". The last six words were heavily underscored, and the order was signed by Major Ariel Sharon, then head of the infamous 101 Special Unit. In the event, 69 men, women and children were murdered.

Sharon's enthusiasm for such operations was to be a recurring theme in his career.

In 1971, his troops destroyed 2,000 homes in Gaza, uprooting 12,000 Palestinians and making them refugees for a second time.

In 1982, as Minister of Defence, he invaded Lebanon and besieged its capital, Beirut, for nine weeks, cutting off all water, electricity and food supplies and bombarding the city with thousands of bombs and at least 60,000 shells. Independent estimates put the death toll at 12,000. In all, over 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces during that invasion.

The highlight of Sharon's Lebanon campaign was the slaughter of nearly 2,000 men, women and children in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila. Although the Israeli Kahane Commission found him responsible for the massacre, a man of such proven sterling qualities could not spend long in the political wilderness.

As head of the far-right Likud party, even before he became Prime Minister, Sharon called on the government to "run and grab as many hilltops as possible" in the Occupied Territories – a policy he was able to supervise personally when he came to power.

His 'private visit' to the Temple Mount in



East Jerusalem in 2000 with 3000 armed police, which sparked the Intifada, was symptomatic of the provocative tactics he was to use again and again. Whenever a truce with the armed groups in Gaza looked like holding, he would execute a swift, brutal incursion into a densely populated area or undertake a targeted assassination, kick-starting a response which could then be used as justification for the next land-grab or the next collective punishment.

“His ‘private visit’ to the Temple Mount was symptomatic of the provocative tactics he was to use again and again”

Since Sharon's rise to power, 5000 Palestinians have been killed, thousands of acres of olive groves and orchards uprooted, thousands of homes destroyed, together with water and electricity supplies. He was careful too to target Palestine's embryonic administrative infrastructure: land records, school and medical records.

Hand in hand with the destruction went the colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza, with a population now standing at about 450,000 illegal settlers. Although the colonies had been established and

developed by every regime since 1967, they were greatly extended under his reign, especially in and around East Jerusalem.

Redeployment from Gaza — much vaunted as a huge concession and a brave gesture of peace — still left it as the largest open-air prison in the world, with access controlled by the Israeli army. It was in line with the longstanding policy of maximising Israel's territory while minimising the number of Palestinian inhabitants. The 1.3 million inhabitants of Gaza were just too tough a nut to crack. But as the 8000 settlers were being removed from Gaza, twice that number were being placed in the expanding West Bank settlements (a move largely unremarked by the Western media).

However, the crowning glory of his career will perhaps be seen, in retrospect, as the 250-mile long Wall, cutting deep into the West Bank, in defiance of a strong ruling by the International Court of Justice, and a UN resolution.

As a politician, Sharon will be remembered for introducing — or reintroducing — unilateralism as the keystone of Israeli policy. Not since Golda Meir's famous statement that "There is no such thing as a Palestinian", has the ethos of denial been more mainstream in Israeli politics. He totally refused to talk seriously to any elected Palestinian leader, even Abbas, his preferred candidate for President, in order to continue colonisation with a free hand.

He was able to exploit the Bush administration's unprecedented eagerness to rubberstamp Israel's every move, to the extent of burying the two-state solution that was the cornerstone of the Roadmap — with the blessing of Bush and Congress. The corpse of the Roadmap is still being flourished, by the EU, Israel and the US, but Olmert's latest declaration on incorporating the West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley into Israel make it clear that any Palestinian 'state' would be a mere collection of ghettos.

The latter part of Sharon's career was dogged by accusations of corruption and shady financial dealings. Just before he was hospitalized, it had been announced that the Israeli police possessed evidence pointing to an illegal USD 3 million transfer to the Sharon family. But this will no doubt be seen as insignificant, next to his military and political triumphs.

This, then, is the 'man of courage and peace' we are asked to mourn. We will soon have to suffer the spectacle of world leaders, including our own Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, visiting Israel to genuflect at his shrine.

Tough challenges, immense prizes

Robin Kealy reports on UNRWA's ongoing work with Palestinian refugees — and suggests some potential avenues for a just solution

Hamas' recent victory in Palestine has sent a shock-wave throughout the region and far beyond. Many predict that the so-called Peace Process may now be put into cold storage, perhaps even for another generation, and that the best that the Palestinians can hope for is a limited series of unilateral Israeli steps, falling far short of the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian state.

If so, this could condemn a fourth generation of refugees to join the three who have already waited for up to fifty years for the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1949 which provides for their right of return to their homes, or for compensation.

For fifty years, too, the refugees (currently 4.2 million registered with the UN, of whom 1.3 million live in refugee camps) have been in large measure the responsibility of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency), who administer their camps and provide medical aid, humanitarian relief, education and social services.

As British Consul-General in Jerusalem from 1997 to 2001, in addition to my core duties as Britain's representative to the Palestinian Authority, I was also effectively Permanent Representative to UNRWA, whose headquarters were in Gaza, with a secondary base in Amman.

Last year I and a colleague, Geoff Haley, undertook a comprehensive review of UNRWA on behalf of DFID (Britain is the second biggest bilateral donor to UNRWA) and a number of other major donors. UNRWA has a

narrower mandate than other UN agencies of a comparable size, and lacks an effective external governance structure. So although there has for the last few years been a lively and positive dialogue on reform between UNRWA and donor states (most of UNRWA's budget comes from voluntary, not assessed contributions) there was a feeling that the process — and ultimately donors' commitment — would benefit from a clearer understanding of how

UNRWA operates, plans, coordinates and prioritises over the use of its all too limited resources.

We visited all five fields (West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) and met large numbers of UNRWA staff at all levels, refugees, international

“To set aside the issue of the refugees would be dangerous, impractical and morally unacceptable”

organisations, donors, NGOs, host Governments, the Palestinian Authority/PLO and the Israelis. UNRWA cooperated fully and openly. Our review was, as it happens, carried out just after the retirement of Peter Hansen, who for nine years as Commissioner-General was a strong and determined advocate of UNRWA and defender of his staff and the refugees for which they were responsible.

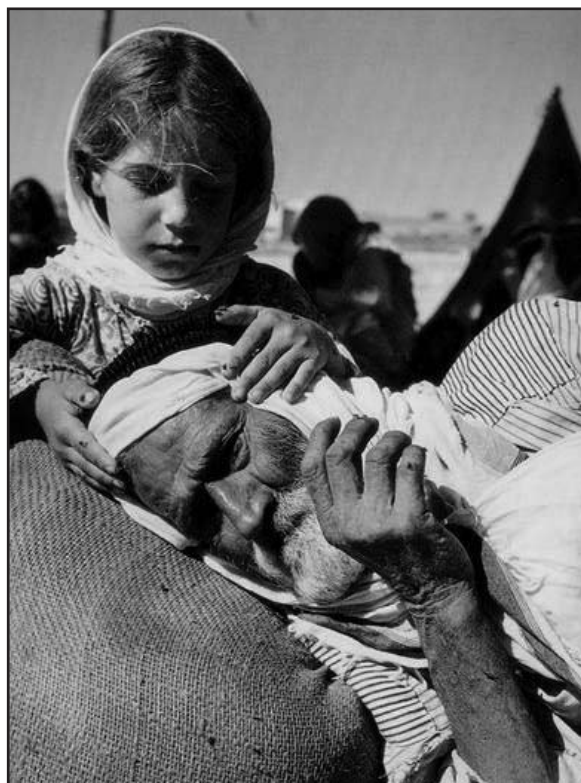
I hope that our report will help the new C-G, Karen Abu Zayd and her colleagues as they reform UNRWA and modernise its corporate culture. We made recommendations on:

- UNRWA's internal and external communications
- its senior structure
- the role of the Commissioner-General
- UNRWA's human resources — 25,000 staff are a huge asset to preserve and develop!

Taking account of political realities, we assumed that UNRWA needs to plan at least for the medium term, given the present state of negotiations. We also stressed that only a just and comprehensive peace can improve the life of the refugees, however efficient and well supported UNRWA might be.

So what are the prospects for the refugees in Final Status talks? Positions on both sides have, on the face of it, hardened over the last four years, and negotiators may be tempted to try to ignore the issue, in the hope that if compromise can be reached on borders, security, settlements and Jerusalem, the refugees can effectively be set aside. This would be dangerous, impractical and morally unacceptable.

The refugee issue is certainly difficult. Any conceivable solution will be expensive, and hard compromises will be required. But agreement would have immense symbolism, leading to an end to all outstanding claims, in effect a 'Solha' — a formal burying of the hatchet — and Israel's acceptance in



Refugees in 1948

the region, the prize offered under the initiative of the then Crown Prince Abdullah at the 2002 Beirut Arab Summit.

So both sides need to move beyond name-calling and the public repetition of their red lines, and negotiate without pre-conditions on this, as on all the other final status issues.

The wider the range of issues on the table, the better the chances of reaching an overall agreement on something like a win-win basis. Tough challenges, but also immense prizes for both sides.

I am not going to try to second-guess the negotiators. They should, however:

- Research the numerous academic studies, virtual negotiations (the so-called Abu Mazen-Beilin exercise and the Geneva Accord) and the 2000/2001 formal negotiations, especially the Taba talks of January 2001 and consider how far these contain ideas that may be practical and politically acceptable in the context of an overall Peace Accord.
- Consult the refugees themselves
- Consider whether the refugees might have a formal right to return, but with the actual exercise of this right limited and phased, and that meanwhile the refugees would have a number of other, more immediate options, all of which would offer a considerable improvement in their status and living conditions, including return to the new Palestinian State, settlement in third countries and compensation
- Note the particularly difficult political and economic circumstances of the refugees in Lebanon, and consider if they can somehow be accorded priority
- Consider how far land swaps and the future of the West Bank settlements



URSULA PRETZLIK

Burj AlBurajne camp, 2004

can help to resolve the refugee issue, as well as the issues of borders, economic viability and security

- Seek agreement on a common account of the events of 1948, as part of the reconciliation process
- Make proper provision for implementation (key roles here for UNRWA and for the World Bank)

Meanwhile the international community — and certainly the British government — need to help both sides to resume negotiations as soon as possible, and ensure that UNRWA continues to receive the political and financial support necessary to enable it to fulfil the task to which it has been dedicated for the past 56 years. Any decision to reduce or withhold aid to

“Any decision to reduce or withhold aid to the Palestinian Authority in order to put pressure on Hamas will impact strongly on UNRWA”

the Palestinian Authority in order to put pressure on Hamas will also impact strongly on UNRWA and the refugees resident in the Occupied Territories.

