

A Day in the life of Palestine

Article and photos by Theresa Wolfwood

I had just returned to Ramallah after a day of olive picking – cut short by threats from settlers- when I was told to head for Khan Al Ahmar.

A Bedouin encampment of 200 people, Khan Al Ahmar is one of many Bedouin communities in the West Bank. As they are being driven out of the Negev area by the Israeli government Bedouins move around Palestine, trying to find a place to live and keep their animals. Khan Al Ahmar is on the highway from Jerusalem to Jericho in a wide valley where the Bedouins have rented the land from local Palestinians. But Israel wants that property and has been harassing and threatening residents with destruction for more than a year. Israel said this demolition would be completed in 2019.

Khan Al Ahmar has been the focus of solidarity by Palestinian and international supporter. Efforts to enter the community with bulldozers have been defeated by determined protectors; people have been detained, injured, arrested; still the community remains.

When I arrived at the big meeting tent beside the school, I was taken to a group of Palestinian and foreign women. As I approached them one woman stood up with open arms calling my name; a friend from England, an unexpected pleasure.

That evening people sat around and chatted, supper was provided; mattresses and blankets were passed out to visitors. A Jerusalem lawyer explained the importance of resistance in Khan Al Ahmar. She told us that Israel wanted this land in order to close a ring of their settlements (750,000 Israelis live in these illegal settlements in Palestine) and connecting roads that would encircle Jerusalem, making access to that international city impossible except through Israeli military checkpoints. Settlers would be able to travel on Israeli-only roads, blocking movement by Palestinians.

After her talk we joined a group of singing Palestinians. Children ran around the camp, people made tea and coffee, some were being interviewed by media. It all seemed so peaceful and benign as we bedded down in the school yard, lit by two lights fuelled by solar panels, the maximum 500 watts permitted by Israeli law. Small groups stayed up all night on watch. We could hear them talking and laughing as they played cards. It is not unusual for Israeli military to attack in early morning hours; keeping watch is vital.

What I was experiencing was the result of seventy years of resistance by Palestinians expressing their right to live normal, full and happy lives as an integral part of resistance.

Breakfast bread was baked outdoors, served with olive oil and za'atar. My friend and I had tea with a Bedouin in her tent. But preparations for confrontation were under way. Medics got ready, media set up, flags were passed out along with many banners and signs. Soon a convoy of Israelis arrived and parked on the highway. Heavily armed they stood before us, making their own film record as we waved flags and told them to leave. They pepper-sprayed demonstrators; injuring and burning eyes. Still we continued, standing strong. Finally the Israelis left without detaining anyone, probably because of large number of visitors and media.

When friends drove me back to Ramallah, I felt privileged to have participated in yet another example of 'sumud', steadfastness, the quality most respected by Palestinians as they go on resisting occupation uncertainty and constant hardship.

The Israel government has announced it is postponing the destruction of Khan Al Ahmar: no doubt hoping that supporters and media will move on soon. They don't understand sumud.

Theresa Wolfwood recently returned from her fourth solidarity journey to Palestine. She is the director of the Barnard-Boecker Centre Foundation and a member of the Canadian BBS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) Coalition. She speaks and writes on issues of peace and social justice, including Palestine. She is author of *Love and Resistance*, a poetry collection, and a play set in Bethlehem, “stores from the walled-off hotel”.

Captions for photos:

1. Khan Al Ahmar surrounded by hilltop Israeli settlements
2. The school building in the community
3. Serving breakfast
4. The Israelis arrive
5. Palestinians gather on roadside
6. Old and young alike face eviction and loss of belongings
7. Demonstrators being treated for pepper spray in eyes
8. Author with flag
9. Kham Al Ahmar from the highway

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