

Moving Stories: 205

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

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA

June 2017 marks 50 years since Israel began its military occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Israel's occupation is a key cause of humanitarian needs, to which the international community responds.

Occupation denies Palestinians control over basic aspects of daily life. Their ability to move unimpeded within their own country, to exit and return, to develop large parts of their territory, build on their own land, access natural resources or develop their economy is largely determined by the Israeli military.

OCHA has compiled a broad spectrum of case studies featured in recent years. These stories tell of the Palestinian experience of occupation and its humanitarian impacts.

Ending the occupation is the single most important priority to enable Palestinians to advance development goals, reduce humanitarian needs, and ensure respect for human rights. The stories can be found at <https://www.ochaopt.org/50Stories/>

YMCA

Commitment for Life, through Christian Aid, has continued to support the **YMCA Women's Training Programme (WTP)** over the last six months. The WTP focuses on strengthening the role of women in Palestinian society while building more economically resilient societies, thereby creating the opportunity for vulnerable women to seek and achieve new levels of

independence through financial and food security. This happens through career counselling, youth

engagement and leadership programmes and through working with the PA Ministry of Education to ensure career advice sessions are included in the regular curriculum. The WTP's work also includes supporting and establishing women's cooperatives and holding modular trainings in agricultural work, food processing, animal husbandry, family health and the management of small projects with seed/seedling distribution before brokering access to markets.



Bethlehem Fair Trade Artisans (BFTA)

BFTA work with Palestinian producers on the promotion of traditional local crafts locally and internationally, to improve their marketability and increase sales. In December 2016, Christmas markets were held (including one in Bath, in the UK), which gave BFTA an opportunity to promote its products and its organization internationally.

As part of Christian Aid's ACRE project, they are hoping to tap in new venues of technical assistance and access to capital available for expanding the markets for local producers. They have also brokered a relationship between two partners YMCA and BFTA, and are in talks to look at ways in which BFTA could market some of the olive oil soap produced by the YMCA communities. There will be more on this partnership in the July booklet.

Programme focus going forward

Christian Aid's IOPT teams are currently working on a new regional strategy going forward. The

new objectives have been set, and Christian Aid now feels it has a stronger narrative underpinning its IOPT work.

2017 marks 100 years of the Balfour declaration, and the 50th anniversary of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. As such, in June 2017, Christian Aid is inviting the directors of two of its partners (two of the oldest and most respected human rights organisations in the region), the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and B'Tselem (an Israeli human rights organization) for a joint speaking tour in Europe. The tour is likely to take in the UK, Ireland, and Brussels, as well as other countries yet to be confirmed).

A Message from President Mahmoud Abbas, remembering 50 years of occupation

'We are a small but great nation, proud of our diversity and identity. We educate our children to respect themselves and others by standing up against injustice wherever it is found. We build our institutions based on the implementation of their responsibilities under international law. Palestinian Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans live and worship side by side, working together towards freedom and justice. We are a people famous for our hospitality and are keen to achieve our full potential as an independent and sovereign state, welcoming people of all faiths to the Holy Land.'

For the full text

<http://thisweekinpalestine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/A-Message-from-H.E.-President-Mahmoud-Abbas.pdf>

So what is EAPPI?

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is an international programme coordinated by the World Council of Churches. It brings people from around the world to the West Bank to serve for three months as

human rights monitors. We call them Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs).

EAPPI was founded in response to a call from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. Since 2002 over 1,500 international volunteers from 22 countries have served as EAs. In the UK and Ireland, it is coordinated by British Quakers on behalf of 16 churches and NGOs who they call partners.

Their mission is to witness life under occupation, engage with local Palestinians and Israelis pursuing a just peace, and work to change the international community's involvement with the conflict, urging them to act against injustice in the region.

EAPPI recruits ordinary people from the UK and Ireland to live alongside communities working non-violently against the military occupation. EAs range in age from 25 to 70 years old and are from many different backgrounds, but what they all share is a deep dedication to human rights.

First and foremost, EAs witness life under occupation. They are on the ground 24/7 and are often the first to respond to human rights violations. EAs live with local communities and participate in daily activities. EAs monitor and report human rights violations, bringing eyewitness accounts to the world's attention. EAPPI has more international human rights monitors on the ground than any other organisation in Israel and Palestine.

EAs engage in protective presence. Their very presence protects vulnerable communities. It deters the Israeli military and armed settler groups from violating the human rights of civilians and makes local communities feel safer. EAs stand in solidarity with local churches and Palestinian and Israeli peace activists, upholding them in their nonviolent resistance to the occupation. For more information please contact the EAPPI UK and Ireland team: eappi@quaker.org.uk

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. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the URC