Finally, PSC members should support and cooperate with the UK UNRWA country support group, once established, following those already operating in the USA and Spain; details can be found on the UNRWA website: www.un.org/unrwa/.

Jeff Halper and Ghassan Andoni nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker peace and social justice organisation, has nominated two candidates for the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize: Jeff Halper from Israel and Ghassan Andoni from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Ghassan Andoni is a physics professor at Birzeit University who has spent years in jail for his peaceful resistance to the Israeli occupation.

In 1988 he co-founded the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between Peoples, which sponsored dialogue and joint activities between Israelis and Palestinians. He also co-founded the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), in which international volunteers and Palestinians take part in grassroots nonviolent actions of resistance.

Jeff Halper is best known as the co-founder of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), in 1997, which was among the first Israeli peace groups to work with Palestinians inside the Occupied Territories. ICAHD resists the demolition of Palestinian homes and organizes Israelis and internationals to help Palestinians rebuild their homes, as acts of political resistance.

Jeff said: “Ghassan and I are not on opposite ‘sides’. Besides our concern for the destructive impact of Israel’s occupation on both our societies, we both consider it a global issue — a fundamental challenge to a world based on inclusion, equality, justice, peace, prosperity, self-determination, international law and universal human rights. If occupation and repression in this most transparent conflict actually defeat a people’s aspirations for freedom and fundamental human rights, what are the implications for oppressed peoples the world over?”

Ghassan and Jeff are currently working on a book about nonviolent resistance to the Occupation.

Trade Unions make a difference

Bernard Regan takes heart from the lessons of history

Trade Unions make a difference. That is the clear message that emerges from the history of the struggle against Apartheid. While the trade unions inside South Africa led the struggle, trade union movements worldwide campaigned to get their own reluctant governments to isolate the repressive South African regime.

Today in Britain over six million people belong to trade unions – the largest voluntary organisations in this country. Their united action could make a tremendous contribution to challenging our government’s complicity with the Bush administration in giving support to the government of Israel.

Solidarity is a concept at the very heart of trade unionism. Trade unions were formed and operate on the basic premise that injustice can be defeated when people act together. “An injury to one is an injury to all” has long been the rallying cry when jobs are threatened, or when discrimination or exploitation prevails.

One of the most famous examples of union solidarity was the decision by Lancashire cotton workers not to support their own bosses who were backing the Southern slave states in the US Civil War. Even though it threatened their own jobs they took the view that solidarity did not stop at the borders of their country.

Imagine six million people campaigning to demand that the Government take action to bring pressure to bear on Israel to dismantle the Wall, release the political prisoners, withdraw the colonial settlers, end the occupation, recognise the right of refugees to return to their homes and pay compensation for the damage the occupying army has wrought.

In recent years many trade unions have sent delegations to Palestine and established direct links there. They are fully aware that unemployment in the

Occupied Territories is now around 60% and that 70% of the population lives in poverty. They know too that the Wall, checkpoints and constant harassment make even the daily task of getting to what work there is virtually impossible.

Workers have been shot and killed at checkpoints by the Israeli Occupation Army and on their way to and from work by settlers. In 2002 the office of the General Union of Palestinian Teachers in Qalqilya was destroyed and two of their offices in Ramallah were the subject of direct attack: property was ruined, records taken, trashed or destroyed. The Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions spends much of its energy providing welfare relief for the families of unemployed workers. Palestinian workers who try to go to work inside Israel have little or no support from the trade unions there — they remain vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation.

“Workers have been shot and killed at checkpoints, and on their way to and from work”

A serious debate about what kinds of solidarity action might be taken is now under way. Today many trade unions have a clear policy in support of the Palestinian people and some 16 national unions are affiliated to the PSC. The main task is to win the active support and involvement of trade union members, by spreading the message about the injustices which are being inflicted on the Palestinians.

Having persuaded members the next question that is often asked is, “What can we do about it?” There are two immediate possible areas of campaigning. One is to argue for disinvestment by unions themselves and the pension funds for which they are responsible, from companies that collaborate in breaching the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling against the building of the Wall. Whilst not a precondition this of course could be linked

to demands that the British government reimburse the pension funds against any losses that might be incurred by fining the companies in breach of the ICJ ruling.

The second course of action would be to impose sanctions. A number of trade unions have already taken up the demand that Britain impose an immediate ban on the arms trade with Israel. The whole question of EU trade with Israel is another wider issue that needs to be considered.

In relation to boycott it is interesting to return to the example of the anti-Apartheid movement. Back in 1960, following an appeal from the All-Africa People’s Conference, the British Trade Unions took the decision to support the boycott campaign. The TUC itself had acted in response to a call from the International Trade Union Confederation, which put the word out through all its affiliates internationally.

It is also interesting to note what the Labour Party did at the same time. On 9 March 1960, Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell went on television to ask viewers not to buy South African goods. Imagine Tony Blair making a party political broadcast calling for sanctions, boycott and disinvestment from Israel until its Government abided by UN Resolutions!

The sanctions, boycott and disinvestment campaign took 35 years to have an impact on Apartheid. The Palestinians have already been waiting for justice for nearly 60 years. The Trade Union Conference on Palestine on 11 March will be an opportunity for trade unionists to discuss how to take this campaign forward in the movement. The presence of Willie Madisha, President of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) alongside Shafer Sae’d, General Secretary of the PGFTU, will provide a unique opportunity to get that campaign firmly on the road to building effective solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Bernard Regan is an Executive Member of the National Union of Teachers

From kibbutz to Gaza

Kate Burton, kidnapped in Gaza in December, explains why she is staying put

Two months have passed since I was kidnapped, and I have now started putting the experience into some kind of perspective.

The face of one of my kidnapers still flashes through my mind and every time I hear of another Israeli targeted assassination I wonder whether it might be him. I find myself hoping that it isn't. I cannot justify the abduction of foreigners in the Gaza Strip but I want to understand the real motives and ideologies behind the kidnapers' actions, and to envisage some kind of solution.

Kidnappers are generally perceived as being hard types that cannot and should not be talked to, but I spent hours talking with my kidnapers and some of their beliefs were both valid and touching. Their struggle is that of all Palestinians, only conducted differently. They feel the pain of living under the occupation and losing the land of their forefathers like the loss of a loved one, and believe it is their duty to restore justice to the poor, fighting a double war against the Israeli occupation and if necessary their own government to achieve this goal.

I first came to the region in 2001 as a Kibbutz volunteer, when I met many Israelis and began learning Hebrew. At that time I believed in little more than justice for both sides and naïve ideas of peace and coexistence. When I started meeting Palestinians, however, I quickly became conscious of the imbalance in the situation. I realised it was not just a question of both sides having valid arguments and having to work together. It was more about one side having a much higher responsibility, one side having the upper hand, the internationally established and recognised state, a powerful army and strong allies, whilst the other side had no freedom of movement, no recognition and no political power to affect change.

When I was offered a job in Gaza I decided this would be the perfect opportunity for me to learn more about the plight of the Palestinians. I first worked on educational and research

initiatives in the Gaza Strip for a year, then started working with the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights in September 2005.

Founded in 1999, Al Mezan is a unique organisation that specialises in promoting and protecting the human rights of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, in particular their economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights. However, when the Al Aqsa Intifada began in September 2000, the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) embarked on a rampage of house demolitions, incursions, targeted killings, harassment, curfews and closures of borders and checkpoints. ESC rights were pushed to the side as civil and political rights took priority, and organisations like Al Mezan (in Arabic, Balance) found themselves obliged to work more intensively than ever on the rights of Palestinian prisoners and other rights being gravely violated by the IOF and the Israeli judicial system.

“I spent hours talking with my kidnapers; some of their beliefs were both valid and touching”

Gaza is facing many problems, some of which have been magnified since the disengagement. There is an urgent need for an improved infrastructure in the healthcare and employment sectors, and for a clear social service plan. Under international law, these are Israel's obligations to the Gazans, as the occupying power, but it never adhered to its responsibilities and these have now been assumed de facto by the Palestinian Authority. Al Mezan is now focusing once again on its specialisation in ESC rights.

Unfortunately, Israeli policies of collective punishment are ongoing, such as the buffer zone created in the northern Gaza Strip, constant shelling and bombing, complete control over all borders, sea space and airspace, and the sonic booms, a new method of terrorising the entire population which



has been adopted since the pullout in 2005.

The problem of weapons proliferation has been growing since the beginning of the Intifada, when the Palestinians of Gaza were forced to try and defend themselves against a powerful and often ruthless Israeli army. The unhindered and unmonitored use and spread of weapons, coupled with the growing boredom and anger of Gaza's youth and unemployed, has led to a severe state of insecurity, infighting and violence, including the kidnapping of foreigners.

The people of Gaza remain optimistic that one day something will change — but not in the near future. In the short term, job creation is essential to keep the situation from worsening, but in the long term the only solution is an end to the occupation, in order to provide the younger generations with the vision of a different future. As my kidnapper told me “we will not give up fighting, but I tell you, if there were another way than this one, I would choose that way; I cannot continue living a life like this, it is no life for me or for my family”.

During the 58 hours of the kidnapping I had a lot of time to think about whether I should stay in Gaza. My kidnapper told me to leave, predicting that the situation will deteriorate. However, I think it is important that Palestinians, especially in Gaza, continue to see foreigners among them so that they don't feel completely isolated. Despite the kidnappings I, like many foreigners here, intend to stay and work for the better future the Palestinians deserve.

