

Note

The following essay, 'Two Days in Palestine,' was written in April 1989, soon after a brief trip to the occupied territories with some colleagues. It was published in two parts in the August 1989 (pp. 11–18) and September 1989 (pp. 21–27, 36) issues of *The Message International* (New York), the monthly magazine published by the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA). The editors, in their wisdom, changed the title to 'In the Eye of the Intifada, A Muslim's Journey to the Land of Oppression;' they also added pictures and inserts of their own. Here is the original text, with some minor corrections.

The first Intifada began in December 1987 and is generally considered to have continued till the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993. During that time Israeli security forces killed 1070 Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (including East Jerusalem), including 237 minors; in addition 54 Palestinians, including 13 minors were killed by Israeli civilians. The Israeli casualties at the hands of the Palestinians during the same time were 47 civilians, including 3 minors, and 43 army personnel.

(Source: B'tSelem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. <<http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/first_Intifada_Tables.asp>> as viewed on 10 April 2009.)

(April 2009)

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Two Days In Palestine

Introduction

There were six of us in the group: five academics from the University of Chicago and one lawyer. Five males and one female. One of us was a devout Catholic, three claimed Islam as their religion, while the remaining two identified with Judaism. Four of us were American by birth; of the others one had been an Indian and the other a Palestinian before settling in the United States. In these general terms we indeed formed a diverse group. What had brought us together was a common concern with the abuse of human rights in the Occupied Territories and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. We had come to the West Bank and Gaza -- some for the first time -- to discover for ourselves the faces, voices and landscape of the events we had been reading about for some time. Our week - long trip was sponsored by the Palestine Human Rights Campaign (PHRC) in Chicago.

As we went through the Immigration at the airport in Tel Aviv each of us was asked where he planned to stay. When the security discovered that the six Americans were all going to the same hotel in East Jerusalem, they became more curious about our intentions. We told them we were on a 'fact-finding' tour, sponsored by the PHRC. After a brief delay they waved us on, out into the cheerful light of late afternoon where we were met by Kathy, a volunteer with a Maronite Christian organization.

It was near dusk when we entered Jerusalem. Kathy drove us to the Mount of Olive to let us catch a glimpse of the great city in the final light of the sun, a breathtaking view. Closest to us was the Temple Mount or Haram Sharif, with the golden Dome of the Rock dominating the entire scene. Millennia of history lay all around us. A hawker approached us. "40 picture cards for one dollar." Who could refuse such a bargain! But at that bewitching hour when normally the panoramic spot should have been thronged with tourists and pilgrims -- we had arrived at the start of the Easter Week -- there were just six of us, sadly outnumbered by the vendors. No wonder the man, after he had sold us the cards, let loose a string of curses: "God damn Reagan!" "God damn Israelis!"

Our hotel in East Jerusalem also looked mostly empty and forlorn. Easter pilgrims had stayed away, frightened by all the news. The local Arabs suffered much loss in income but I didn't hear anyone—Christian or Muslim—complain. When I brought up the subject with the service in the hotel, they merely nodded and said, "Yes, it's sad," and let it go at that. That evening, some of us walked over to American Colony Hotel for a drink. The streets were dark, soulless, not at all what one expected on a nice cool night in a Middle Eastern city. Even the fancier hotel turned out to be unusually quiet. When we returned to

the National Palace, we learned that there had been some terrible events in Gaza: five Palestinians had been killed in just two days.

Starting the next day we followed a busy schedule. After an early breakfast we'd get into a van or a large taxi and drive around with some guide from one of the human rights organizations. To different cities: Nablus, Baita, Qabatiya, Nazareth, Ramallah, Umm Fahm, Hebron, Gaza. To camps: Dheisha, Aida, and Jabaliya. To hospitals, homes of the "martyrs," sites of demolished homes, offices of lawyers, activists and politicians—Israeli and Arab, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Most days, on our return in the evening, we would find a small group or two waiting for us: European volunteers, Israeli lawyers and peace activists, representatives of smaller Palestinian organizations, including women groups.

Some overall facts: Since the Intifada started in December 1987, close to five hundred Palestinians have been killed, a great many of them in their teens. For every person killed one must count at least ten persons wounded. The rubber bullets that one reads about are not made of rubber, they are heavy metal bullets with a thin rubber coating. The plastic bullets are sharply pointed. But the key fact, which one doesn't see mentioned, is that they are all fired from high velocity guns. The soldiers also use bullets, which shatter inside the body. We saw a number of young boys with horrible abdominal wounds. The high impact rubber bullets do not penetrate the body but they can shatter bones and also cause severe neurological damage. Plastic bullets can penetrate the body; we saw an x-ray photograph where a plastic bullet had lodged in the skull of the victim; in April 1989 one young boy died when a plastic bullet penetrated his heart.

