

FACULTY FOR ISRAEL/PALESTINE PEACE FACT FINDING DELEGATION JUNE 4-18 2005

Written by Jerry Joffe, St. Johns University, Jamaica, and N.Y.

Following is a brief report on the highlights of the trip focusing on the ideas of the people we visited and the settings and circumstances encountered in the early part of the trip.

We were graciously and kindly received by all. Special thanks go to Hannah, our wonderful guide who directed us through the unusual complexities of travel in this region and responded with agility to all contingencies, our local Palestinian guides with their expert knowledge and frank responses to our questions and to the drivers of an assortment of vehicles who got us quickly and safely to our destinations with great cheer and friendliness.

To avoid repetition, for each person we spoke with I am only including those remarks which provide nuance or a slant on affairs different from the others.

EARLY ARRIVAL-WEST JERUSALEM

My arrival on the day before our organized visits began led me to Zion Square in West Jerusalem where I witnessed the celebration of Jerusalem Day commemorating the conquest of the city in the Six Day War. The major event was the hours long parade of thousands, many dressed in orange to support the retention of the Gaza settlements. Some of the marchers were in armed vehicles and tractors. A fellow spectator told me that many came from other as well as the Gaza settlements and from right wing groups. The audience in the Square was largely Orthodox Jews judging by their dress who lustily cheered the marchers some of whom broke ranks to directly address the spectators. The parade was preceded and accompanied by martial music. Walking through the area before the march I was struck by the large number of armed civilians with either small arms or automatic rifles. It was a startling welcome to Israel.

HEBREW UNIVERSITY

On entering Hebrew University we went through an electronic detector, which was not surprising, as the university not long ago had a terrorist attack.

What did surprise me however was being asked if I had a weapon. This was not the only time in Israel this question was asked. I was later told that since carrying a weapon was legal and as I discovered the previous day not uncommon, that if I answered in the affirmative, I would merely be asked to show my gun license.

We were introduced to the current political status of the Israeli- Palestinian relationship by Professor Menachim Klein, a member of the Geneva Accord delegation and atypical for his political persuasion, as signified by his skullcap, an Orthodox Jew. Dr. Klein was quite pessimistic regarding the prospects for peace. His analysis was similar in important respects to the perspectives of the Palestinians with whom we later spoke. Sharon's Gaza pullout was his strategy for negating the wide approval of the Geneva Accord among Israelis calling for permanent boundaries on the Green Line and the sharing of Jerusalem. Sharon will unilaterally withdraw from Gaza only to expand and consolidate the West Bank settlements especially around Jerusalem. No leadership in The Palestinian Authority could accept this option and remain in power. Under Sharon and with his assured support from the political class, ongoing conflict is inevitable. The only possible way out is through international intervention, which at this juncture doesn't appear likely. This sober estimate of the prospects for peace became the crux of our subsequent political explorations.

Next on our agenda at the University was joining a peace demonstration. Together with a small group of students and an even smaller number of faculties we gathered at the ground level and walked through corridors into dining and lounge areas handing out leaflets opposing the occupation and settlements. Several other students joined us along the way. My impression was that while curious and not unfriendly, few members of the university community were committed to opposition activity. This included the minority of Palestinian students who notwithstanding their beliefs could suffer severe penalties if they were openly in opposition.

We exited and reassembled across the street from the School of social work. The faculty leader of the demonstration then walked us some 200 feet to an overlook of an adjacent Palestinian Israeli neighborhood. The community was blocked by a rock barrier from access to the university site ostensibly to protect the campus. This forced a round about entry and exit for the residents to the major areas in the city. We also saw the foundations of a new Jewish settlement being built that will absorb land within the boundaries of the Arab community. We also learned that some of the buildings of the university were built on confiscated

land.

THE ALTERNATIVE INFORMATION CENTER AND THE DRIVE TO THE KALANDIA CHECKPOINT

We visited the Alternative Information System, a critical source of information and analysis printed in news and topical reports and on a website on the occupation and the settlements. The co- director presented a brief history of this small but vital resource for the political opposition operated jointly by Jewish and Palestinian Israelis.

He then described the expanding Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, and the constraints that will be placed on over 200,000 Palestinians whose villages will be destroyed when the consolidation occurs. With the completion of the Separation Wall they will be absorbed within a massive Jerusalem Province and given a special status that will restrict their civil rights and their movement both within Israel and to the remaining territory under the Palestinian Authority. Those Palestinians outside the Wall will have difficulty entering East Jerusalem, their cultural and religious center and a major source of medical care and jobs. He also noted that as a Palestinian Israeli he is unable, except with special permission, to visit Ramallah and other areas under the direct jurisdiction of the PA.

We then drove to an unfinished area of the Wall about 200 feet from the Kalandia checkpoint, the major checkpoint from Jerusalem – which leads to Ramallah and surrounding villages - where from a small hilltop of rocks and debris we viewed what appeared surreal on first glance.