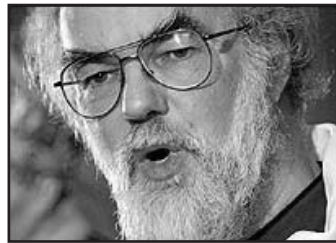
See www.mezan.org for more information about Al Mezan.

Church of England divestment vote

On 6 February, campaigners were delighted to hear that the Synod had passed a motion by a large majority, recommending disinvestment from companies profiting from the Occupation (particularly Caterpillar).

The essential clause states: "This Synod heeds the call from our sister church, the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, for morally responsible investment in the Palestinian occupied territories and, in particular, to divest from companies profiting from the illegal occupation, such as Caterpillar Inc, until they change their policies."

The motion was proposed by a Synod member who had become convinced by the arguments put forward by Canon Naim Ateek of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre and Bishop Riah Abu El Assal, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, that the church should heed the call of Palestinian Christians to campaign non-violently and actively to end the suffering



Archbishop Rowan Williams

of the Palestinian people. This call was taken forward by an interfaith group of organisations and individuals, wanting to challenge the church to look at morally responsible investment in this situation. The

group includes War on Want, whose report on Caterpillar had provided solid information about the link between the specially militarised bulldozer equipment and very repressive occupation policies — house demolitions (with the loss of life), destruction of agricultural land and the construction of the Wall.

The church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group had recommended that the church investment bodies should retain the shares in Caterpillar (worth over £2.2 million), and it was an amendment to this proposal that was debated at Synod.

Archbishop Rowan Williams voted for the amendment.

Those within the church opposed to divestment (notably previous Archbishop Lord Carey and the new lobby group 'Anglicans for Israel') immediately made a link between this decision and a 'rift' between Anglicans and the Jewish community, but those Jewish groups working for justice in Palestine welcomed it.

The Church Commissioners (who own the majority of the Caterpillar shares on behalf of the church) do not have to follow the recommendation, and their reaction will be watched with interest by campaigners.

Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, responded angrily to the Synod's decision. In an article in the Jewish Chronicle, he wrote: "The church has chosen to take a stand on the politics of the Middle East over which it has no influence, knowing that it will have the most adverse repercussions on a situation over which it has enormous influence, Jewish-Christian relations in Britain."

Dr Williams wrote to the Chief Rabbi to insist that the vote in no way questioned Israel's right to exist or to self-defence.

Sue Plater

(Associate Director of the Amos Trust)

For War on Want's report on Caterpillar see www.waronwant.org/download.php?id=289

Architects stand up for justice

On 2 February a group of about 60 architects and planners met at the London headquarters of Lord Richard Rogers' practice, to launch a campaign for environmental justice in Israel/Palestine. In his opening address, Lord Rogers stressed the obligations of architects to create humane and sustainable environments for all.

The meeting was chaired by UK architect Abe Hayeem, who set out the broad case for a campaign against the occupation of Palestinian land, focusing on the way this is enabled and sustained with the help of architects and planners. He stressed the importance of exposing those construction industry professionals who accept commissions for schemes that expropriate Palestinian land and resources. At the same time, he said, it was vital to support initiatives, both internationally and within Israel/Palestine, that promote collaboration between Jewish and Arab communities towards a fair and lasting peace.

Rob Bevan presented his new book *The Destruction of Memory* — *Architecture at War*, which examines the way in which architectural heritage is systematically destroyed by occupying forces. Referring to the current destruction of Arab buildings in Israel, and in ancient Palestinian cities such as

Nablus and Hebron, he said that the destruction of symbolic buildings and the physical fabric of cities is not merely collateral damage, but a deliberate intention to "dominate, divide, terrorise, and eliminate".

Eyal Weizman, an Israeli architect and director of the Centre

for Research Architecture at Goldsmith's College, London, said: "The wall and the settlements have been deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice and we should boycott any company which does

business, any architects that participate — anyone facilitating these human rights violations and war crimes."

The meeting agreed that the organisation should concern itself not only with the built environment, but also with the natural environment, reflecting concerns about the expropriation and pollution of resources such as agricultural land and water. Possible actions proposed included publishing a list of firms and individuals profiting from the construction of settlements in the West Bank, the Separation Wall, and all state-sponsored schemes dependent on the theft of Palestinian land or resources.

In a formal statement coordinator Abe Hayeem said later:

"We challenge the ethical role of Israeli architects and planners and the construction industry in the Occupation... Politics and justice cannot be separated from buildings, culture and society."

For more information see www.archplanjust.org

"We challenge the ethical role of Israeli architects and planners and the construction industry in the Occupation"

PSC speaks to the BBC

In January, PSC Executive members **Diane Langford** and **Robert Robinson** gave oral evidence to the BBC Governors' Independent Review Panel on coverage of Israel/Palestine.

Members of the panel were welcoming and attentive. The meeting lasted for just under an hour. We began by explaining PSC's aims, emphasising our independence, non-party political nature and the diversity both of our membership and partner organisations. We stressed that we work within the framework of international and human rights law and suggested that the BBC should do the same in its coverage and terminology.

Our proposal that panel members should visit Palestine to acquaint themselves with the situation was received with non-committal smiles. One panel member told us that he found his experience of visiting Gaza reflected in our 'interesting' written submission (see website, under PSC News).

The panel was told how perplexing our members find it that the BBC fails to report what is going on in Palestine when information is widely available from reliable sources. Generally BBC coverage is seen as a parallel universe — far from the one that actually exists on the ground. That the BBC shapes the news rather than reporting it is completely unacceptable.

Examples given included the false impression of two equal sides, failure to provide basic context, failure to mention occupation, ethnic cleansing and war crimes. Among other issues

covered were the BBC's failure to explain the original dispossession, its constant reference to Israel's 'War of Independence', repeated misinformation such as referring to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and uncritically supporting Israel's repudiation of international law, amounting to collusion with an illegal occupation.

We also took issue with what is NOT said: no sense of the sheer scale of dispossession, the racism suffered by indigenous Palestinians inside Israel, the dearth of maps, and making no mention of non-violent resistance.

We reiterated our complaint about the lack of Palestinian voices, citing 'Women's Hour' as culpable. Fresh examples of distortion were given, for example, the BBC's pusillanimous coverage of Sharon's illness, in which they presented him as a 'man of peace', contrasting with Lindsey Hillsum's nuanced report for Channel 4 in which she acknowledged the fact that there is no peace process — specifically mentioning that disengagement from Gaza was a move to consolidate colonies in the West Bank.

“The BBC shapes the news rather than reporting it”

There was a discussion on the failure of the BBC as a public service broadcaster to call Israel to account, perceived as the corporation's unquestioning acceptance of the impunity bestowed on Israel by its powerful friends. We also discussed the ways in which the BBC bows to pressure from the Israeli Embassy, tailoring language and muzzling its own journalists.

Robert handed the panel a draft suggestion for the BBC Website regarding settlements and spoke about settler violence and the consensus amongst international human rights lawyers on the subject.

Finally we expressed the hope that the review will be seen as an opportunity to set things right. If the BBC starts to live up to its obligations as public service broadcaster this will have been a worthwhile exercise.



Agrexco protesters vindicated

In a remarkable judgement at Uxbridge Magistrates Court on 26 January, a District Judge ruled that seven anti-apartheid protesters, who had blockaded the Israeli agricultural export company, Agrexco UK, had no case to answer and the case was dismissed.

The charges of Aggravated Trespass and Failure to Leave Land were dismissed after District Judge Barnes found that the evidence against the defendants was 'too tenuous' to justify continuing with a trial. The trial had been listed for seven days but ended on the morning of the fourth day with the dramatic acquittals.

On 11 November 2004 the seven protesters succeeded in shutting down the UK distribution centre of Israel's biggest state owned agricultural export company for over eight hours, blocking both the entrance and exit to the Agrexco UK distribution centre in Hayes, Middlesex, and reportedly losing the company over £100,000 in profit, which would have been channeled back into the Israeli economy. Amos Orr, General Manager of Agrexco UK, said in court that Agrexco exports from Israel and the Occupied Territories amount to some \$700 million a year out of a total of \$880 million which is the annual total of all Israeli agricultural exports. He admitted Agrexco imports between 60-70% of all produce that is grown on illegal settlements in the Occupied Territories.

The protest was carried out to draw attention to the complicity of Agrexco, in the system of apartheid that is enshrined in Israeli law. The defendants acted in support of the growing campaign for an international economic boycott of Israeli goods. Supporters of the defendants had collected documentary evidence of Agrexco's business operations in the Jordan Valley that would have been put forward to show their complicity in the 'Crime of Apartheid' which is a crime under UK domestic law according to the International Criminal Court Act 2001.

At a packed public meeting on 25 January at the University of London Union British/Israeli academic Dr Uri Davis spoke in support of the blockade action and a boycott of Israeli goods. He described Israel as the only apartheid state in the United Nations.

The campaign to Boycott Agrexco continues. A website that will give information disclosed through the Uxbridge case will be launched soon.

Update on Mordechai

On 21 April this year it will be two years since Mordechai Vanunu was released from Ashkelon prison in Israel, where he had served an 18 year sentence, including 12 years in solitary confinement. Vanunu, a former technician at Dimona, Israel's centre for nuclear research, was kidnapped from Rome in September 1986 and forcibly taken back to Israel to face charges of treason for revealing Israel's secret development and stockpiling of nuclear weapons to the Sunday Times. Despite this brutal sentence for telling the truth, and years of what Amnesty International described as "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment", Mordechai has, remarkably, retained his sanity and an absolute commitment to a nuclear-free Middle East and the right to freedom of speech.