At any given time there are thousands of Palestinians in jail, some duly tried and sentenced but a many more held in what is euphemistically called "administrative detention." In every Arab town we visited there were one or two prisons. The Israeli Army was present everywhere with soldiers posted on roofs at strategic points. Almost every one we talked to had had some experience of detention and/or torture, and everyone that we met had had some close relative in jail. We learned that anyone over the age of twelve was considered an 'adult,' and could be—in fact many were—sentenced to jail. When children under twelve are arrested their parents must bail them out by paying heavy fines, and if the parents can't pay the fine they are themselves arrested. We saw several demolished houses. The owners had not been tried or sentenced; just a suspicion against one among the many living in the house had been enough in each instance. When one house in a congested area is demolished several other houses also get damaged. Needless to say, no one receives any compensation.

One new thing we learned was that since January '89 the Israelis had imposed a kind of 'war tax' on all Palestinians. It is in the shape of an extra levy, sometimes with the tax for license plates, sometime with other taxes. And if anyone refuses to pay he cannot get even a birth certificate not to mention a work permit or a travel pass. Not only he, even his relatives are denied access to these civil rights.

Most Palestinian males work in Israel; they may not spend the night in Israel and must return home. They pay union dues and insurance fees equal to the Israeli workers but don't get equal benefits of health and job security. The hospitals in the occupied territories are in sad shapes; they however pay huge amounts to Israeli hospitals for all the cases they must refer to them. They can save much by investing those amounts in improvements but cannot do so without the permission of the Israeli authorities, which has always been refused.

All schools and universities in the Occupied Territories have now been closed for over one year. They were closed by the army. Every attempt to start local schools is punished. The few lower level schools still functioning—and only in Gaza, not in the West Bank—were run by the U.N. Consider this in the context of the fact that traditionally the Palestinians have been the most highly educated among the Arabs. Not only the private schools are raided but also any other project of a self-help kind. It is obvious that the Israeli army would like to create a generation of uneducated, dependent people, whom they could then manipulate and exploit. One hears these days of the Israelis seeking to talk with local leaders and not finding any; we met four Palestinian mayors (Muslims and Christians) who were legally elected in 1976 and then deposed by the Israelis in 1983 or earlier. We met Bassam Abu Shakar of Nablus who lost both his legs when a bomb exploded in his car soon after he was elected as mayor; the bomb was planted by Israeli extremists. He is still full of fire. On New Year's Eve his house was again raided and he and his wife were threatened and abused by soldiers. He is a Muslim. In Ramallah when we arrived at the house of its deposed mayor, Mr. Rantisi, a Christian clergy, he immediately showed us the van of his nephew who had arrived minutes earlier. Its windshield had been shattered by a rubber bullet and there were marks of other bullets on the van. Apparently some soldier had fired at his van from a rooftop as he was coming to visit his cousin with his young son beside him.

Everywhere in the West Bank we saw new Jewish settlements. Even in the midst of the hellhole that is Gaza, the Israelis have set up three settlements, one of them a large, Club Med-type resort! Most settlements are built for purely strategic reasons, on high hilltops overlooking Arab towns, main roads and passes. There is a ring of such settlements around Jerusalem itself. Almost one-half of all land in the Occupied Territories is now under exclusive Israeli control under one guise or another: settlements, land attached to the settlements, army posts, security zones, prisons, detention camps, etc. The new settlements are not at all like the old kibbutz; they are only bedroom communities or in a few cases high-tech groups. Sadly enough, they seem also to be favorites with American Jews.

For over one year now all stores in the Occupied Territories (including East Jerusalem) remain open only for three hours in the morning (9–12); the only places exempted are factories and pharmacies. It was an eerie sight to see the closed shops, the deserted streets, day after day. There may perhaps be some coercion, but there is no doubt that it also has much popular support. It no doubt causes a great deal of economic hardship, but the money sent in by the 3.5 million Palestinians in the diaspora helps the local people carry the burden. Another, more significant, development is the emergence of all kind of

self-help groups, consumer co-ops, women's craft-centers, etc. Some of these are frowned upon by the military authorities. The Intifada has also brought about tremendous tensions within the family, not only of the generational kind, but also between the sexes. The patriarchy begins to lose its grip when women and children fight side by side with the men; in fact the women seemed to be doing a great deal more to hold the families together. In any case, Palestinian women have always been more educated and active compared with the rest of the Arab world.

The Intifada has also set up a challenge for the PLO and the diaspora. It has a life of its own now and there is no way that someone from outside can stop it. It will stop only when some definite concessions are made by the Israeli government and when concrete plans are put into place towards the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the territories. What was inspiring to see in this regard was the cooperation between any number of Israelis and Palestinians towards a negotiated peace. Unfortunately, not much of it gets reported in the American press.

