



## **International Solidarity with Palestine**

**My journey to Palestine started in Canada many years ago. My solidarity with the cause of justice for Palestine began with my awareness of the many injustices committed; many concerns were raised and actions were and are organized by my community of social justice activists in Canada. Over the years we have hosted many guests who have added to our knowledge and help build our solidarity. I belong to solidarity groups in Canada and I bring warm greetings from my colleagues and friends in Canada, also in Europe, Africa and Asia. You are not alone.**

**Years and many miles later, my husband and I attended the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi; there we met Razan Zuayter of the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN). She gave us information about the tree projects in Palestine & Jordan – mainly the sacred olive trees, trees of peace. It excited me immediately! What a brilliant idea – both extremely practical and physical and also a powerful symbol of a living free Palestine. This symbolic meaning of trees for a free Palestine can be immediately understood; Canadians love trees, support has been readily given. Through donations for trees people learn about how and why trees have been and are being destroyed and so they learn more about your work and Palestine; creating bonds and support.**

**We thank APN for organizing our trip to Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon; it was a lot of work by many people who were generous and helpful at all times.**

**When we were in Palestine and also meeting so many Palestinians in exile we saw and felt their determination to regain their homeland and to live there in dignity and peace. This determination strengthens us in our solidarity and social action. We cannot forget that we have the privilege to go to Palestine when so many of you do not. It imposes a responsibility on us to build more support. When we go to UK to speak en route home & then back to Canada where many events will be organized for us to share our experiences here with community, church, school and solidarity groups, we will carry Palestine in our hearts.**

**We do not see ourselves as 'helping the poor passive helpless Palestinians'. We are honoured to be working as partners in solidarity and respect. We also have to struggle against the imperialist agenda of the USA government and its collaborators which include the government of Israel and unfortunately the government of Canada. We have much to learn from you. We can see the shrinking of the earth, the destruction of the environment, the stealing of resources so obvious in Palestine, but it is also a Canadian and global issue. We have to work together to stop the destruction of the natural world, the impoverishment of many; the military, economic and cultural domination by a rich elite. We have only one earth to share and nurture.**

**In the worlds of Darwish, your great poet: *Where will the birds fly after the last sky? Where should plants sleep after the last breath of air?...our blood will plant its olive tree.***

**This is 60th anniversary of the Nakba - burned into your history, hearts and collective memory. I see a change of awareness worldwide. Some Canadian mainstream media for the first time wrote about the Nakba as across Canada groups stood with signs, banners, posters and organized forums about the catastrophe. 10 years ago there was nothing like that. The global disenchantment with the USA and neoliberalism and its effects everywhere**

is becoming more & more obvious.

It is also the 60th Anniversary of signing of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an opportunity to pressure governments worldwide. The USA, Israel & Canada signed and must implement this declaration, including *Article (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.*

Raising awareness of this declaration, UN resolutions, the judgment of the Inter Court in The Hague on the illegality of the wall, crimes against humanity, the treatment of civilians, children in prison, all are issues that millions of people can support.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of people in London UK decided to start a boycott of OUTSPAN oranges from South Africa. The boycott spread, campaigns were organized, those involved worked with the resistance inside South Africa; boycotts, divestment and sanctions were developed and by 1991, South Africa was free.

We see similarities in the struggle of South Africa to Palestine & many similar actions are developing. Boycotts of Israeli products like wine and Chapters bookstore chain (whose owners fund a foundation to sponsor anyone anywhere who wants to join the Israeli military) in Canada, divestment by churches & individuals from Israeli or Israel-supporting multinationals companies are gaining strength. Labour unions, including Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and branches of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), work to implement their resolutions against Israel oppression & for Palestinian rights. Much work remains to be done to involve other unions & professional groups like teachers, lawyers, farmers, engineers. We need to have more contact with Israeli activists who support Palestine; theirs is a lonely and difficult choice.

Together in words of Dorothy Livesay, a great Canadian poet we can; ... *believe in an ongoing universe...we can climb...a rung on the ladder upwards to a possible breathtaking landscape.*

We were told that food security is crucial, as is self-reliance of production as the access to outside sources and your external markets are so uncertain. We saw community groups helping individual gardens and orchards, organizations supporting better sustainable agriculture that does not poison the earth – APN and its partners are very active in this work.