From the checkpoint, a multitude of people was streaming in both directions; from Jerusalem to Ramallah past the checkpoint, from Ramallah to Jerusalem much slower through the checkpoint. Adjacent was a makeshift food market further slowing movement. On both ends and extending in a wide arc from the checkpoint was a throng of honking cars, trucks, taxis and buses positioned in every which way either waiting to pick up passengers and goods or trying to get out of the area. There was no through movement.

Alongside the checkpoint was a construction site with an active bulldozer and crane and a few hundred yards away was a large settlement under

construction. Many including those observing the scene looked sullen and some short fused. We were to pass through this checkpoint in both directions several times but not now.

THE OUTER RING OF SETTLEMENTS IN METROPOLITAN JERUSALEM

A drive from Municipal Jerusalem took us on a road tour to the outer ring of settlements of Metropolitan or Greater Jerusalem which now houses some 70,00 Israeli Jews. The future of these settlements will be among the most contentious issues dividing the Israeli state and the Palestinians.

We passed some of the major settlements like Maaleh Adumin which occupied a great expanse as well as smaller settlements. Of special interest were settlements whose boundaries have been declared and mapped but without residents and with no or few buildings. These sites were rapidly designated, with an eye to the international community, to have additional communities without establishing "new" settlements. It is the consolidation of these towns and cities and the surrounding area into an expanded Jerusalem behind the Separation Wall which will transform Jerusalem from a city into a region, absorb the entire central portion of the West Bank dividing the West Bank into two sections and isolate an expanded population of Palestinians in Jerusalem from the wider Palestinian population.

TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE (Ramallah)

We crossed the Kalandia checkpoint from Jerusalem to reach Ramallah. As the most active economic center and the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, Ramallah was the most modern and best maintained of the West Bank cities we visited. The Center is located on the fifth floor of a commercial building in the business core. We were greeted by Ms. Suad Mitwalli, Chief Psychologist who provided a riveting description of the organization

Under the direction of Dr. Makmood, a psychiatrist, the organization has a 35 member staff with sites also in Jenin, Hebron, and in surrounding villages. Treatment includes both home as well as office visits. Some 300 to 500 patients are usually under treatment each year. Ms. Mitwalli said that these include

disproportionately politically active intellectuals who are singled out by the Israelis for detention. Patients from Iraq and Algeria also receive free treatment for psychological problems arising from politically connected trauma. For Palestinians, trauma arises from the consequences of the occupation and the Israeli response to the Intifadah. The direct causes are shelling, housing demolition, imprisonment, torture, and threats of torture in prison interrogation, checkpoint stress and conflicts at the wall. Children who are imprisoned with adult criminals are an especially difficult to treat group. The repetition of images of torture on TV exacerbates psychological problems.

Family stress, frequently the result of the aforementioned also produces trauma patients. Ms. Mitwalli also acknowledged cases, though much smaller in number, which stem from treatment in PA prisons. Center staff also visit prisons in Israel but have had limited permission to do so during the Intifadah.

Outreach to communities is through word of mouth, via media and referrals by other organizations in small towns. The Center is also proactive when having specific knowledge of demolished homes. Visits are made shortly after home demolition to moderate expected posttraumatic syndrome.

The Center and the Israeli organizations, B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights have documented many torture cases.

The budget of the Center is financed by the Swiss government and the Mandela Center. Aid is also provided by the EU and the UN sponsored Center for Victims of Torture.

MEDICAL RELIEF COMMITTEE (Ramallah) -Dr. Jihad Mushail described the work of his organization as well as supplying us with health service and health status information.

The organization staffs 25 health centers primarily in villages, towns and refugee camps. The Committee's main project is outreach for and provision of care in primary care clinics. It achieves this goal with the aid of thousands of volunteer first aid workers. Ambulance service is also furnished for transport of the injured from remote villages and refugee camps to the several hospitals in the major cities as well as to high tech medical centers in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Israel (Hadassah Hospital). The committee also works with NGOs in policy development for primary and secondary health care throughout the Palestinian territory.

There are serious problems of financing and access to medical service. Government health service is limited; there is no public health insurance and only

optional insurance for public employees, which covers primary and minimum secondary care. As there is only one major cancer center in Palestine patients must travel to Egypt, Jordan and Israel for treatment. This requires special permission from the Israeli military to pass through checkpoints.

Foreign physicians are helping by providing voluntary services. The Israeli organization, Physicians for Human Rights also provides services especially in those villages with Wall barriers delaying treatment. The U.N. also provides medical services in refugee camps.

Immunization rates are high for children but there have been some child deaths due to serum deprivation and vaccine spoilage. Some health status statistics indicating severe problems not only from limited medical services but also or perhaps primarily from poverty and poor living conditions were presented: Malnutrition- 26% of the population; Infant Mortality rates 25 -35 per 1000 live births. This is five to six times higher than in Israel but approximates rates in Egypt and Jordan.