Lastly, mention must be made of the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism in Palestine as well as in Israel. At least on the surface these are two separate movements. In the recent local government elections in Israel, the Arab town of Umm Fahm elected a fundamentalist mayor. We met him as he sat in his tiny office, under the picture of the President of Israel. They are opening mosques, starting religious schools, making women wear 'modest' clothes and doing a great deal of community work. Previously the town had elected Communists. The mayor had studied the writings of Maulana Maududi and Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi. When he learned that I was from India he asked me to convey his greetings to Maulana Nadwi. I couldn't tell him that the last thing I did on my most recent trip to India was to write a rejoinder to one of the Maulana's homilies to Indian Muslims.

During that week we saw and heard much, some of it new, some already familiar. But the critical experience was to see all of it for ourselves, to behold specific names and faces with whom we palpably shared our humanity, to breathe the same air as they did, to see the same shadows and walk the same streets. Lifeless numbers became actual individuals; what was merely a name now became the dead son of a mother whose angry tears we saw and can recall; "a demolished house" became a pile of concrete and stones that we felt under our feet and whose earlier residents served us tea in the one room they were now living in thanks to the generosity of a neighbor. Things were shown to us but we also saw things on our own; people told us about their lives but also frankly answered our questions.

What follows then is a detailed account of just two days: our first day in the West Bank and our only day in the Gaza Strip. Obviously, these days were not typical or representative. The five days not described here also taught us a great deal. But my most urgent need is to share my experience with others now, and in a way that would bring them close to the actual words and sights. This is what I have sought here, and this is also what my limited time and talent allowed me to do. (The conversations are reconstructions based on extensive notes; they are not verbatim.)

A Day In The West Bank: 20 March 1989

Our guide and chauffeur for our first full day in Palestine was Kathy, who was waiting for us as we came out of the dining room of the hotel. She took us to the office of the Palestine Human Rights Information Campaign, where we were briefed by Jane Abu Shakra. PHRIC has a total of 15 fieldworkers who gather relevant information, but two of them were at the time in prison and one under “administrative detention.” A few had been confined to Gaza and could not travel to Jerusalem, or anywhere else for that matter. Jane told us about the effectiveness of the continuing strike—the decision to open stores for only three hours in the morning. (Factories, bakeries and pharmacies are exempted.) According to Jane, the West Bank and Gaza now imported from Israel only one-third of what it used to before. This must be a rude blow to Israel’s economy, since the Occupied Territories had been its chief market for two decades, in fact a customer with no choice. Also: 20% to 25% of the Palestinian labor force was staying away from their jobs in Israel. All this means a great deal of sacrifice and hardship on the part of ordinary people, and only shows how desperate their desire was to be rid of the occupation.

Jane also told us about the political scene in the Arab areas within the Green Line -- the post-'47 Israel. Apparently the Communists have lost their monopoly of Arab support; a Progressive Party is trying to replace it, but -- much more significantly -- a new Islamic Movement has suddenly gained major prominence. There is an Islamic Movement (HAMAS) within the Occupied Territories, but the Islamic Movement in Israel itself acknowledges no ties to it; their goal seems to be a kind of autonomy for the Muslim Arab population within the state of Israel. Its supporters have not taken any public position in re the Intifada, but they have sometimes provided relief supplies and such, choosing to work with local leaders. Jane told us about the Arab town of Umm Fahm where the Islamic Movement gained a majority in local elections and now runs the municipal administration. She praised their efforts to deal with civic causes, their moral message, and their slogans of self-respect and self-sufficiency. I wondered about the attitude of the Israeli government. Will they outlaw this new radical phenomenon? Or will it be patronized and then used to create dissension between Christian and Muslim Palestinians?

Our next stop was the Maqassed Hospital, the largest health facility for the Arab population of Jerusalem. That's where all the dying and the wounded of the demonstrations in Jerusalem and the nearby camps are brought. We got a quick tour of some of the wards and talked with a few of the wounded.

Amar Abd-al-Latif Shakra was a shopkeeper in Nablus. One day he noticed some trouble brewing on his street. Before he could close his shop he was attacked by five soldiers. They knocked him down and beat him; since then he has been paralyzed from the chest down. He had been in the hospital for more than four months. Above his bed was a small

poster showing the map of Palestine and a PLO flag. Amar talked with great passion about how God created all men equal and quoted from the Qur'an. "We want justice. We want only 1/1000th of what has been given to Israel." In Nablus he had been the sole provider for his six children, his wife, and his old mother.