Although he served his full sentence, the Israeli authorities continue to pursue and harass him. A few weeks ago Vanunu was once more back in an Israeli court to face 21 charges of breaking the severe and unwarranted restrictions imposed on him following his release from prison. This postponed hearing was "coincidentally" held on the same day as the Palestinian elections; therefore, it came as no surprise that Vanunu's appearance in court got no publicity. The charges in this case relate to speaking to foreigners, which Vanunu is forbidden to do; in addition he is not permitted to leave Jerusalem without permission and is denied a passport. It is because he has defiantly continued to exercise his human rights and refused to remain silent that he is now facing these latest charges. The judge's decision is due in March, just one month before the restrictions themselves are to be reviewed. Mordechai's appeal against the imposition of the draconian restrictions was turned down earlier this year by the High Court.

Since his release Vanunu has been arrested several times — most recently after attending a protest at the Wall. He repeatedly said that he had gone to see the Apartheid Wall, and had not left Jerusalem as accused. His lawyer was able to demonstrate that the Israeli security services had no real idea where the boundary of Jerusalem was, and Mordechai was released without any conditions.



Steve Bell, 2004

Vanunu encountered further evidence of Israel's iniquitous legal system when his long-running libel action against Yediot Aharonot came to an end. While he was still in prison the paper had said he was passing bomb-making information to Palestinian prisoners. Both Mordechai AND the prison authorities denied the story and he sued the paper for defamation. The judge's decision in December was so blatantly biased as to be shocking even by Israeli standards. She stated that because the source for the story was a high ranking security officer it was legitimate for the newspaper to print it

“He is not permitted to leave Jerusalem without permission and is denied a passport”

— tantamount to saying the story had to be believed. The judge then ordered Mordechai to pay costs of 36,000 Shekels (£4,800).

In the most recent bout of harassment, Mordechai was summoned to a court hearing on 22 February, during which the police asserted he had been

spying. No evidence at all was brought to substantiate this, but the police were nevertheless able to confiscate his computer, and bring pressure to bear on Microsoft to give them access to his emails.

Ernest Rodker, Adeline O'Keeffe

Please support Mordechai by joining in the Vanunu Freedom Ride, a bike ride from Faslane (Britain's nuclear submarine base near Glasgow) to London, via Carlisle, Manchester, Stoke, Birmingham and Oxford, to coincide with the second anniversary of Vanunu's release from prison. Mordechai was elected Rector of Glasgow University in 2004. We need riders and people to welcome the riders along the route. See www.vanunufreedomride.org.uk or contact 0845 4581965 for more details.

You can contact Mordechai Vanunu at: vmjc1954@gmail.com
Campaign for a Nuclear Free Middle East
— contact: david.lrcnd@cnduk.org

LARF or CRY



ZAPIRO



MAHJOOB



NEIL BENNETT/THE TIMES, LONDON 28 JANUARY 2006

"I suppose Mr Bush will have to free Palestine from the yoke of democracy"



WWW.BAHA-CARTOON.NET

AMJAD RASMI



PSC AGM — Campaigning to end Occupation

The AGM this year featured three keynote speakers: His Excellency Manuel Hassassian, Head of the Palestinian Delegation to the UK, Jeff Halper from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) and Mushtaq Khan, Professor of Economics at SOAS.

Betty Hunter, PSC's General Secretary, talked of the important work that had been carried out by PSC nationally and its branches throughout the year. She stressed that the year ahead will be a crucial and difficult one for the Palestinian people and PSC must be ready to respond effectively to any development. If we are to achieve change in the attitude of the British government we need to build a strong grassroots movement.

Delegates gave a warm reception to **Professor Hassassian** — for many this was the first time they had heard him speak since his recent appointment to the London post. He spoke of Israel's impunity and his view that the US was not best placed to be the main Middle East peace broker given its past record of unconditional support to Israel. He criticised Europe for not having the political maturity to hold an independent position in the Quartet and also the Muslim and Arab world for its failure to act in support of the Palestinian people. He praised the Palestinian people for their maturity in the conduct of the recent

A Miscarriage of Justice

Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh are in the eleventh year of their imprisonment for a crime they did not commit. Amnesty International regards their trial as unfair.

The campaign has the support of 60 MPs but the government still refuses to release evidence. Please ask your MP to support EDM 1440. for further information go to: www.freesaj.org.uk



Samar Alami



Manuel Hassassian

Legislative Council elections and said nothing could exonerate Israel for the damage inflicted upon the Palestinians over the last decades. A negotiated settlement was the only solution, with an end to Israeli occupation and self-determination for the Palestinians. Prof Hassassian concluded by thanking the PSC for its work in support of the Palestinian people.

Jeff Halper spoke of the danger that the Israeli Government could, by cleverly drawing the borders to minimise the reduction of the West Bank territories, present the planned unilateral borders as a 'reasonable offer', just like the 'disengagement' from Gaza. He talked of the Bush-Sharon exchange of letters where Bush approved the annexation of settlement blocks to Israel, accompanied by Israel's strategy to declare final borders.

Delegates from the recent PSC election monitoring mission spoke of their impressions both at the polling stations and speaking to ordinary Palestinians (see page 4).

Mushtaq Khan explained that this is a period when we can expect the very sudden escalation of a difficult situation in Palestine because the western

countries led by the US are painting themselves into a corner by presenting threats to the Palestinian people. He warned that, if the threats of withdrawal of aid are carried out, this would not only lead to a severe worsening in the existing deprivation and poverty in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but, if Palestinian security forces were not paid, civil war could result.

Apart from the formal speeches, the organisational business of the AGM was carried out efficiently with speakers from branches and affiliated groups as well as the Executive. The newly elected Executive committee included members with a wide range of political backgrounds and campaigning interests such as political prisoners and church disinvestment as

well as valuable organisational skills. This bodes well for the coming year, which will by all indications be one of the most challenging for PSC.



Jeff Halper



Mushtaq Khan

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign 2006 Annual General Meeting was held on 11 February at the University of London Union. The Annual Report, Finance Report and Resolutions passed are available to members on request.

Active on all fronts!

Christmas Campaigning

Several PSC branches used the festive season to highlight the issues surrounding Bethlehem during Christmas. **Bucks/Berks** contacted hundreds of churches in their area using material from the Open Bethlehem project, launched by the Mayor of Bethlehem in November (see *Winter issue of PN*).

York also focused on the work of Open Bethlehem to keep the city accessible despite being isolated by the Apartheid Wall. Supported by the York Minster, they distributed almost 2,000 leaflets to the crowds waiting to take part in the main carol service. Methodist churches gave them support too, featuring Bethlehem and PSC material in several of their Advent and Christmas services. And articles were published on the situation in Bethlehem in local Methodist and Baptist Church magazines.

Oxford PSC marked the festive season with some Alternative Christmas Carols in the week before Christmas. They obtained a busker's license, (so it was legitimate), printed the words of the carols for their audience as well as the singers, and featured a crib surrounded by a model Apartheid Wall.

Oxford also organised an exhibition about Bethlehem in the Central Library, combining pictures on a religious theme with the reality of life there. They are planning to follow this up with an exhibition about Jerusalem in the run-up to Easter, for the local churches.

Brighton are already fundraising to pay for a visiting group of 25 Palestinian dancers and musicians, to tour the UK next Christmas. A series of 20 events, starting in February, entitled 'Music and visions of peace', will highlight the arts and culture of the region, and aims to show that two peoples can work together despite the difficulties they face.

Fundraising

Manchester PSC had a busy few months leading up to Christmas. A number of public meetings were held with Palestinian speakers and the branch held its fifth annual Breakfast

for Palestine in November. Stalls were held at each event and at the Bradford CND Peace and Craft Fair in Saltaire in Yorkshire. Overall the branch raised about £1,500 and was therefore able to send substantial donations to 'Enlighten' and to the 'Women's Organisation for Palestinian Prisoners'.

The **Lambeth & Wandsworth** branch of PSC held a successful fundraising Pub Quiz in the Workers Beer Company's Clapham pub, the 'Bread and Roses', on 2 February. With several bottles of Zaytoun Olive Oil for prizes, they attracted a full house and raised over £150 towards a children's playground in the Jalazone refugee camp.

Bucks/Berks branch also rounded the year off with a successful social and fundraiser, and have plans to increase contact with local universities this year.

Resisting Zionist intimidation

Some branches have experienced difficulties lately with harassment and intimidation from Zionists. When the **Manchester** PSC stall in the city centre was attacked by aggressive Zionist supporters, the police were called but they failed to protect the group from verbal and physical threats.

A letter of complaint to the Chief Inspector of Manchester Police resulted in a meeting in which members highlighted PSC's legitimate campaigning rights, and the problem of being harassed by a highly organised group of thugs enjoying apparent impunity from the law.

PSC **Cymru**, meanwhile, have won a year-long struggle against a campaign of intimidation by Christian Zionists in Cardiff. The group would attempt to disrupt the PSC's work there by closing in on them and handing out Zionist literature.

These efforts were thwarted by simply moving the regular leafleting sessions to different locations. PSC Cymru told Palestine News: "We have the streets to ourselves once more."

Boycott events

Exeter kicked off their BIG campaign at their annual Palestine Day event at Exeter University in November, which was addressed by Betty Hunter, linking the boycott call to a commitment to sell Palestinian olive oil and other products. This was followed up by the National Day of Action on 10 December, where members talked to shoppers outside Tesco and M&S in the Exeter High Street. Their table with goods from the stores from Israel, ▶



Campaigning in Birmingham

and alternatives too, brought a good response — and even co-operation from the staff in Tesco when a shopper complained.

Future plans are to take the action to other towns in the region and help other groups to organise around the boycott issue. The branch is also in contact with the SW Region Labour Party, with a view to them taking up the boycott initiative, and have a speaker from War on Want coming in March.

In **Bangor**, north Wales, PSC have combined with the Bangor and Anglesey Peace and Justice Group and now carry out activities together, such as a recent vigil outside the Cathedral. Boycott activities have continued (they recently found plastic snow sledges in the shops — made in Israel). They leaflet supermarket car parks and have found that handing out leaflets to drivers in traffic jams is also a good way to get people's attention.