To a question of having special birthing facilities installed at checkpoints - some 90 Palestinian women have died as a result of delays- Dr. Musall said that Palestinians are not interested in this kind of "reform" as it would legitimize delays as well as the existence of checkpoints.

In summary, medical service access for Palestinians is limited by insufficient resources and by checkpoints, walls, gates and roadblocks creating barriers to access. The delivery system needs to respond to a violent occupation causing impoverishment, trauma to body and mind, malnutrition and disease. Only with the resourcefulness and commitment of dedicated Palestinians, U.N. staff and volunteers from abroad including some Israeli clinicians organized by The Israeli Physician Committee for Human Rights - does basic medical care get delivered.

DR. AZMI SHUAIBI, HEAD OF the PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY NEGOTIATION DEPARTMENT Elected to the Palestinian National Council, 1995 and to the Ramallah City Council. General Coordinator for Coalition of Accountability and Integrity to improve the functioning of the Palestinian Authority (Ramallah)
Comments and Responses to Questions Posed by FIPPP Delegation

A. On the Gaza Withdrawal, Negotiation and Israeli Unilateralism

*While the PA is attempting to connect withdrawal from Gaza to the road map, Sharon has moved from negotiation to unilateral separation. Unilateralism

also implies the possibility of reversal.

*There have been no negotiations on Issues of the border between Gaza and Egypt, Gazan immigration to Palestine and the integration of Gaza with the West Bank. There have also been no discussions on road and other movement of people and goods to the West Bank, Egypt and Israel and the possibility of direct marketing of agricultural goods to Europe. There is no airport or seaport accessible to Gaza. (It should be noted that Israel has offered to build a railroad between Gaza and Hebron but not a road; former World Bank head Wolfensohn, head of a Quartet appointed group has proposed a sunken road a roofless tunnel at least 15 yards deep that can also be walled to ensure that no Palestinian can leave the road in Israel).

*A Palestinian organized peace conference "Beyond Gaza" was scheduled in Jericho in early June, Knesset members from across the political spectrum agreed to attend. In the past the Israeli government permitted attendance at such conferences but not this conference.

*If there are no further withdrawals, Hamas will have a strong argument that only violence is effective. Hamas is pragmatic unlike Al Quieda is willing to participate in the political process and is communicating with the international community.

*Fatah postponed the July legislative elections because without a peace process and Israel resistance to negotiation, the electorate will favor Hamas who they believe can force Israelis to negotiate by militant action.

*The difficult refugee issue must be negotiated and not ignored or resolved by unilateral decision.

B. On Settlements and Expansion in the Jerusalem Area

*There are 140 Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Separation Wall is being constructed as a border with Palestine and between Palestinian cities and villages to accommodate these settlements

*While Palestinians are willing to accept 22% of historic Palestine, enunciated Israeli strategy settlement strategy will provide only 12 percent.

Palestinians living in East Jerusalem who have chosen an Israeli ID are unable to vote in elections to the Knesset and are restricted in their mobility both within Israel and with the West Bank. An additional 200,000 Palestinians currently living in the East Jerusalem region planned for annexation will also be denied mobility and political rights. Others living outside the wall will be limited in access to the

religious, cultural, and health facilities as well as the labor market in Jerusalem.

YASSER ABED RABBO, PLO Executive Committee member, Head of Palestinian Peace Coalition; member of Palestinian delegation which negotiated Geneva Accord with Yossi Bellin and other Israeli MKs (Ramallah)

Comments and Responses to Questions Posed by FIPP Delegation

Despite the two thirds of Palestinians and Israelis supporting the principles of Geneva Accord which sets final goals of return to the 1967 borders and the sharing of Jerusalem, ongoing conflict and Sharon's announcement of a pull-out from Gaza, motivated to counteract the appeal of the Accord, has permitted him to develop his current strategy.

Rather than negotiation, Sharon's modus operandi is "conditionality": a unilateral Israeli concession which then requires an acceptable concession by the Palestinians e.g. arrest of Hamas leaders, for any further unilateral concession. "The Road Map is dying!"

Hamas welcomes Sharon's intransigence because it permits them to show Fatah's weakness. Hamas is depending on the absence of peace for success and is presenting itself as relatively moderate. The U.S. is believed to be evaluating them as acceptable if not behaving as a militia but as a political grouping. This is analogous to the ongoing U.S. evaluation of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Rabbo sees democratic secular forces, currently being marginalized by Fatah's use of patronage and corruption and Hamas's appeal to religious extremism and violence. The U.S. preference he stated is for "responsible" Islamist or secular forces which though moderately nationalist is pliable to Washington's wishes and ultimately accepting if reluctantly, of Israel's goal of a mini fragmented Palestinian state

Rabbo evaluated the democratic forces, where he appeared to position himself, as a loose coalition of secular progressives consisting of groups organized around leading personalities with only slightly different goals as well as of moderate religious forces. The personalities include Mustafa Barghouti and Hannan Ashrawi. He cautioned against being misled by Barghouti's prominent second place showing in the PA presidential election as he captured the vote of many hostile to Fatah and Abbas but who will likely vote for Hamas in legislative elections. The latter didn't participate in the presidential election.