Salah Jabar had lived in Al-'Aroof camp all 20 years of his life. He was one of eight brothers in his family, two of them in jail for "security offences." He was returning to the camp after visiting a friend at the Maqassed Hospital when the Border Police stopped him at the checkpoint. They held him for fifteen days during which time he was severely beaten. Eventually they dumped him outside his family home. No charges were made, either then or subsequently. Now his left arm and leg are paralyzed and he has lost much of the function in his left eye and ear.

Bilal was 16 and had been in the hospital for one week. He was from Gaza. One morning, on his way to school, he saw some boys throwing stones at an Israeli patrol. Bilal turned around to run away. Just then the soldiers fired and Bilal was hit in the stomach. It was a regular bullet fired by a regular soldier. Bilal has 14 brothers and sisters and his father is a day worker.

Muhammad from a village near Bethlehem had been in the hospital since 26 January. He and his cousins were shot at from a distance of only 3 meters. Hit in the stomach he has required colostomy; another bullet has shattered a nerve in his right arm. He was constantly in severe pain and the doctor told us that the pain would continue for another six months.

Bassam Tamiza, 22, was from Idna near Hebron. He took part in a demonstration one year ago and admits to throwing stones at the soldiers, who then fired live bullets and tear gas. Two demonstrators were killed, and seventeen were injured. One bullet hit Bassam in the ankle and shattered two bones. He was taken to a hospital in Beersheba and later went into hiding. The army put into detention his father and three of his brothers for 13 days, and raided his house several times. Once a soldier hit his father and broke his jaw. Eventually Bassam was arrested, kept in isolation and interrogated. He says he was also beaten. Now he had been in the hospital for several months, slowly gaining functional control of his nerves. One of his brothers had been a prisoner for 15 years and was freed only in an exchange in 1985. Another brother was beaten by soldiers and received spinal injuries. Now in that family of ten (5 males and 5 females) three male members were unable to work.

There were many others. What was significant was the number of stomach injuries caused by bullets that shattered inside the body, often resulting in colostomy. We were told that the so-called rubber bullets were always fired from high-velocity rifles, with the result that the impact often caused severe neurological damage. This was confirmed by what we saw at the Maqassed and at the Shifa Hospital in Gaza.

During the trip we learned a lot about the so-called plastic and rubber bullets. Reading about them in Chicago one conjures an image of tiny, bouncy things. The reality is very

different. One type of plastic bullets are sharply pointed cylinders, they can penetrate human body. In fact, they can kill. Others are round balls, usually fired packed 12 to 15 in a canister. At close range, their impact can be terrible. Rubber bullets come in two shapes and sizes. They are heavy, with a core of solid metal. Only a thin covering of hard rubber gives them their misleading name. They too can be fired packed 15 to a canister. They don't penetrate human body; instead they shatter bones and skulls and damage nerves. The use of live ammunition has, of course, not stopped. In fact, from the types of wounds we saw it seemed that the soldiers had often used special bullets that fragment inside the body and cause tremendous damage to vital organs.

As we left the hospital, I couldn't help thinking of the public hospitals in Barabanki and Lucknow, my two "homes" in India. The Maqassed was smaller compared to either, but the atmosphere within was very different. Despite being strained beyond its resources, it looked cleaner and better organized. Like Indian hospitals, its wards were crowded with patients and their relatives, but the interaction between the medical staff and the public was more cordial and egalitarian. One saw no signs of a hierarchy in the quality of treatment. This was also true of the hospital we visited in Gaza. In both hospitals, people asked me where I was "originally" from, and when I told them they responded with unusual warmth: India is seen as a staunch friend of the Palestinians. I don't speak Arabic, but having been raised a Muslim I know a few verses from the Qur'an and the traditional, formulaic responses on occasions of grief and loss. As I uttered them I felt a bond being formed, superficial perhaps, yet very real in that moment. On the other hand, it was a curious experience to meet people with names same as mine, who looked and talked differently and who didn't necessarily share my faith either. (Naim is a name, common enough in both Arabic and Hebrew, and thus not limited to Muslims alone, as is the case in South Asia.) In a strongly personal way it reminded me of the fact that not all Palestinians are Muslims.

In the afternoon our group was joined by Janet Gunn, a graduate of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. She now lives in Jerusalem and works with a volunteer organization. Janet took us to Dheisha refugee center to meet Muhammad Abu Akar and his family. As we drove into the camp, we could see it had been sealed off at several places; the two entrances and exits that were still open were guarded by fully armed soldiers. The camp itself was a labyrinth of narrow, twisting roads on the side of a hill, facing a main highway. The houses, made of cinderblocks, were modest in size and look; some of them had two stories. We learned that the improvements had been made only since 1986.