Bruce Kent also visited Bangor and gave an inspiring talk in which he spoke up strongly for Palestinian rights at the same time as making his plea for 'War no More' and showing the excellent 20 minute film.

Birmingham have maintained a boycott stall virtually every Saturday in the City Centre for the past three years, culminating in a highly successful 'Wall Must Fall' day of action. PSC supporters formed a human wall with placards, and had a 2.3m high replica of a Caterpillar bulldozer, targeting four shops stocking Caterpillar products.

Oxford PSC also runs a stall each week, which was started several years ago by Judith Dawes, a passionate campaigner for the Palestinians, who sadly died last year. People who sign up (currently over 400 people), receive a weekly electronic bulletin which provides them with information about local and national events and links to news and web-sites about Palestine.

Liberal Democrat MEP Sajjad Karim met with a delegation from **Manchester** PSC to discuss how to work together and support the campaign. Sajjad is on both the EU Trade Committee and the Committee for Human Rights and had already tabled questions to the Commission challenging the EU/Israel trade agreement.

Sajjad plans to use a newly agreed human rights clause to challenge the agreement and look into seeking reparations from Israel for EU development infrastructure destroyed by the IDF. He also discussed the suppressed EU report on East



Children from Al Asria Centre, Jabalia camp, Gaza in Orchard Square, Sheffield

Jerusalem and the EU insistence on voting rights for Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The meeting inspired Manchester PSC to undertake a local lobbying campaign, contacting MPs and MEPs throughout the North West, enclosing copies of the EU report.

Films, visits, speakers

On 1 February the film 'Bury my Heart in Palestine' was shown at the Duke of York's cinema in **Brighton**. This film is the work of three Brighton filmmakers from different backgrounds who visited Palestine in 2003, narrated by ICAHD's Jeff Halper, and with commentary by Irish human rights activist, Caiomhe Butterly (who was shot in the leg whilst protecting children in Jenin). Tapes and DVDs are available at a cost of £10 (plus £2 P&P): e-mail beautifulintention@yahoo.co.uk.

Naseer Arafat, architect and conservationist from Nablus and a former York University student, returned in early December as part of a tour which included **Stavanger, Dundee** (twinned with Nablus), **Manchester, London, Amsterdam** and **York**. His main theme was his determination to break down the isolation which Israel tries to impose on the towns and cities of the West Bank.

There was also an excellent turnout for a public meeting in February organised by **York** PSC and ICAHD UK (the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions) at which Jeff Halper spoke on 'A New Apartheid Regime? Israel/

Palestine after the Elections' as part of Jeff's recent highly successful tour of the UK. Another familiar Israeli speaker, Dr Ilan Pappé, was invited by **Sheffield** PSC to speak on 'Palestine in the Post Sharon era' — the hot topic just now.

Hereford hosted a talk about a two week trip to Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, by a visiting lecturer at the Al-Quds Medical School, whose medical faculty is now separated from the main teaching hospitals by the Wall. And in February, Judith Keshet was billed to talk about the Israeli human rights organisation MACHSOM WATCH.

David Mowat has just returned from his pilgrimage walking from Bristol to Jerusalem, to then work with ISM, and has been speaking in **Reading** and **Bucks/Berks** about his experience before returning to Palestine in February.

Many more meetings and film screenings are planned around the country for March 2006, including David Bencheitrit's film "Dear Father, Quiet, We're Shooting..." in St Anthony's College, **Oxford**. The film unfolds the personal stories of five Israeli soldiers of different ranks and units who, each with his particular experience, share the decision not to continue serving in the IDF.

Branches may wish to show Kate Barlow's powerful film on Jenin — see page 26 for details.

**There is a PSC branch near you!
Phone 0207 700 6192 for contacts.**

Linking, twinning, sponsoring

This winter saw more visits to Palestine by PSC branches, with the aim of strengthening existing ties and creating new ones.

East London PSC launched a campaign in the autumn to twin Tower Hamlets with **Jenin**, who warmly welcomed the initiative. (Local MP George Galloway had already visited Jenin last summer to promote the project.) Said PSC member Miriam Scharf: "Our first fund-raiser collected money for the Free Theatre in Jenin. Four of us from the campaign went for six days just after Christmas to take the money, a message of solidarity from the people of Tower Hamlets and to get ideas for projects between the two municipalities which could make the contact and the twinning real!

"We found great hospitality, but also heard some terrible stories of imprisonment, torture, loss of relatives to Israeli gunfire or bulldozers and loss of land. There are posters everywhere of 'martyrs', the last being the 10-year-old shot in November, whose parents donated his organs to Israeli patients.

"The Israelis were in occupation of Jenin for three of the four days of our visit. On the day they left there was a street demonstration of some hundreds of young people, a band, and "our forces" marching in uniform. Foreigners are seen immediately as friends, you are looked after with amazing warmth and hospitality. The morning we left our hosts gave us presents, trays of baklava, CDs of photos of our meetings — and told us the army was back, occupying twenty houses and a tower-block overlooking the camp.

"We made excellent contacts and have come back with loads of concrete projects, from an exchange of artwork to fund-raising for specific things needed at the Centre for the Disabled, at the Girls secondary school. Hopefully this will lead to an exchange of people; they want trainers, teachers, musicians, artists, and sports coaches.

"If you want to establish twinning



SHEFFIELD PSC

Children at the New Horizons Centre, Gaza, with toys, videos and puzzles donated by Sheffield PSC

in your area don't wait for the council; Tower Hamlets council passed a resolution in December blocking twinning. Our advice is, just get on with it!"

Leicester PSC, together with Leicester NUT, Leicester Social Forum and Friends of Al Aqsa are all working together to twin Leicester with **Bethlehem**. Two local schools have already established twinings and in July the Leicester Bethlehem Link Group hosted the 'Hakaya' Children's Dance troupe from Bethlehem.

On 10 December they held a 'Bethlehem Christmas Fayre' at Bishop Street Methodist Church in the city centre, to which the Lord Mayor paid an official visit. Palestinian products such as olive wood and mother-of-pearl carvings, olive oil and embroidery were sold and the twenty minute film 'Walling in, walling out: a Bethlehem Story', produced by the International Centre in Bethlehem, was shown throughout the day. At lunchtime the Revd. Nicola Jones spoke about her visits to Bethlehem, and related stories of the lives of three women she knew: a Palestinian Muslim, a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli peace activist.

Sheffield has been active for years in **Gaza**. Last year they brought over the Al Asria children's folk dance group from the Al Asria Centre, Jabalia Refugee Camp, Gaza, for a very successful tour of the UK. (In Sheffield they danced as part of the children's festival — pictured.) The branch has recently paid for new costumes for the dance group, which they hope to host again in 2006.

In Khan Younis they established the Never Stop Dreaming Centre, with help from local student volunteers in Gaza, and have set up or sponsored various children's educational and play projects in the refugee camps of Jabalia and Khan Younis.

In December the branch donated toys, videos and puzzles to the New Horizons (Afaq Jadeeda) Centre in Nussairat refugee camp (pictured).

The **Hebron** and **Exeter** twinning group was formally launched at the EPSC Palestine Day held at Exeter University on 19 November.

Hebron lies in the south of the West Bank and with a city population of 150,000 is the largest city in the West Bank after annexed East Jerusalem. It is seen as a particularly troubled city as there are not only Israeli settlements on the outskirts of the city but also directly in the centre of it. Because of the settlers in the centre of the city (around 500), there is also a huge army presence (around 4000 soldiers), and the centre of Hebron has been divided into two zones. Sector H1 (80% of the city) is under Palestinian rule, H2 is under Israeli control. This area contains part of the old city including Abraham's mosque and the tomb of the Patriarchs.

Some local activists in Exeter were keen to link with Hebron as they had visited it or worked there. Luckily, on Palestine Day, Hamid Qawasmeh, Public Relations Officer for the Governors Office in Hebron, came to do a talk at the university about the current situation in the city, and they were able to discuss the project with him.

As the process of formal twinning can be long and complex, it is more realistic to start with a friendship link between similar organisations and institutions, and build from there. However, so far **Chester** has succeeded in twinned formally with **Jericho**, **Dundee** with **Nablus** and **Glasgow** with **Bethlehem**.

To be continued...!

A conference will be held over Easter in Bethlehem, hosted by the Britain-Palestine Twinning Network.

For details see www.twinningwithpalestine.net

Pioneers for Palestine

Riyad Tibi reports on his recent visit to the Al-Rowwad Theatre Group

Aida camp is one of three Palestinian refugee camps in the Bethlehem area. With a population today of 4,500 in half a square kilometre, it was created in 1949 to house refugees from villages within what is now Israel. The camp, which lies right next to the Apartheid Wall, has been subjected to repeated assaults and curfews by the Israeli army since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada.

Aida camp is also the home of the al-Rowwad Cultural and Theatre training centre. Al-Rowwad means 'pioneers' in Arabic and the work of the al-Rowwad team truly is pioneering. While the main focus is on children's development through theatrical and artistic expression (dance, painting, music), it has a wider mandate, which includes developmental work and cultural exchanges. I visited the group in December 2005 on behalf of a UK project called Adopt a Family



Young actors from Aida camp

in Palestine, which has recently formed a partnership with al-Rowwad. Adopt a Family raises funds in the UK and channels them to al-Rowwad, which distributes the money to the neediest families and is generally in charge of monitoring of the funds.

My host was al-Rowwad's impressive director, Dr AbdelFattah Abu Srou, who showed me the theatrical training centre and IT training room where we were treated to an impromptu violin performance by two of the al-Rowwad children. The training for the young Palestinians is provided by both local and international volunteers, for example the children we heard play are coached once a week by an Italian volunteer, and the choral group by a volunteer from the Kamandjati music group in Ramallah.