BI'LIN

While on the road not far from Jerusalem we received a phone call that protesters of the construction of the Wall at the village of Bi'lin had just been released from confinement. We quickly drove there and met Mohammed, a young leader of the protest together with some of his comrades, about 1-2 hours after he was released from detention. He explained the nature of the protest as we walked through the fields of Bi'lin about fifty feet from where the foundations of the wall was being dug, clearly within the boundary of the village as the settlement was about a mile from where we stood. Israeli soldiers were clearly visible in the fields.

This section of the Wall will partially surround the village and absorb about 40% of agricultural land formerly belonging to Bi'lin separating it both from the settlement being built and an adjacent village. For about a year, weekly active non-violent protest demonstrations have been held at the wall to halt its construction and are broken up by the Israeli military with gas pellets and rubber bullets. The protests have been joined regularly by Israeli supporters.

While Israeli demonstrators are only temporarily detained, Palestinians are frequently jailed and threatened with future violence and home demolition. Siren and other loud noises at night and other forms of intimidation are used to attempt to dissuade resisters

Village workers who were recruited to work in settlement construction have been persuaded to quit their jobs, though at this time there is no compensation or work alternative for them. Those constructing the wall were recruited in Israel.

JERICHO

After driving south through the awesome Judean desert with its great sand dunes we met Dr. Saeb Erakat, Head of the PA Negotiation Department the day after cancellation of the planned meeting of PA officials with members of Likud, Labor, Shinue, Yachad (Yossi Bellin's party) and other political parties in the Knesset. The Israeli secret service reportedly warned the delegates that it was unsafe to attend the conference. We met in the room where the conference was to have been held.

Dr. Erakat, was one of Arafat's key assistants at Camp David. A large portrait of Arafat hung on the wall behind his chair at the head of the large conference table. Alternately jocular and serious and with a booming voice, he conveyed the message that "Assassinations, house demolitions, collective punishment and walls are not working for Israelis; violence and suicide bombings are not working for the Palestinians. Negotiations alone based on recognition of

reconcilable national interests are the only solution”.

Erakat said that negotiators at Camp David were able to resolve 80% of all issues; without specifying, he implied the remaining 20% were concerned with the right of return, division of Jerusalem and Jewish settlements around Jerusalem. He argued that Israelis and Americans focus on the failure rather than the 80% degree of success. Therefore there is no reason to give up on negotiation.

Though the conference scheduled the previous day with Israeli MKs was not held, he said, it was important that the invitations to attend were accepted signifying that within the Knesset there is the recognition that negotiation is ultimately the only solution. The PA, he said, is willing to accept 22% of historic Palestine as a final settlement.

After our meeting we briefly visited the ruins of a medieval fortress.

HANNAN ASHRAWI Director MIFTA

(Palestinian initiative for Fostering the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy)

We met in her office and though having to interrupt our discussion to briefly meet with a visitor and with other interruptions by her secretary, was very hospitable, responding in a straightforward manner to all questions. She was very articulate and magnetic.

Her Key points:

*Israeli policy is to maximize territorial acquisition and minimize absorption of Palestinians.

*She is politically aligned with Mustapha Bharghouti and other secular nationalists though without an organized party or formal alliance. Their alignment exists as a third force between Fatah and Hamas; between the corrupt and opportunistic major group within the PLO and the religious fundamentalists

* She opposes Hamas not only because its mode of resistance is suicidal and self defeating but because their societal goal with its perspective on women's' role, family and Shariah law is unacceptable

* A binational solution is unrealistic because Israelis are not willing to dezionize their state. Perhaps in several generations of peaceful coexistence between the two states a different consciousness might arise, but there is no likelihood of such a change in the foreseeable future.

*She supports the boycott of firms involved in economic relations with the

settlements and the active non-violent resistance to occupation and wall construction.

*Chaos exists in the West Bank, with a 60-70% poverty rate and Hamas grows with the absence of progress on political settlement,

*At this time Ramallah is the only working city in Palestine.

Dr. MUSTAFA BARGHOUTI (Ramallah) is an eloquent and lucid speaker. His major points:

*Israel is postponing negotiation to gain time to coerce the PA to become an enforcer of discipline on a passive population while expanding existing and developing new settlements. Israel wants only collaborators as interlocutors.

*The Wall is destroying coherence of the Palestinian economy through loss of crop land and with barriers to movement of people and trade. Israeli control of borders also imposes barriers on external movement and trade while Gaza remains a ghetto. Segregation of roads and restriction of water provision is also a result of occupation.