Muhammad, at age 17, was a hero in the camp. He had been jailed thrice, the first time when he was in primary school. After being expelled from the school, Muhammad hid with friends in the camp and regularly took part in demonstrations. The soldiers raided his home several times; they took away the ID card of Muhammad's father so that he couldn't go to work. During one raid, the soldiers hit Muhammad's mother and his 6 yr old sister and broke up the furniture in the house. They also took away their savings. An Israeli journalist managed to visit them and published their story. On 6 August 88 Muhammad was shot in a demonstration. A high-velocity bullet tore into his stomach. He

was taken to the Maqassed where he underwent over four hours of surgery. During that time a large group of friends and sympathizers gathered at the hospital, some of them wanted by the authorities. Israeli intelligence personnel raided the hospital and arrested four Arabs, but the others escaped. A couple of weeks after the first surgery, Muhammad's wound re-opened; he had to be operated on again, then a third time. Janet's organization arranged for Muhammad to be brought to Boston for a possible bowel transplant. Eventually the doctors in Boston decided against it and sent him back to the Maqassed, where he gradually recovered. He had been home for two weeks when we visited. His return had been a cause of great celebration and now people called him Muhammad "Ajib", for his miraculous recovery: he was the first to survive hyper-alimentation. [Three youth had so far died during the Intifada in Dheisha Camp.]

An interesting sidelight was our encounter with Muhammad's grand-uncle, who came visiting while we were there. A loquacious old man, he had been a soldier in the British army during World War II, where he had met soldiers from India and learned a few Urdu words; he was delighted when I recognized them. As he recounted his well-worn stories, the younger people in the room exchanged glances and smiles. It was evident that the heroes of today were the young, who had known no other life but of the camps. The family had originally lived in a village not far from Jerusalem but was forced to leave after the '48 war. As the several generations in the room talked, we could feel some generational differences. The older people appeared to be more conciliatory, the younger less so. The youth seemed more confident, more assured of the success of their struggle.

I got that impression again later that day when we went to the A'ida Camp to visit with the family of one of the "martyrs." Muhammad Khalid Khalil was 18 when he died on March 12. Two days earlier had been shot while taking part in a demonstration. The bullet had fragmented inside his stomach. He too had been born in the camp, his family, originally farmers, having been displaced in 1948. The father was now a day worker in Israel. The surviving family consisted of 3 sons and 5 daughters. They too had known no other life but that of the camp. Khalil's father asked us: "Why has a big country like the United States become an enemy of a small people like the Palestinians?" We had no answer. Just then we heard some commotion. Shortly a bunch of young kids came running in. One of them, not more than ten years old, was crying in pain; he had a fresh wound on his knee. Apparently, the kids had been out somewhere in the camp where they encountered an Israeli patrol. Slogans were raised, stones were thrown, and shots were fired. A plastic bullet hit this boy. Our hosts advised us to leave immediately and we did.

Our first full day ended outside a huge conference hall in Jerusalem where "Prime Minister's Conference on Jewish Solidarity with Israel" was being held, attended by some 1500 representatives of various Jewish organizations, mostly from the United States and Europe. Some thirty men and women, belonging to various Jewish/Israeli peace groups, had lined themselves by the path leading to the hall. They carried signs such as "We Don't Want Another War" and "One Who Can Protest And Does Not Is An Accomplice", and handed out fliers to the delegates. They didn't shout slogans, block anyone's way, or start arguments with the delegates. Suddenly two men and a woman started calling them names and pushing them around; they also tore up their placards and

leaflets. Simultaneously, a police van drove up; a plain-clothes man made an announcement in Hebrew, and a dozen men and women in uniform joined the first three who had started the melee. Within a few minutes five or six demonstrators had been arrested and taken away. I then walked away from there and was standing in the parking lot when suddenly there too the police arrived and took away three men, who at the time of their arrest were merely talking with a few other men and women. Below is reproduced the text of one of the fliers that were briefly—but courageously—distributed at the demonstration.

“Dear guest:

“Welcome to Israel, where RAMI HASSON has just been jailed for 28 days for refusing to serve in the occupied territories. It is his third imprisonment on the same charge. Hasson - a reserve corporal with the engineers - is not shirking military duty. Referring to his refusal to serve in the occupied territories, he declared: “I don't think I shouldn't serve in the territories; I think we—Israel—shouldn't be there!”

“Since the onset of the Palestinian uprising, hundreds of reservists have refused anti-insurgency duty. 63 have been jailed - some, like Hasson, receiving recurrent sentences.

“Official policy in the occupied territories, with its human rights abuses, its denial of basic political freedoms and its deliberate brutalities, forces Israeli soldiers to act in a manner repugnant to every civilized person.