We then toured the camp, passing right by the Wall with its sinister watchtowers. I was informed that the flamboyant murals on this section of the Wall had been painted by a group of Mexican solidarity activists/artists and others. We then dropped in on one of our adopted families. As ever I was struck by the resilience of Palestinians in the most difficult of situations and also by their spontaneous hospitality. The head of the family (a widow) was struggling to pay tuition fees for her daughter as well as for expensive medicines for an eye condition. She told us she had immediately spent all of her first consignment on these much-needed medicines. It was instructive to meet some of the end recipients of financial aid and understand how much this money means to them. Back in al-Rowwad's modest HQ I was shown

some of the beautiful products of yet another of Al-Rowwad's projects, a work creation scheme for camp women involving embroidery and other traditional handicrafts.

I was really impressed by what al-Rowwad has managed to achieve across a number of fronts in the seven years of its existence, largely due to the energy and vision of Dr Abu Srou and his dedicated team of volunteers. I could see at first hand the advantage of twinning with community-based NGOs such as al-Rowwad, which has an intimate knowledge of literally every family in the camp. As the situation for so many Palestinians worsens, it is increasingly important to continue to support projects like this that make such a difference to Palestinian lives.

The al-Rowwad children's theatre group are touring France and Belgium in June/ July 2006 to perform 'We are the children of the camp', a historical drama about the Palestinian refugee experience. This tour could potentially be extended to the UK but this would require support from PSC branches or other UK solidarity groups. Possible dates would be 5 – 20 July. If your group would be interested please contact al-Rowwad directly (email : alrowwad@alrowwad.org / alrowwadtheatre@yahoo.com). A video of the group's previous performances is available from the PSC Office.

For more information on al-Rowwad visit www.alrowwad.org

For information on Adopt a Family visit www.al-wda.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25&Itemid=89

Art dialogue: UK — Palestine

For the past three months eleven artists from Palestine and Chelsea College of Art have been collaborating on two exhibitions, making work together via the internet. The artists swapped practices — the Palestinians implementing the Londoners' works and vice versa. Two exhibitions will take place at the end of the term, one at Chelsea College of Art and Design for one week opening on 20 March and one in Ramallah at the beginning of May. For an update on the project and to view the dialogue going on between the artists visit www.chelseasculptureprojects.net.

Another major collaborative project is a 'wall painting' exhibition opening on 23 May at the Bethlehem Peace Centre, curated by Charles Asprey and Kay Pallister. Twenty five international artists will take part. At the same time an Arts criticism workshop will be held, by Sacha Craddock and Sally O'Reilly. For more information see www.artschoolpalestine.com.

Music from the Motherland

Paul Hughes-Smith listens to three inspiring new CDs from Palestinian singers

Palestinian music has always absorbed many musical influences throughout its long history, by virtue of its geographical position at the centre of the Arab world. Enforced migration has now added to these influences and these three CDs, in their very different ways, represent the desire to preserve tradition and remember the good times, while embracing innovation and outside influences.

Reem Kelani is well known in the UK both as a solo artist and for her performances with Gilad Atzmon in the past. She has carried the flag of Palestinian music almost single-handedly here for the last few years. Although born in the UK, her family is from Galilee and she was exposed to many kinds of music from an early age. Her CD, 'Sprinting Gazelle — Palestinian Songs from the Motherland and the Diaspora' (Fuse Records CFCD048 distributed by Proper Music

— www.properdistribution.com) is a mixture of traditional songs, the result of extensive research into her Palestinian heritage, and settings of popular and resistance poetry.

Reem is passionate in live performances, evoking the pain and longing of a dispossessed people. Often such passion does not translate well to the cold conditions of a studio recording, so she has wisely chosen a varied menu with changes in tempo, dynamics and musical colour but that still expresses that essential fervour of a live performance.

In most Arab music, as with these CDs, poetry is the predominant force and inspiration that is in turn served by the music. Whether it is a poem by Mahmoud Darwish (Track 5 Mawwaal — variations on loss) or a song collected from women in a Lebanese refugee camp (the title track, *Sprinting Gazelle*), the words are crucial, and are helpfully printed in full in both Arabic and English in the CD booklet. The richness of the musical arrangements is due mostly to the variety of musicians and styles supporting Reem: from the jazz world of piano, bass and drums (Zoe Rahman, Oli Hayhurst

and Patrick Illingworth) to more exotic sounds and rhythms from the Diaspora, such as Armenian duduk (Tigran Aleksanyan), Iranian tombak (Fariborz Kiani) or the violin of Sami Bishai. The recording deals deftly with all these complex textures as well as the full power of Reem's voice. 'Sprinting Gazelle' is both a celebration of the Palestinian spirit and a debut album for a truly original musical talent.

Moneim Adwan (oud player and singer) grew up in Gaza and now lives in Rafah after studying and working abroad in other Arab countries from the age of 17. He returned to Gaza in the wake of Oslo to work for the Palestinian Authority, organising concerts and also writing film music. Musical performance can still be problematic in the more conservative Gaza and most of his collaborative work with other musicians has been done outside the area; this album, 'Once upon a Time in Palestine' (Accords Croises AC111 distributed by Harmonia Mundi — www.uk.hmboutique.com) was recorded by a French company during the Festival of Sacred Music in Fes, Morocco.

The sleeve notes describe Palestine in 1948 as being at the 'crossroads of a range of influences', influences that were further widened by Moneim's long period abroad and this is certainly reflected in these pieces. Once again the poetry of the songs (commissioned from young poets) sets the mood, but the lyrics do not refer specifically to Palestine but celebrate traditional life, love and spiritual yearning. The supporting ensemble of musicians from Gaza is similar to what you would expect to find in any group from Egypt or Lebanon — qanoun (zither), violin, ney (flute) and percussion — but the violin (Safwan Kenani) and qanoun playing (Mahran Moreb) are particularly spirited and distinctive.

Moneim has a wonderfully light voice that can be both tender and passionate and his pitch is unfailingly pure, however ornamented the singing. It is heartening to hear such beautiful music coming out of an area that has suffered the worst deprivations of the occupation, and Moneim's determination to remain in Gaza can only be applauded.

Marwan Abado is a Christian Palestinian, born as a refugee in Beirut in 1967, who has lived and worked in Vienna since 1985. This latest CD, 'Kabila' (Iris Music 3001 895, distributed by Harmonia Mundi —



Moneim Adwan



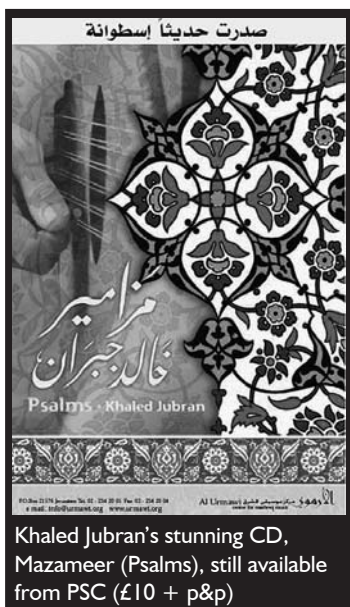
Reem Kelani

► www.uk.hmboutique.com), is the fifth Marwan has recorded and so should be seen as part of a body of work rather than as a single statement. He is the closest Palestinians have to what the French call a *chansonnier*, composing highly personal and individual songs sung in a very intimate style and often using his own lyrics as well as those of other poets. Woven into these are often thought-provoking commentaries on the Palestinian condition and a certain wry humour is evident in his live performances.

Despite working with European musicians and, since 2000, as a duo with the percussionist Peter Rosmanith, his compositions are always uniquely Palestinian in character, whatever the instruments used; here the accordion (Otto Lechner) and the violin (Joanna Lewis). This CD is also partly instrumental and draws some of its inspiration from the classical tradition of *taqsim*, in which a composition is preceded by a passage of free improvisation. Marwan's oud playing is warm but never showy and you can feel the close rapport he has with his other musicians.

This is music in miniature, to be played late at night when there is time for reflection.

Like Reem Kelani, Marwan Abado proves that cross-cultural collaboration can be successful without having to sacrifice your own national musical voice.



Khaled Jubran's stunning CD, *Mazameer (Psalms)*, still available from PSC (£10 + p&p)

Jerusalem Music Festival

An annual festival staged each year in Jerusalem and Ramallah gives Palestinians a chance to hear many wonderful groups of musicians from around the world (last year from Tunisia, Spain, Argentina and Korea), together with artists from Palestine itself. They also work in close conjunction with artists associated with the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, that has branches in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah. One of the concerts in 2005 featured a large ensemble of more than 20 young musicians called 'Maqamat', that was designed to give a platform to the most talented students from the Conservatory. The logistics of arranging rehearsals for all these students who live miles apart would be difficult enough in any country but in the West Bank, with its checkpoints and endless restrictions on movement, the final success of the project was an unbelievable achievement for all concerned.

The venues used for the festival concerts are well worth a visit in themselves, for very different reasons. In Jerusalem concerts are held in the Tomb of the Kings, an ancient first-century rock-hewn sepulchre site while in Ramallah, artists get to play in a brand new \$6m state-of-the-art concert hall, the Ramallah Cultural Palace, built recently with money from Japan.

In Ramallah I also attended a performance of 'The Little Prince' with specially composed music performed by the Palestinian-German Youth Orchestra, the result of a musical summer camp in Ramallah with students from Palestine and Jena in Germany. This was supported by the Friends School in Ramallah and the Barenboim-Said Foundation, amongst others. It was so heartening to see all these young students working together and embracing the opportunity for cultural exchange. The young Palestinian director of the theatrical performance had herself won a scholarship to study production in Vienna.

Music is an essential part of the Palestinian soul and you cannot go far without encountering it in some form or other. When I returned to Jerusalem I was lucky enough to go to a wedding celebration on the rooftop of a house in the old city and music is of course one of the most essential ingredients of any such celebration. It was a refreshing antidote to the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of the Ramallah Cultural Palace: a massive sound system was set up with a small makeshift stage and a band composed of guitar, synthesizer, darabuka, and drum kit fronted by two singers. The wonderful Madaniya Brothers stormed through three hours of popular Palestinian songs, dancing and extended eulogies to the bridegroom and his family while the friends of the groom tossed him in the air, flourished the Palestinian flag and formed endless lines and circles for increasingly hectic bouts of dabke dancing while carrying the singer shoulder-high through the crowd. It all ended as abruptly as it had begun, chairs were neatly stacked away and the guests melted away into the night. It was a party to remember — and just as much part of the Palestinian music scene as the Jerusalem Music Festival.