The role of women is vital. We saw workshops, ongoing education, training for women in political participation, many income generating projects and support activities. I was most impressed by women's ability to stand up to soldiers and defend their families. One woman said, *'I shout at them & tell them they should be ashamed!'* Soldiers are more afraid of them than of other young men! Their production of soap, za'atar, preserves may be the beginning of a new international fair trade along with the olive oil already available in many countries.

This practical project was started in Latin American countries with coffee, cocoa products, dried fruit & handcrafts. It helped to bring world attention to conflicts in Nicaragua, Chiapas, Bolivia, and Guatemala.

Expanded marketing of Palestinian products could do the same. We were told how happy farmers were to have solidarity brigades from abroad to help with the olive harvest, particularly in sensitive areas near the barrier - we and many others did this in Nicaragua for the coffee harvest 20 years ago, that spread the suppressed news of the USA backed Contras.

**We need to build links with farmers' groups and solidarity organizations, particularly in Europe, to extend this action. Getting young people outside involved is essential; they go back to schools & universities and talk about their experiences. We were told some European student teachers were coming and volunteering in schools and summer camps. The UK has a well organized Palestine Solidarity Campaign with many actions including excellent publications on history, boycotts, sales of Palestinian products and recently lobbied 100 Members of Parliament about Palestine. We met a solidarity group of USA Jewish people travelling through Palestine; other USA groups organize olive oil events to fund playgrounds for Palestinian children; USA Women in Black campaigned for the Peace Boats for Gaza this summer – and more are coming.**

**In Palestine it was the stories of daily life that moved us the most, those who have lost young people, children in jail, the constant harassment at any hour of the night or day, the fixed checkpoints and the movable ones all create an atmosphere of nerve-wracking uncertainty. We came to you and to Palestine to see, hear and learn, we will take back our photos stories, reports, and contact others to build solidarity, spread information, more boycotts, fair trade, links to universities and religious groups.**

**Palestinians are determined not give up. Palestine is at the heart of USA policy and the instability of this region. We must not allow Palestine to become Bantustans like South Africa had; people confined, impoverished and controlled and accepting bad jobs in planned industrial zones without health or environmental or labour regulation.**

**We met strong people who are building cooperation inside and outside Palestine, overcoming isolation by empowering citizens through cooperative projects, building social movements that are a model for a new free society. They need our solidarity on all fronts including that of those who seek the right of return.**

**The spirit of people is wonderful, Darwish wrote: *It would be easier to catch fish in the milky way/ to plough the sea or to teach the alligator speech than to make us leave.***

**Before I I read came a report of another visitor to Palestine who was asked by a woman he interviewed, " *Why should I talk to you, will you bring my son back to life?*" I wondered what I would answer if I was asked that. I realized that all I could say was: "*I cannot bring your son back but together we can create a place where no more mothers' children are killed.*"**

**The Chilean poet, Neruda, wrote, *Action is the mother of hope.* Action and hope are everywhere. Latin America is emerging from under the USA boot. Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Cuba are strong - every speaker we have from those countries and others from Colombia & Haiti - still brutally suppressed by USA & Canada – all expresses solidarity with Palestine. The Venezuelan government has taken a strong public position condemning Israel for its treatment of Palestinians and invasion of Lebanon and has followed up with concrete actions. The Nicaraguan President of the UN General Assembly recently called for Israel to end its oppression and for the UN to assume responsibility for creating justice for Palestine.**

**In the words of our Latin American friends: VIVA PALESTINA LIBRE!**

Theresa Wolfwood was in Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon in October– November, 2008. This article is based on notes for a speech she gave at an APN event in Amman on Nov.16. and another to Palestinian Solidarity Activists in Reading, UK on November 26.

A family arrived and said that they had papers to prove that his house was theirs.  
-No, no, said the man, my people have always lived here.  
My father, grandfather... and look in the garden, my great grandfather planted this.  
-No, no, said the family, look at the documents.  
There was a stack of them.

-Where do I start? said the man.  
-No need to read the beginning they said.  
-Turn to the page marked 'Promised Land'.  
-Are they legal? he said, who wrote them?  
-God, they said. God wrote them, look, here come His tanks.

Michael Rosen



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