“Moreover, by its consistent refusal to meet with the Palestinian leadership, or seek a peaceful solution to reconcile the legitimate needs of both sides, the Israeli government is perpetuating the violence, holding out no hope of meaningful change. No wonder that close on 1000 reservists have signed a pledge ‘to take no part in putting down the Palestinian uprising.’

“You are in Israel to express your support and solidarity. You are a welcome guest in our country, if you have its true interests at heart. On behalf of Rami Hasson and hundreds of loyal Israeli soldiers, we urge you: **PLEASE RAISE YOUR VOICE AGAINST POLICIES WHICH REQUIRE US TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MILITARY DUTY AND THE DICTATES OF CONSCIENCE!**

(YESH GVUL, P.O. Box 6953, Jerusalem 91068, Te.: 5131462)”

This group, or those demonstrators, were by no means unique. In subsequent days we learned about more such groups. They are small in numbers, but they represent a respectable and increasing portion of Israeli population. In their devotion to the vision of Israel they are no less fervent, yet at the same time they sincerely seek to find a just and enduring peace with their Arab brethren. Unfortunately their voices are not as frequently and loudly heard in the United States as of their opponents.

A DAY IN GAZA: 23 March 1989

Gaza, like all other cities in that land, is not too distant from Jerusalem—only a couple of hours or so down well-laid roads. But the life of the man in Gaza is a far cry from what one sees in the Arab quarters of Jerusalem or even in the towns of the West Bank. To my eyes everything was new and different and familiar at the same time, still I noticed a big change as we came closer to our destination that late morning in March. The lush countryside began to change; orange groves and other fruit orchards became less frequent; the soil on the right side of the road began to look sandy; and all of us became a little tense. We had started a bit late; now we feared we might miss our appointment at the gas station, where a van sent by the Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work, Gaza, was to meet us. Our taxi would have been allowed into the Gaza Strip, but the driver had no desire to be noticed and harassed by the authorities. Neither did we wish to be conspicuous in our taxi. But the van had waited for us.

The landscape became still more sandy and desolate as we went through two army checkpoints and entered the Strip. At one point a huge arch sat across the road with signs in three languages that proclaimed "Welcome to Gaza." It didn't say welcome to one of the most densely populated urban-spreads in the world, to a narrow strip of land dotted with shantytowns and prison camps for most of the 650,000 Arabs and beach-resorts and subsidized settlements for a few thousand Israelis. The sign looked simply obscene.

Originally we had planned to spend two days and one night in Gaza, but the day before our arrival in Israel, Gaza had "exploded." Three Arabs had been killed, scores more injured, and a curfew had been clamped on most of the Strip. We had to delay our trip. Even today, seven days after the events, parts of the city were under curfew. As we drove into the city we could see remnants of the road-barriers and charred tires that the demonstrators had set up at many intersections. At one place there was even a tattered PLO flag hanging from the power lines overhead.

Every wall had some graffiti: pro-PLO, pro-HAMAS (the new emerging Muslim Movement), celebrating the Intifada, saluting the "martyrs," denouncing the Israelis. Many of the slogans had been painted over or defaced, but many more were still boldly visible. Every so often we passed a jeep or some other vehicle full of soldiers, otherwise there was little traffic in the streets.

Our first stop was the office of the NECCCRW where we received a short briefing about the conditions within the Strip and the various projects concerning, health, rehabilitation, and education that the Committee for Refugee Work has been engaged in over the years. Gaza is the largest town in the Strip; the other few towns are much smaller. In addition to the original population there are some 450,000 refugees, roughly half of them in towns, the other half scattered in eight camps. The total area of the Strip is about 400 sq. miles.

The Israeli army of occupation has already confiscated one-third of it. On this land, beside prisons and prison camps, army posts and such, they have also created 19 Israeli settlements for the benefit of 3000 settlers and two beach resorts for the benefit of Israeli tourists!

The current, sustained uprising, the Intifada, began in Jabalia Camp, next to Gaza City, on December 9th, 1987. Since March '88, the entire Strip has been under night curfew (9 pm to 3 am); while almost every day some part or another is placed under total curfew for various lengths of time. On the day of our visit, parts of the city were still under partial curfew after the major flare-up a week earlier. On occasion the entire Strip has been put under total curfew, twice for three and once for five consecutive days. At other times, for days or weeks, a kind of siege has been imposed on various camps, their utilities cut off and the movement of people and goods completely stopped. That, we were told, had been the "normal" state of life in Gaza Strip for more than a year now. Under these most trying conditions, the Committee runs four Family Health Service Centers, four centers for training in Home Economics for women, two vocational schools for boys, four vocational training programs for girls and, most importantly, several projects dealing with community development and cooperatives. Needless to say, the work of this Christian group is for the benefit of the entire Arab refugee population, of which most are Muslim.