*The process that results from the failure to set the terms of a final settlement including the boundaries of the two states started with Oslo then proceeded to the Road Map and is now manifest in the current Israeli unilateralism.(I was reminded why secularists such as Edward Said opposed the Oslo agreement at its inception).

*As did Ashrawi, Bhargouti contended that the only political force that could achieve a settlement and create a stable Palestinian state is a progressive secular and moderate religious political front in opposition to both Fatah with its corrupt and authoritarian rule and the forces of religious fanaticism. He maintained that the progressive front reflects the sentiment of 50% of the population. His strategy includes active non-violent resistance in coordination with international solidarity in boycott and disinvestment campaigns.

* He advised that the best argument that could be used by the anti occupation movement in the U.S. is to have their government be consistent with its opposition to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait by opposing the expansion of Israel into Palestine.

UNIVERSITY OF BETHLEHEM-Organized by the LaSalle Brothers (and under Papal control)

The school was shelled during the siege of the city and the entry point of a shell in the library remains unplastered as a reminder.

While a Catholic institution, most students are Muslim. Christians who are disproportionately middle class left as business and professional prospects declined. Émigrés joined other family members in Lebanon, U.S. and Latin American countries

We were invited to a history class, the teacher being our Bethlehem guide's husband. Group members led a discussion for about twenty minutes, each with several students. I spoke with four students, all in accounting and business administration, one a transfer from Nablus University, another a former resident of Jerusalem who had to move closer to the university as he was forced to walk a long distance from the Wall separating the two cities.

Only one of the students is politically active but all complained of the difficulty of movement into and out of Bethlehem due to the checkpoints and segregated roads. The students also described the problem of families maintaining contact with different members living in different "zones" as defined by the Oslo agreement. Special permits individually applied for are needed for interzone travel and some family members have a Palestinian I.D. and others an Israeli I.D. and with only those aged 40 and over given these permits. The two types of I.D. offer different opportunities for travel.

The type of I.D. a student has also sets limits on which university they can attend both in the West Bank and in Israel. Professional education enrollment is restricted. For some Medicine and Engineering are off limits.

All stated having a positive educational experience at Bethlehem University. The main concern of all the students is not living in a normal country with a future. All stated support for two state solutions.

We went to the roof of the university building from where we could see the Wall largely surrounding the city, making entry and exit difficult to nearby villages we could also see the Jewish settlement for which the location of the wall was sited to separate it from the Palestinians..

The Wall and the route of the tourist bus from Jerusalem also inhibit transit of tourists to the city other than directly to the Church of the Nativity and other holy sites. This has caused extreme economic hardship to the city's residents.

We visited both the Church of the Nativity and Rachel's tomb during our two-day stay in Bethlehem.

GHASSAN ANDONI (Professor, Birzeit University) Theoretician of Active Non-Violent Resistance and Head of the Center for Non-Violent Resistance. (Ramallah)

Andoni's soft-spoken manner and the delicate movement of his arms and hands contrasted with his unmistakable commitment to resolute struggle.

Andoni was involved in armed conflict to protect Palestinians in Lebanese camps but the Lebanese Civil war forced his return to Palestine.

In the first intifada (1987) he led civil resistance in Bethlehem. Placed in military detention he became knowledgeable of the "varieties of torture.

The Center was established during the Intifada with the demand for recognition of the PLO and the end of occupation. "It was not possible to be disengaged as war was fought against civilians". The second or Al Aqsa Intifadah's goal was also to end Israeli control; however, he said, its political consequences have been destructive.

Non-violent direct action was developed as a new strategy to obstruct and dismantle the occupation. The first stage of non-violent resistance involved the International Solidarity Movement under Palestinian leadership. Volunteers were largely Italian and German and the participation of foreigners was ironically dubbed "Adventure Tourism". Resistance however led to 3 dead, and 20 severely injured.

The direct accomplishment was to delay building of the Wall.

Palestinians learned tactics from the volunteers and have now become the activists while the international volunteer effort is petering out. A key element in organizing such resistance, Andoni said, is that it is only learned when engaged in and sharing risk it is not clear however what strategy will succeed when the wall is completed, to resist the occupation and the settlements. He also noted that non-violent resistance is a strategy that can also be used by the political right as it is now by Israeli settlers in Gaza.

DHEISHEN REFUGEE CAMP (Near Bethlehem) it was evening and very few adults were visible as we walked through the narrow alleys in which children were playing, in a network of cramped two and three story buildings. Some 1100 people lived in a half a square kilometer. Three thousand students attended the camp's two schools with its 23 teachers. The refugees came from many destroyed villages in Israel. Most in the camp were supporters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

We were guided through the alleys by Jihad, a resident of the camp in his early 20's. He told us that unemployment is high and living conditions difficult. However, with external funding, housing had much improved from the earlier years. Some current building rehabilitation was evident and signage indicated financing from UNRRA and the USAID.