Paul Hughes-Smith

If you haven't visited Palestine, this would be a great introduction to the area and its cultural heritage. For details of this year's Festival see the website of the organisers, Yabous Productions: www.yabous.org.

Munich, or Making baklava

Joseph Massad draws parallels between Spielberg's recent film and Otto Preminger's *Exodus*

"The best baklava is made by the Arabs in Jaffa," insists the Mossad case officer to his chief agent in charge of assassinating those Palestinians Israel claims planned the Munich operation of 1972. Besides being excellent baklava-makers, we learn little else in Steven Spielberg's film *Munich* about Jaffa's Palestinians, the majority of whom were pushed into the sea by Zionist forces in May 1948. Many drowned while the rest escaped on boats to Lebanon and were never allowed to return. *Munich* is not about these Palestinians; it is emphatically about Israeli Jews and Israeli terrorism.

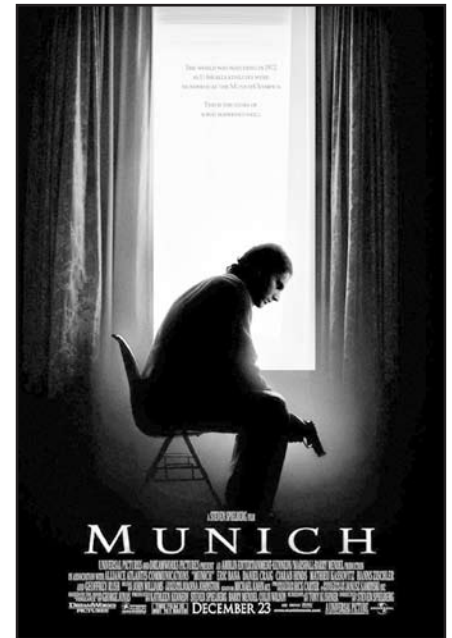
In the context of Hollywood's cinematic history, *Munich* is not the first film to discuss Israeli terror; Otto Preminger's 1960 film *Exodus* was in essence a celebration of Jewish terrorism. Like *Exodus*, *Munich* poses moral questions about terrorist methods and whether the end justifies the means, as it chronicles the pangs of conscience troubling Israeli terrorists while they murder Palestinian poets, writers, and politicians across Europe and in Lebanon. To a considerable extent, *Munich* is already having the same impact on American audiences and is playing the same role as *Exodus* did in legitimizing Israeli policies and the Zionist project.

Exodus was the major cinematic achievement of the Zionist movement. The film popularized the Zionist cause and remains inspirational to young American and European Zionists. The film was most effective in staging the determination and desperation of the Zionist leadership, which was depicted as having no choice but to conquer Palestine and make it the Jewish State. *Exodus* tells the story of the

Zionist hijacking of a ship from Cyprus to Palestine by a Zionist Haganah commander, Ari Ben Canaan, who threatens to blow it up with 200 pounds of dynamite killing 611 Jewish men, women, and children. The film depicts the Jewish refugees as in agreement with the plan and vote in favor of it, rendering the terrorist threat a suicide bombing. Indeed Jewish mothers refuse to let the children off the ship when Ben Canaan asks them to, insisting that their children should die with them in the event they carry out the suicide bombing.

"*Munich* is playing the same role as *Exodus* did in legitimizing Israeli policies and the Zionist project"

Exodus insists that Ben Canaan's threat of suicide bombing was not an idle one. As in the extra-fictional world, which the film references, the Zionists had indeed blown up a similar ship in November 1940, killing 242 Jewish refugees. When questioned by a young American widow about the purpose of sacrificing so many lives, Ben Canaan tells her "call it publicity, a stunt to attract attention". He avers that "each person aboard this ship is a soldier. The only weapon we have to fight with is our willingness to die". While the Haganah is shown in the film as engaging in suicide bombings to achieve its goals, it is contrasted with the terrorist Irgun whose terrorist goals in the film targeted the British specifically (but not the Arabs!) and were not suicidal.



Exodus finally reconciles whatever misgivings it has about Irgun-style terrorism with its approved version of Haganah-style suicide-bombings, in the interest of unifying both forces for the purpose of establishing the Jewish State. The Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah, stolen as it is from gentile Czech composer Bedrich Smetana's symphonic poems *Má Vlast* (the second poem, to be exact), is played ad nauseam in the film to drive the effect home. The major achievement of *Exodus* besides disseminating the Zionist story was to eliminate the Palestinian people, whose lands and lives were being robbed by the Zionist project, from the equation. *Munich* need not dabble with such existential questions, as the matter of Israel's existence on stolen Palestinian lands and at the expense of Palestinian lives has been settled in *Exodus*. *Munich* simply wants to update the story. Script co-writer Tony Kushner was clear on this point in a recent article he wrote for the Los Angeles Times: "my criticism of Israel has always been accompanied by declarations of unconditional support of Israel's right to exist, and I believe that the global community has a responsibility to defend that right. I have written and spoken of my love for Israel."

When only one Palestinian, Taha, is allowed to speak in *Exodus*, he is permitted to do so in order to praise Zionism. *Exodus* is invested in depicting Jewish colonists as ultra-civilized compared to the Palestinians, shown throughout the film in Bedouin garb (parading as village and city apparel) as a measure of their backwardness. *Munich*

employs similar cinematic tactics, even though when it shows Palestinians in Western “civilized” garb, it reminds viewers that they are no different from those who live in Arab villages. If Ari Ben Canaan is a cultured man who knows his way around a restaurant menu of French food and wine, *Munich’s* Avner Kaufman is a gourmet cook and a sensual lover, although he has questionable taste in erotic fantasies. *Munich* focuses exclusively on the character of Avner, exploring his inner conflict, his love for his wife and yearning for his newly born child, as well as his troubled relationship with his parents.

The film also describes the moral conflicts of the other members of Avner’s terrorist cell, inspired by what Robert, the explosives expert, presents as Jewish ethics. Robert, who learned his expertise at the hands of the Israeli secret police, the Shin Bet, is unable to reconcile his Jewish ethics with his Israeli training and finally quits the killing spree. He is reminiscent of Dov Landau, the young Irgun explosives expert in *Exodus* who had learned his skills from the Nazis in Auschwitz when he had to dynamite the ground to make trenches for the burial of exterminated Jews. Unlike *Munich’s* Robert, Landau had no qualms about killing Jews, Arabs and Britons when he blew up the King David Hotel. Landau’s major trauma as presented in the film was not his internment in Auschwitz or his witnessing the gassing of Jews and participating in burying them, the only thing that made him cry was his rape by the Nazis (“they used me as you would use a woman”), which impelled him to join the Irgun as a restorative

“Zionist propaganda has always claimed that Jewish soldiers ‘shoot and cry’”

act of his lost manhood. Robert in contrast has little problem sharing a homoerotic moment of dancing with Steve in celebration and rejoicing after they murder Wa’il Zu’aytar in Rome. The sexual politics of Zionism have certainly progressed, or so we are led to believe watching *Munich*.

The moral qualms that Robert and other members of the terrorist cell express strike the educated viewer as uncanny, since documentary accounts of and interviews with Mossad agents show them to have strong ideological



commitment and determination to kill enemy Palestinians with no moral questioning. It is some of the diaspora Jewish supporters of Israel who infrequently feign moral dilemmas (on occasion, also, Israelis feign them when called upon to perform before the international media). Spielberg being one of them expressed his dilemmas in clear terms to the London Times, namely that he and his family “love Israel, we support Israel, we have unqualified support for Israel, which has struggled, surrounded by enemies, ever since its statehood was declared . . . I feel very proud to stand right alongside all of my friends in Israel; and yet I can ask questions about these very, very sensitive issues between Israelis and Palestinians and the whole quest for a homeland”. *Munich* is a film in which Spielberg, Kushner, and similar-minded diaspora supporters, and not Israeli Mossad agents, may recognise themselves.

The moral questions that *Munich* poses have more to do with the souls of Israeli Jews. In that, it does not deviate much from Zionist propaganda, which has always claimed that Jewish soldiers “shoot and cry.” Indeed, Golda Meir, who is depicted in the film as a righteous and lovable leader, had once said “We can forgive you for killing our sons. But we will never forgive you for making us kill yours.” It is this racist sentiment which structures the story *Munich* wants to tell. The fact that Palestinian violence was in response to Zionist conquest and murder is immaterial to Spielberg’s reasoning, nor the fact that many Palestinians are willing to forgive Israeli Jews for the continued theft of their lands and livelihoods, the continued oppression they visit upon all Palestinian communities in Palestine and the diaspora, and for the major role Israeli and diaspora Jews play in the Israeli and Western media in transforming Palestinians from victims of Israeli terror into perpetrators of it.

Spielberg, who is at any rate an active participant in such media depictions, humanizes Israeli terrorists in *Munich* but expectedly not the Palestinian terrorists who are portrayed as having no conscience. It seems that, unlike their Israeli counterparts, Palestinians shoot but do not cry! We see the Israeli murderers laugh, cry, make love, cook, eat, kill, regret, question authority, but we also see them lose their souls. It is true that *Munich* wonders whether the policy of terrorism that Golda Meir unleashed out of anguish at the murder of Israeli athletes might have been misguided, but the film insists that it is none other than the Palestinians who forced the choice of terror on Israel. *Munich’s* point of contention with Meir’s policy rests on the film’s claim that because Jews have a morally superior code, Israel need not respond to the Palestinians in kind, a sentiment articulated by Robert, the explosives expert.