We next walked over to the office of the Palestine Women's Union to talk with its Chairwoman, Miss Yusra El Barbari; she turned out to be one of the most remarkable persons I have ever met. In her late sixties, dressed in gray and as feisty as they come, she sat in a corner of her tiny office, looking, for all the world, like "Whistler's Mother." Her words of greeting to us were: "Those who come here, we call them astronauts—they have come to a different planet." She had just finished her French lesson, and introduced us to her teacher, a young man from the French Cultural Center in Gaza. Miss Barbari was born in Gaza where she also had her primary education; she was sent to Jerusalem for the secondary school and finally to Cairo University where she read Social Studies and graduated in 1949. She taught in girls' schools, was the Principal of several, and eventually became an Inspector of Schools. In 1963 she was a member of the Palestinian delegation to the UN. After 1967 she stopped teaching—"the Israelis won't let me teach Palestinian history and geography"—and devoted herself to the Center that had come into existence three years earlier. She has been confined to Gaza since 1974, not permitted by the authorities to travel anywhere outside the city.

"We Palestinians want dignity and freedom," she continued, "It's the right of all nations to resist occupation. You should explain to your students that we are freedom fighters. Just like the people in Afghanistan. How can Reagan call them freedom fighters but us terrorists? I'm against occupation everywhere." I asked her about the PLO. "We have the right to choose our representatives and we have chosen the PLO to represent us." Then she added, "I'm sorry to say this, but Arafat has given away much but received little in return." Asked about the Israelis, she replied, "There is no difference between Shamir and Peres. They are same. We lived peaceably sixty-five years ago, the Jews and the Arabs. The midwife at my birth was a Jewess." Then she told us about her brother, a lawyer,

who was killed by Israeli soldiers in the '67 war and whose body was never recovered. "I didn't tell this to his children. They were very young then."

The Women's Union runs five centers that serve women and children. There are forty employees. Earlier they used to get financial aid from abroad but the new army restrictions have drastically reduced it. The employees now work at 1/4th their salaries. They teach women sewing, knitting and embroidery, and work with families who have male members in detention or jails. We asked her about women prisoners. She told us that there had been quite a few but they were usually held for shorter periods of time than the men. Though there had been, according to her, no instance of sexual harassment of any woman, there had been a few cases when women prisoners were tortured during interrogation. Also, in several instances, soldiers had brought prisoners' wives into the prison and used threats against them to make the husbands confess.

As one listened to the passion and energy in the voice of this remarkable woman one couldn't help but think how effective a representative of her people she would be. I can see her tearing to shreds men like Shamir or Peres on "Nightline." No wonder she wasn't allowed to stir out of Gaza.

We then returned to the Committee office where we met Dr. Mohammed Zeineddin, Chairman of Central Blood Bank and Medical Relief Committees, and Dr. Zakaria El Agha, Chairman of Arab Medical Association.

Dr. Zeineddin's organization, in addition to collecting and providing blood for medical needs, also runs three medical labs and clinics. All the blood is collected from within the community, and he was very proud of the high ratio of donors: "one in ten as opposed to one in twenty-six in U.K." They provide blood to all the hospitals in Gaza and the West Bank, including hospitals run by Israeli government -- "after all it is our people who lie wounded there." Recently they even sent some blood to help the victims of the earthquake in Armenia. In their clinics, where they provide simple medical aid and information on family- planning and hygiene, they charge a nominal fee -- "we want our people to retain their dignity; they don't want charity." They used to get funds from Arab sources overseas, but now the Israelis had barred them from doing so. The army had twice raided their building and confiscated the account books. "Just to harass us. They don't want us to create any infrastructure of our own; they don't want any leadership to surface. Now we get donations in kind not in cash, but only with great difficulty."

Dr. Zeineddin was born in Jaffa, from where his family was driven out in 1948. Fortunately they had an ancestral home in Gaza so they settled there. He received his medical training in Alexandria. At the time of our talk, he had two sons in prison for taking part in the Intifada: one sentenced to 5 years in a Gaza jail and the other, only 15 years old, to 5 months in the notorious detention camp, Ansar II. His other son and daughter were students in Russia. "Anyhow, we are more fortunate than others. Some of them are dead, some lost eyes, and some lost limbs." The parents are allowed to visit the sons every 15 days. "There is a Palestine Republic in the prisons. Prisons are schools for

our future leaders. The older people take care of the younger. The Israelis are stupid to create these detention camps."

Dr. Zakariya El-Agha heads the Arab Medical Association, an organization of Palestinian doctors, dentists and pharmacists. It was originally formed in 1945 in Jerusalem as Palestine Medical Association; after 1948 it moved to Gaza but stopped functioning after the '67 war. It was revived in 1977 with a new name. It has some 1200 members, one-fourth of them abroad. A professional organization, it also tries to provide medical aid to the local population. They can't receive funds from abroad and need special permission from military authorities to do local work. It took them four years to get the necessary permission to set up an eye clinic in 1982, the only facility of its kind in Gaza. It serves 300,000 people. But interference and harassment continues.