We passed a new school building and were then escorted to a two story small but cozy social and cultural center. Some teenagers, looking well nourished, were loudly chatting. The facilities we saw included a computer room, art display hall and a canteen. Craft objects made at the camp were on display and purchased by members of our group.

We were addressed by an articulate young woman who described the dance, theater and athletic activities at the center and the invitations and competitions including some abroad in which some of the young people had participated. My impression was that dedication to individual and collective accomplishments was being nurtured in a difficult environment.

HEBRON

Hebron is divided into A and B areas-the Palestinian and Israeli settlement areas of the city. We walked through the crowded market streets with Hasmad Qawasmeh, PR Director of the Governor of Hebron. He pointed out the demarcation between the Palestinian sector and the Jewish settlement cordoned off by walls, metal fences and guarded checkpoints. Incidents often occur between the settlers and local residents often ending in outbreaks of violence and harsh reprisals followed by the expansion of the settlement zone by the IDF.

An underlying fear of the Palestinians was that the Israeli government would acquiesce to the settlers' demand that the main mosque which shares the site with the tomb of Abraham would be converted to a synagogue. The resistance to this move it was feared would lead to a massacre of the Palestinians. This is the location where Baruch Goldstein, the Jewish terrorist slaughtered some 30 Palestinians at worship over a decade ago significantly raising the level of violence including suicide bombings in Israel.

Adjacent to the road leading to the mosque separated only by a high metal fence were the walls of the settlement buildings. About thirty feet above our heads on this road was a wire mesh on top of which lay assorted food garbage and junk. The settlers frequently threw garbage and heavy objects from their windows and the mesh was placed to protect worshipers on their way to the mosque.

The entrance to the Mosque grounds was through an electronically controlled turnstile. The soldiers at the controls were laughing as they started and stopped the rotation of the turnstile for each of the entering Palestinians who silently endured the discomfort and humiliation.

A number of the Israeli soldiers were Falashi and Druse. We engaged one of the soldiers in conversation. He acknowledged the grim nature of the antagonism and hatred in Hebron, initially claiming neutrality and stated his mission was to protect the Israeli settlers from the Palestinians and visa versa but then spoke of his nation's commitment to settlement. Though his task was unpleasant he felt duty bound to do military service.

We saw the soldiers at the same checkpoint as we were returning from the mosque. A member of a Christian Peacemaker Team hastened us to the checkpoint where the military had detained a young Palestinian man for not moving fast enough on the road leading to the mosque. A verbal encounter ensued involving the CP group, members of a Quartet Observer Team and our group with the IDF guards. It appeared that our protests led to the release of the Palestinian. A Quartet observer credited our presence with averting what could have been a serious incident. I became aware not for the first time of the importance of an international presence.

THE NEGEV AND THE BEDOUINS

BEERSHEBA

After a morning three-mile drive from Jerusalem we arrived in Beersheba brilliantly lit by the midday sun. This is the principal town in the Negev -the northern portion of the Sinai desert. We went to the office of Shatil an NGO, which provides services to and advocates for the Bedouin community.

We were greeted by Dr Thabet Abu Ras, the Director of the organization who also teaches at Ben Gurion University in Beersheba. Dr. Ras, an Arab Israeli, received his Ph.D at the University of Arizona in Planning. Shatil is funded by several organizations including the New Israel Fund, an organization of liberal American Jews, which has also financed

education for Bedouin girls. During our trip we encountered other NGOs of Palestinian (Arab) Israelis funded by U.S. Jewish communal organizations which may be advocacy or integrative organizations but must shy away from any questioning of the core structures of Israel as a Jewish state.

Dr. Ras regards himself as a Palestinian whose political goal is full equality in the state of Israel. He is also supportive of the establishment of a Palestinian state. He recognized no contradiction between the deepening development of Palestinian identity by approximately 20 % of the population of Israel and support for a two state solution.

Dr. Ras gave us a basic grounding in the demographic composition of the Negev, the status of the Bedouin community and an explanation of the conflict between the Bedouins and the Israeli state. Afterwards we drove to an "unrecognized Bedouin village" and subsequently we met the leader of a Woman's Center in a Bedouin town.

The Negev constitutes two thirds of Israel's land area. It is a strategic area for the state with part of it lying between Gaza and the West Bank territory under the Palestinian Authority, which together in part or whole will constitute the future Palestinian state.

Bedouins, who are Palestinian Muslims - the indigenous inhabitants of the Negev- are a shrinking 10% of the population. Jewish immigrants including often poor notably Mizrahi and Falasha Jews are being located in newly developed settlement towns and an expanding number, now 25% of the population, are relocated Russian Jews. The government also wants Israelis scheduled to be removed from Gaza to resettle here.

Bedouins have been removed from their traditional nomadic territory and now much of their agricultural land and villages to make room for Jewish settlers and are being concentrated into several especially created towns.

