

Newsletter 6 - February 24th 2011

We Live in 'Area C'



In the Jordan Valley, in Area C, the tiny agricultural village of Abu Al Ajaj has homes and animal shelters built from animal feed sacks sewn together and bits of plastic. The illegal Settlement* poly-tunnels and fields now encroach to within five feet of their homes with a 4 foot high fence dividing them. The first time we visited, in December 2010, we had been called to come immediately as the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) were there and it was a dangerous situation for the villagers. On arrival we saw four IDF jeeps with sixteen soldiers and two settlement security vehicles.

We walked through the tangled remains of the animal shelter and the school that had been demolished the week before. The dead bodies of the lambs had been seen by the previous team when they had visited.



At the furthest tent about eight soldiers were having a very heated 'discussion' with the men of family, including one elderly man. We were told that it was good that we were there because last week the men had been severely beaten up by the soldiers and it was unlikely that they would do that while we were there. We watched and took photographs and the soldiers guarding the jeeps took photos of us taking photos of them! They called one of our team over asking why we were there and demanded to see his papers, which he produced from the pocket of his 'vest'. "We are here on a World Council of Churches Programme," he said and produced the letter that said so. In the pockets of our distinctive 'vests' we carry most of what we need: passports and WCC letter, money for a taxi to leave immediately if we need to, at least two telephones, telephone lists, business cards, camera and of course our pens and notebooks (which have to be just the right size to fit into the pocket). Watch any EA for a short

while and you will see them reach automatically into a pocket for whatever they need at that moment.

Our vests are very heavy!



Meanwhile the other soldiers continued to threaten the family. The reason being that they had managed to get a very large piece of polythene sheeting that they were putting over the roof of their tent and tying down to the ground to keep it waterproof. The soldiers argued that this constituted making it a permanent structure and it was therefore, illegal in Area C! The family were made to remove it – but it was acceptable for them to put it over the sheep shelter next to their tent! There are constantly things that we see and hear that make me want to weep and this

was one of them. I thought of them constantly in the next few days when there were the horrendous storms with the torrential rain and wind that I mentioned before.

These people have nothing but their sheep and goats. Their farm land has been stolen and their human rights are violated every single day of their lives. Their tent homes are simple, clean and tidy, they care for their children and ensure that they go to school, no matter how far away it may be. On our visit there last week, one of the young girls was sitting outside her tent reading one of her schoolbooks and shoeing the goats back every now and again. Other children and adults came to talk to us and told us that there had been no problems in the last month. We have discovered that means that nothing disastrous has happened, as visits from the security officers, IDF and abuse from settlers are seen as 'normal'.

Yanoun, where we live, is in Area C ** and, like thousands of others in this area, two of the village houses had demolition orders on their homes. They were repealed in court but they are unable to add a single stone to anything. Yasser (right) told us that after the court decision the soldiers came and told him that if he added one stone to any of his buildings they would come and demolish everything.

On the hillsides all around us are the outposts from I tamar Settlement. The villagers used to be able to farm and take their animals onto the hillsides and up and over the hills. But their land has been taken from them and invisible boundaries given to them by the IDF and the Settlers. Someone from the team will walk these boundaries twice each day to show the international presence. The villagers are too frightened to venture beyond those boundaries but settlers break them all the time. On Wednesday, when we were having a party for the village children, settlers came through the village on a quad bike driving round houses in the valley. Last time they did this they drove in circles around the newly growing wheat field. Other times groups walk through, always with an armed guard.



Since the Israeli outposts were established in 1996 on the hilltops around them the villagers of Yanoun have not been able to build anything on their own land. In the past young men have wanted to build homes for their families but have been refused permission – so they have to live elsewhere – and the population of Yanoun decreases. One of sons of the village started to build a home for himself and his wife beside his father's house on his family land. Just before he finished the building the IDF bulldozers arrived and demolished it. From our window, we can see the rubble outside Um Hani's house, in the valley below us.

From Yanoun we monitor the Jordan Valley and several villages nearer by that are all surrounded by illegal settlements and as we travel we are constantly referring to maps, both getting our bearings and checking to see which 'Oslo' area we are in. The first we need to do because we have to go 'the long way round' because the direct way is no longer open to Palestinians, as the Israeli Settlers have roads just for them. The second is because the whole of the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C in the Oslo Agreement in 1995. This agreement was intended to be for a few years until a permanent solution was found. Unfortunately this has not happened and the Palestinians living in Area C are being strangled by Settlements and Settler Outposts* and have total and absolute bans on building, extending or repairing anything on their land.

Every visit to a village in the area means that we hear of long-standing or new demolition orders on people's homes. The orders can give anything from 24 hours notice that the house is to be torn down, some have orders given years ago but not yet carried out. They are said to be because there has been an extension built without Israeli Planning Permission, which, even if applied for, is almost impossible for Palestinians to get. It may be simply that a new animal shelter has been added, it may be that the land is wanted for new illegal settlement homes to be built or it may be to clear the land near settlements for so-called 'security'. Whatever the reason the families live in constant fear of the arrival of the bulldozers in the early hours of the morning to tear down their homes.

Ann Farr, UK EAPPI Team 38, based in Yanoun

**Under article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention, Israel is prohibited from establishing settlements: "The Occupying Power shall not transfer parts of its own civilian population into territories it occupies"*

Since 1967, successive Israeli governments have established settlements in violation of international law. Originally used to describe any new Jewish development in Israel, the term 'settlements' now refers to Jewish-only housing units built in strategic areas of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, on land occupied by Israel in 1967. Most settlements begin as 'outposts'. These are often composed of just a few families who live in caravans whilst awaiting infrastructure and financial support from the state and other sympathetic communities both inside Israel and abroad. Palestinian Monitor, 15th March 2010

***Area C: In 1995 the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C in the Oslo Agreement. Area A is under full Palestinian civil and security control. Area B is full Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control. Area C is full Israeli control over security, planning and construction.*

I work for Quaker Peace and Social Witness as an Ecumenical Accompanier serving on the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The views contained herein are personal to me and do not necessarily reflect those of my employer (QPSW) or the WCC. If you would like to publish the information contained here (including posting on a website), or distribute it further, please first contact Teresa Parker (teresap@quaker.org) or the EAPPI Communications Officer (eappi-co@jrol.com) for permission. Thank you