Some of the legitimacy that Spielberg and Kushner hope the film will receive comes from the dissatisfaction of Zionists with it, which to the US media confirms *Munich’s* “objectivity”. This is hardly different from how Sharon’s policies are presented as “fair” when opposed by Palestinians and Israelis who are to the right of Sharon. While this simple-minded tactic works with naïve US audiences, it has a harder time being persuasive to more savvy ones outside the country.

Like in *Exodus*, Palestinians in *Munich* ventriloquise the worst that Zionist propaganda says they say. If the good Palestinian in *Exodus* was the collaborator Taha, who was killed by the Palestinians for his treason, *Munich* offers the terrorist Ali who is killed by the Israelis for not being like Taha, confirming that the only good Palestinian is a dead Palestinian. As for the rest of the Palestinian people, *Munich*, like the Israeli authorities, hopes that they stick to making baklava and stop resisting Israeli oppression, resistance which forces Israel to kill them and which in turn forces moral dilemmas on Spielberg, Kushner, and some of Israel’s other supporters in the diaspora.

The writer is Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University, NY. His latest book *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question* is published by Routledge.

Challenging the silence

The title of Katie Barlow's new film, *Visit Palestine*, can be taken both ironically and literally. Palestine may not be at the top of most people's holiday destination list, but the film demonstrates what a contribution can be made by a truly committed 'visitor'. Irish activist Caoimhe Butterly explains how her ideological commitment grew into something much more personal, as she formed close friendships with the families she lived with and sought to protect. Her base was Jenin, with its massive refugee camp that has suffered innumerable violent incursions by the IDF — some of them documented first hand in this powerful film.

Amid death randomly dealt to the men, women and children of Jenin, Caoimhe makes light of the leg wound she herself received. But the real focus of the film is on the movingly articulate inhabitants of Jenin who talk of the friends and relations lost to Israeli



Caoimhe wounded in Jenin

bombs, guns and bulldozers. We witness the children's determination to achieve an education, when the daily act of going to school may result in death (since the beginning of the Intifada, five children have been killed in the classrooms of Jenin alone); we hear a mother's resignation, waiting for the demolition of her home that she knows will follow her

son's resistance. The family of a young woman suicide bomber speak of their loss, telling of her deep depression after her brother's murder by the IDF.

All speak of their hopes, sometimes teetering on the edge of despair, for a better future. For despite the squalid surroundings of the camp, people manage to create what Caoimhe calls "spaces of beauty and joy": family celebrations take place, young couples get married amid the rubble, the children joke and tease, and learn to dance.

Caoimhe has no illusions that she can transform the situation; she can only help to alleviate her friends' isolation and tell an apparently indifferent world the truths it is reluctant to hear. She reminds all of us how important it is to "challenge the silence".

Hilary Wise

Visit Palestine is going to be screened at the Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, on 5 April at 8pm and at the Curzon Soho on 9 April at 2pm.

It will also be screened in May at the Duke of York cinema in Brighton and at the Watershed in Bristol (dates to be confirmed). It will be available on DVD through PSC at £15 (80 mins). The film makes an excellent basis for a public discussion: think about getting a copy to show locally.

Occupied Space

An exhibition in a London gallery in May will be featuring work by Palestinian artists. 'Occupied Space — Art for Palestine' is an exhibition of work in different media by artists from Palestine, the UK and Europe. This will be a rare opportunity to see paintings, drawings, photographs and sculptures by some of Palestine's best known contemporary artists as well as by younger artists embarking on their artistic careers. Works by established artists Nabil Anani, Suleiman Mansour, Khalil Rabah and Vera Tamari will be shown alongside that of younger artists Rafat Asad, Jad Salman and Rana Bishara. Work by the distinguished documentary photographer Rula Halawani and by a new generation of artists experimenting with digital photography and new media (Mohanad Yaccoubi and Shareef Sarhan for example) will also be

included. The work on show — much of it by artists based in Ramallah, Gaza, Jerusalem and inside the Green Line — will demonstrate some of the varied and vibrant work being created by artists throughout the Palestinian territories.

Palestinian artists now based in the UK, the US and elsewhere will also be contributing to the exhibition. Laila Shawa and Mona Hatoum have lived in London since the 1970s. Born in Beirut, the internationally acclaimed artist Mona Hatoum has been living and working in London since she came to study and was prevented from returning home by the outbreak of the civil war. Her video work and installations have been shown in major galleries, exhibitions



Mona Hatoum at the Tate Modern

and Biennales around the world.

The exhibition will also feature work donated by prominent artists from the UK, such as Maggi Hambling, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Antony Gormley and John Keane. Sophie Calle, the Paris-based artist renowned for her work that deals with identity and intimacy, private and public space, will be showing one of her bookworks, *Le Bronx*.

The exhibition is organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to raise awareness of artistic practice in Palestine. All the work will be for sale and proceeds will go towards supporting PSC's campaigns in Britain. The art works will also be available for viewing, and for sale after the exhibition, through an on-line gallery: www.occupiedspace.org.uk.

Nicola Gray

'Occupied Space — Art for Palestine' 15 — 20 May, 2006, Gallery 27, 27 Cork Street, London W1S 3NG

Paradise Now

Writer/director **Hani Abu-Asad**
from Nazareth

Said and Khaled, two young friends in their early 20s, who work in a garage in Nablus on the West Bank, are the faces of those tens of thousands of young Palestinian men who live without hope of normal security, normal jobs, normal family lives, under the pressure of the uncertainties and grinding poverty of Israeli occupation. "A lifelong imprisonment," they call it. Both have volunteered as suicide bombers, and they have opted to carry out their action together. The film starts just before they know they have been chosen to avenge an assassination, with a little casual violence from a customer over the car repair work they have done, and minutes of silent companionship, smoking, lying in the grass, looking down on the crowded city from the hills above.

So far, so grim, it might appear. But Hani Abu-Asad's film has such gripping tension in its story telling, a wry humour at unexpected moments, a touching flicker of love, and such a brilliant illumination of the young men's lives, that it has garnered praise and prizes in unexpected quantities, and even been nominated for an Oscar. No book, poems or article has so completely captured the texture of this Palestinian life. Leaving the cinema at the end is like crossing a checkpoint from another reality.

The film starts at a checkpoint, with Suha, the beautiful, confident, French-educated daughter of a revered Palestinian martyr, returning home. Without a word being exchanged, the power relations between her and the young Israeli soldier who finally nods her through are laid out. Mutual incomprehension and scorn are implied behind the two inscrutable faces from two worlds.

When smiling, relaxed Suha takes her car to be fixed at the garage and meets Said, she is too far from her old city's histories to understand that his life, and his stilted response to her, is marked not just by the Occupation, but by his father's shameful past as an Israeli collaborator.

By contrast, Said's mother is a brilliantly observed portrait of a woman who can read every nuance of

atmosphere in her surroundings, and needs no words to convey what she feels. When Said comes home with an unexpected guest for dinner and to spend the night in his room, she takes one look at the confident figure of Jamal — who has met Said after work to tell him his action is set for the following day — and she knows what her son is going to do. She feeds the two with the rest of the family, and looks at them in the dawn as they leave, as though nothing momentous is in her heart. Hani Abu-Asad deserves his Oscar for this subtle, heart-breaking scene alone.

He brings the film into a different emotional world as Said and Khaled are prepared for their joint suicide in a disused building. The two are shaved, dressed in new suits, fed a last meal, and videoed giving the political message that will be broadcast after their deaths. In between the high seriousness of the wanted leader the two meet with reverence, and the bungled filming and unconcerned sandwich munching of Jamal and some of the acolytes, Abu-Asad uses a wonderfully light touch and a see-saw of emotion between fear and laughter.

After their crossing into Israel goes wrong, there is a day of nerve-wracking searching for a lost Said as his bomb ticks away, and the momentum of the film goes into high gear.

It is remarkable that the film was actually shot mainly in Nablus despite an Israeli military siege, missile attacks, mine explosions, and the kidnapping of his location manager. Finally the set was moved to Nazareth to finish the film.

Without giving away the ending, the ambiguity of Khaled and Said's attitudes to what they are doing, their mood swings, their sense of responsibility, their sense of loss, tell everything there is to tell about Palestinian suicide bombers. This is a very important film for understanding one of the tragedies of our times. And as a work of art, it is a great film.

Victoria Brittain

UK premieres of Paradise Now

Saturday, 18 March 21.00,
the Ritzy cinema, Brixton;
Sunday, 19 March 18.00,
ICA cinema

A special exhibit of stunning photographs covering the production of the film in the town of Nablus — by award-winning photojournalist Seamus Murphy — will be on display during the festival run at The Ritzy. For more information on the photographs visit www.ashleywoods.com/photographers/portfolio.php?ph=2&sr=2.



April 2004: Camera crew of "Paradise Now" filming in a residential area bombed by Israeli Airforces in the Old City of Nablus.

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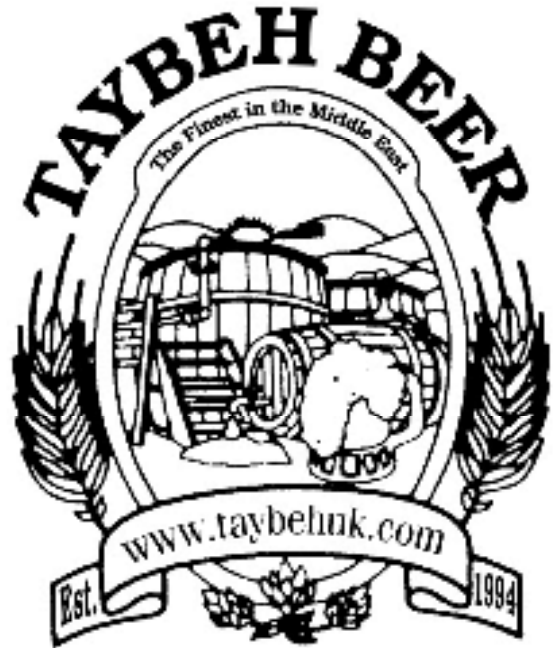
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