Many Bedouins have fled to the West Bank. Some are resisting by remaining in their "unrecognized villages" which are groups of dwellings, which have been disconnected from water, electricity, sewage treatment and garbage collection. Through petitions and demonstrations at government offices and supported by advocacy organizations like Shatil, some of those villages have become "recognized" and have had their services restored. The struggle continues to extend such services to the other villages.

With continued removal from the land, Israel has forced the urbanization of Bedouins in specially built towns. Some work in the construction and transportation sectors, and others are service and repair workers in the informal economy. A few have pooled clan savings to become petty entrepreneurs in the trucking and repair trades and provide extended family employment. Many are living under stringent economic circumstance reflected in a 30% unemployment rate compared to 10% in the region. Extensive poverty and a high crime rate prevails. Substantial smuggling over the Egyptian border is another source of economic activity. Ironically, Bedouins are a large percentage of the region's Israeli army border guards.

Reflecting their traditional nomadic and agricultural culture Bedouins have a very high birth rate, some with as many as 20 children. They have a young population with some 60% of the population under age 17.

Tribal and clan culture is also the source of the continued practice of polygamy and the custom of endogamy. Marriage is among first cousins, the first marriage for those practicing polygamy. Because of this practice there is a high incidence of birth defects. There is also a high infant mortality rate for this reason as well as for reasons of poverty and problems of access to health service.

Dr. Ras said that he had persuaded clan headmen to give his staff permission to counsel those contemplating marriage to be genetically tested and this has produced some positive results. Dr. Ras also observed that it

was possible to critically discuss endogamy with Bedouin leaders by reminding them that the Prophet Mohammed in the Koran advocated that one should search for marital partners over the furthest reaches of Islam.

Some of these internal Bedouin issues as well as the struggle against patriarchy were later discussed with the head of the Woman's Center in a Bedouin town.

As we drove in a small van out of Beersheba to visit the site of an unrecognized village, Dr. Raz noted that this is a tolerant city, a city of Olim- (using the Hebrew word for immigrants), despite its support for right wing candidates in the Knesset. This support by the large Mizrahi population is in response to the Ashkenazi domination of the Labor Party, - a reminder of another source of conflict within Israeli society.

We were accompanied part of the way by a Bedouin leader recently elected to the Municipal Council who explained the ongoing effort to get services restored to "unrecognized villages". His remarks in Hebrew were translated by Dr. Ras.

We passed several of the unrecognized villages consisting of barrack like homes but no life was evident. Scattered in close proximity, on land taken from the villages were industrial parks with a concentration of light industry employing new immigrants making electronic goods including those for military use and other light manufacturing products. About 25,000 acres of Bedouin land was confiscated for settlers, industrial parks and military use.

We stopped at one "unrecognized village" -about 23 miles from Gaza - and from a nearby hillock observed its barren nature. There were no schools or other community structures in the area.

We then drove to one of the new towns dominated by one of the tribes, which like the other tribes has no wish to have integrated housing and resent the intrusion of other Bedouin tribes. Our destination was The

Women Center. The Center is located in a one level spacious tent like structure with a large room for dining and discussion and an adjacent supply room. We were greeted by the leader of the Women's Center. We ate a delicious goulash like meal combining vegetables, meats and fruits seated at a long table and then reclined on rugs around the room for a discussion on the origin and activities of the Center.

The Center was designed to raise the status of Bedouin women. Women's status with urban migration declined as roles became limited to housework and child care as compared to their earlier joint planting and harvesting activities with men in agriculture in addition to the responsibility for collecting water from local wells. The Center helps to expand their range of activities and increase their literacy. Through nurturing equality between boys and girls they also hope to change the male dominated culture.

Among the new activities women were trained for is embroidery. Home-embroidered items sold at The Tel Aviv museum are a source of independent income and status. Women of all ages are taught reading and writing and a Kindergarten was organized for childcare

A mobile library was organized which also provides books to those unrecognized villages. Books were contributed by a local Kibbutz and book loans were also obtained from the Beersheba University library. To expand cultural horizons, lecturers on health and other topics are invited to the Women's Center.

In response to questions from our group regarding women's attitudes towards the traditional practices of polygamy and endogamy, ---- ?--- told of marital conflicts when husbands take a second wife, generally a younger woman from outside the tribe. They do this to have additional children without the risk of birth defects. The first wife is then expected to help raise the younger children. She said she would divorce her husband if

he took another wife. Women's changing attitudes are also evidenced by the acceptability of family planning.

The activities to empower women were so threatening to some men in the community that not long ago the House was burned down. But it was rebuilt with the assistance of outside funding including The New Israel Fund and has resumed its activities.

Our visit to the Negev Bedouin community revealed resistance to expropriation and forced exodus from traditional lands together with internal conflicts including the struggle against patriarchy.

