

# Moving Stories: 204

Responding to the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory: May 2017

---

## Update on Christian Aid's programme in IOPT

The continued Israeli restrictions on the movement of goods and people in OPT over the last six months has resulted in many people experiencing a complete failure in ability to generate a livelihood. Local communities have been denied long term access to markets and basic resources, including land and water, meaning they have not only been unable to grow crops, but have not been able to access markets, either to purchase food or sell any produce they have managed to produce. Christian Aid has subsequently continued to support partners in the West Bank working with the most vulnerable communities and individuals in Areas B and C, to strengthen their livelihoods, and help promote a resilient economy.

While many of Christian Aid's projects have been able to carry on without too many setbacks or surveillance from Israeli authorities, some work has struggled to continue as normal, and has faced significant impediments. For example, work in Gaza has been difficult both to design and implement due to the blockade of Gaza. Partners have to ensure they have everything that is needed to set up and implement the project within Gaza, or that the items they need are not on the list of products banned by Israel – as such would mean they are unable to bring it into Gaza and implement the project. Consequently, a considerable amount of 'extra' planning is having to go into ensuring projects are planned and can be implemented appropriately.

Partners have also noted the impact of increased restrictions on travel – particularly in and out of Gaza. These restrictions have made it increasingly

difficult for partners to meet together and exchange information and experiences, as well as support each other within an environment of increasing intimidation.

## The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC)

PARC continues to sustain the Palestinian economy and agricultural sector, increase food security and build resilient livelihoods in the face of competition from Israeli-branded produce and climate change through their work on **protecting, reproducing and promoting the use of local seeds** among farmers and in Palestinian society. As part of this work, PARC has been running a seed bank, from which it reproduces and distributes local seeds to those most in need. It also runs training sessions on local seed production, organises exchange and extension visits to build capacity, and promotes awareness on climate change and its impact on Palestinian agriculture in schools.

PARC has also held seminars on local seed protection and production where at least 150 farmers, researchers, local seed companies and governmental & non-governmental representatives have gathered. PARC considers this work to be of particular importance, and as such will continue it over the next year, alongside a new rainwater harvesting project.

Finally, PARC is entering its last year of work focusing on expanding access of women's cooperatives to private and domestic markets. PARC has trained women and women's agricultural cooperatives for years, and this last year will focus on ensuring sustainability of the women's cooperatives as well as their long-term access to markets.

## Two perspectives on the same land

Sitting in the fields of the southern West Bank you have to pinch yourself to remember where you are, and why. The hills, in their coat of spring green, are beautiful at this time of the year. A pinch jolts the memory: we are here to provide a protective presence to shepherds who are regularly threatened by Israeli settlers from Otniel (a settlement that is illegal under international law).

When Shefdi and Safi were arrested at the beginning of March 2017, they were shocked by how severely they were treated, both during the arrest and when in custody. After they were released – they had done nothing wrong – the two shepherds asked us to increase our presence, particularly when the community was grazing sheep on its land near Otniel.

The hills of the area are planted with barley, lentils and collections of beautiful olive trees but turn 180 degrees and the view changes. There is a cluster of trailers on the hilltop, part of an outpost of Otniel. Loops of wire provide electricity and there is a barbed wire fence, a smoothly-surfaced road – and soldiers. In February 2017, the Knesset passed a land regularisation bill that retrospectively ‘legalised’ all outposts. Until this point they had been deemed illegal by the Israeli government.

For some people living in the West Bank, circumstances are quite good: settlements are expanding in size and growth is facilitated by the government’s provision of well-constructed roads, water and electricity. But life is far more uncertain for the Palestinians in Area C, where the supply of water and electricity is restricted. Each day Palestinian shepherds wait to see if patrolling soldiers will permit them access to their land to graze sheep.

The presence of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) team does not deter the soldiers. On this occasion they approach with guns and mobile phones in camera mode. Israeli soldiers on patrol are armed and instructed to photograph anyone who might be perceived as a challenge. They wish to check our legitimacy, and explain that sheep must not stray within ten metres of the road to the outpost. The shepherds comply with a knowing shrug; a calm, watchful expectancy descends. This is part of the daily routine of a shepherd. “The soldiers”, say Shefdi and Safi, “would chase us away if you weren’t here”.

The EAPPI team in the south of the West Bank provides a protective presence to a number of shepherding families. We are open to requests from any shepherds who come under threat. The harassment of shepherds by Israeli soldiers is frequent and takes place among farming communities across the West Bank. Our presence allows Palestinians to tend their flocks and plant their fields with confidence, ensuring their land remains tended – if it were not, the land could be confiscated by the Israeli government under an old Ottoman law. © Chris, SW Bank EAPPI

Please note: The views expressed in this blog do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of EAPPI UK and Ireland’s partners

**An article** on the mass hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners from Addameer  
<http://www.addameer.org/news/treatment-hunger-strikers-raises-concern-amongst-rights-organizations>

**Balfour** was a member of the Church of Scotland and the Church has a long association with the Holy Land through schools and projects supporting Palestinian Christians and partnerships with organisations promoting peace and reconciliation. The Church of Scotland will discuss a new report at their General Assembly  
[http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news\\_and\\_events/news/recent/balfour](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news_and_events/news/recent/balfour)

**Moving Stories** is produced by Commitment for Life, the programme of the United Reformed Church that seeks to raise issues around justice and development. To receive **Moving Stories** email [linda.mead@urc.org.uk](mailto:linda.mead@urc.org.uk). Views expressed are not necessarily those of the URC