NABLUS

With a population of 200,000, Nablus has been a commercial and light manufacturing center of northern Palestine since Ottoman times and has been a center of national resistance both to British and Israeli occupation. At the height of the Al Aqsa Intifadah in April 2002 the Israelis entered Nablus with tanks, fortified troop carriers and helicopters. The Palestinians fought back with rockets, small arms and rocks.

On approaching the city, we were warned not to speak Hebrew. Several members of our group were Israelis (both Jewish and Palestinian) and Israeli Americans and because of this history and continued armed conflict, dangerous hostility and suspicion could be aroused. Nightly exchange of fire with Israeli snipers from the surrounding hill ledges is a frequent occurrence. The IDF may enter the city and declare a curfew with risk of arrest, injury or death for violation. Armed gang fights are also frequent nightly events.

Cell phone use is ubiquitous, essential for family contact during Israeli incursions, random curfews and roadblocks and also for communicating the shifting location of Israeli military units.

Our visit to Nablus included the commercial center, the old city, a soap factory , El Najah University and the Aksa refugee camp.

We arrived in the busy commercial center to visit Project Hope, a teaching and cultural organization located on the seventh floor of a bustling multi- use building .The elevator were not working this day.

The Project Hope staff consisted of both paid and volunteer Palestinian and international volunteers. They teach art, drama and English to children and young adults and involve the children in circus play. Many of the young suffer from post trauma stress disorder and the goal of the latter activity is to enable them to express their feelings through play .

We walked through the old city market area, stopped at a town clock near a central Mosque and were regaled by a grizzled resident on the history of the clock and the mosque. We visited various food stalls and feasted on a very sweet pastry. The venders worked quickly, were animated and friendly and encouraged our capacious appetite. It was easy to develop an addiction.

Through narrow passages between buildings we entered a Turkish Bath, dating from the Ottoman period, suggested by the ornate architecture around the pool of the main steam room.

Nablus culture is traditional and religiously conservative. Hostility to Fatah is intense, explained by its inability to end the occupation and the conviction that international financial donations are being disproportionately allocated to Ramallah, the capital of the PA. Fatah's leadership is regarded as corrupt by many who are also suspicious of its high living and its unacceptable secular ways such as the easy availability of alcohol in stores and restaurants in Ramallah.

Though the majority of voters in the presidential election supported the secular candidate Mustafa Barghouti as a rebuke to Fatah, they will probably support Hamas - which did not enter the presidential race- in legislative elections in January, 2006.

We drove to Al Najah National University, toured the facilities observed classroom activity and met with a senior dean and other administrative officials. They spoke with pride of the achievements of the students who have been under great duress including bombardment of the university. The university offers many programs for a Bachelors degree, fewer programs for a Masters degree and a Ph.D in chemistry. The total student body is 10,500 of whom 60% are female is taught by a faculty numbering 400, with slightly over half having a doctorate.

Annual tuition and fees are \$500 to \$1000 in Jordanian dinars. The undergraduate "colleges" or faculties include Liberal Arts, Sciences, Pharmacy, Law, Agriculture, Pharmacy, Information Technology and Nursing The senior dean gave us a glossy handbook listing the many affiliations of Al Najah with universities in Europe, South Africa and the Middle East and the joint scientific research projects in which they were engaged.

We saw an impressive real time video conferencing interview between an El Najah student's thesis committee professor in Jordan appearing on a large screen in the classroom, questioning the student about her research and listening to her responses.

Our next stop was a soap factory, one of the few manufacturing facilities currently functioning in Nablus. We were given a tour of the various stages of soap manufacturing and packaging. The process was very labor intensive especially the packaging with each bar individually wrapped.

This economically inefficient method of production is a consequence of the general shortage of capital in the West Bank, a result of the blockage of capital imports by the occupation authorities since 1967 only briefly interrupted during the Oslo period, and the paucity of banking facilities for borrowing. In addition, the current obstruction of inter city trade and shipment of raw materials by roadblocks, circuitous roadways and delays at

checkpoints limit the production and marketing of goods and contributes to the 30% unemployment rate in West Bank cities.

THE ASKAR Refugee Camp

We visited two units of the Askar refugee camp on the outskirts of Nablus, limited to the cultural and medical rehabilitation units in the camp. We spoke to the directors of both the New Askar and Old Asker Camp, viewed a fund raising video and toured the facilities comprising a large gymnasium, library, computer center and rooms for physical, occupational and speech therapy. The residents being served included both those with cerebral palsy and other congenital disabilities as well as those wounded in the Intifadah. Programs at the camp also encompass vocational rehabilitation, counseling and social and psychological therapy.

As with the financing of the residential quarters of the camp, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency is a major financial contributor to these services. OPEC and several Gulf States were also noted on the metal plaque on the exterior of the building as financial contributors.

We were then afforded a magnificent view from the rooftop of the city of Nablus spread out on the nearby mountainside. The foundations of a new Israeli settlement could also be seen about a mile away.

Nablus revealed important aspects of contemporary Palestinian life embodying loss and deprivation but also resistance and vitality.