Dr. El-Agha also described to us the state of medical facilities in the Strip. Every family is taxed for medical care but they don't get full and sufficient service. The occupying authorities run only one hospital, UNRWA or local organizations manage the others, and yet nearly \$500,000 is annually collected by the Israeli hospital in insurance money. "They don't want us to create our own infrastructure; they want us to be dependent." In 1967, 840 hospital beds were available in the Strip, now the number is 900—an increase of 60 beds in 22 years! In 1967 the population served was 370,000, now it was 650,000! There are 190,000 students but there is no health service in any school; earlier there used to be a nurse in every school. Vaccination services are provided by Israelis but the brunt of it is borne by the UNRWA. No hospital has an intensive care unit. According to Dr. El-Agha, the Israelis have cut funding for health services, by 25% in 1988, and by another 30% in 1989. Harassment, however, has increased. Hospitals are frequently raided. It is quite common for the army to take away the wounded for interrogation even before they receive any first aid. We asked him about the use of tear gas and its effect on women. According to Dr. El-Agha, there had been more than 200 cases of miscarriage caused by the gas used by the army. His organization asked the army to provide more information about the gas and its possible antidotes, but no reply was forthcoming. Soldiers interfere with ambulance services and prevent all voluntary work through harassment.

Dr. El-Agha was himself detained in Gaza Center Jail for 6 months in 1988; he still doesn't know why. "The Israeli Embassy in Sweden falsely charged that I was a member of the PLO central committee." Since 1981 he has not been allowed to leave the Gaza Strip, as has been his wife, also a doctor, since 1985. The week previous to our visit, their daughter, 13, had been roughened up in her school by some Israeli soldiers.

Our next engagement was with Dr. Haider Abdel Shafi, whom we met in his office at the Palestine Red Crescent Society. He is its Chairman. His face was familiar to most of us from that historical "town meeting" between Palestinians and Israelis on ABC's "Nightline." A senior man of a dignified mien and old-world courtesy, Dr. Shafi was born and raised in Gaza and received his medical degree from American University in Beirut. He had been member of the first organizing committee of the PLO. Presently all his children live abroad but while they were in Gaza, one son was jailed for one year while

another son was detained several times. Now the parents have advised them not to come for visits. Dr. Abdel Shafi was restricted to Gaza for three years in 1979; that restriction was re-imposed in January 1988. I asked him about his visit on the "Nightline." "ABC first asked the Defense Ministry for permission; they gave no answer for ten days. Then they moved the Prime Minister's office; they too made no response. Then, 24 hours before the show, ABC threatened to put an empty chair on the stage. That worked. They gave me permission to travel to Jerusalem, but just for the show."

Our first question to Dr. Abdel Shafi was about the current developments and how he viewed them. "At this late hour," he began, "the most important thing is clear: the stage is ready. The PLO has now recognized Israel. The only obstacle that still exists is Israel's refusal to recognize the PLO. But the right of the Palestinian people to be free is not subject to question. We may dislike putting pressure on Israel but that seems to be the only way left." He then referred to the transfer of property and land at Taba to Egypt that had taken place just recently. "It took Egyptians 9 years to get Taba back from the Israelis—nine years of direct negotiations! We need arbitration by the super powers and some pressure from them. To allow Israel to use its military power without restraints is scandalous. The United States objects to Israeli settlements and yet continues to give huge amounts of money to help Israel in establishing them."

"The Israelis want our people to become dependent on them. They don't want us to engage in any developmental work. In 1976 we wanted to set up a general hospital in the Strip, like the Maqassed Hospital in East Jerusalem. We applied for some land. After three months our request was turned down. We then tried and succeeded in leasing some Waqf [Muslim Charitable Trust] land. We did all the necessary planning and finally were ready to start construction, then the army said: You can't. No grounds were given for the order. We made the matter known to progressive circles in Israel and also appealed to the World Health Organization for help, but the army remained adamant."

We asked what he thought of the Israeli claims that during the occupation there had been much improvement in health services. "In vaccination and preventive medicine they have contributed," he responded, "but in cooperation with the UNRWA, not on their own. A fair number of mother-child centers have also been opened, but I can't comment on their effectiveness. In environmental health-care, however, their record is very bad. In curative health-care too, it is quite unsatisfactory. Despite full taxation, there has been no improvement since 1967. Do you know that the infant mortality rate in the Occupied Territory is almost double of that in Israel? And that's their own estimate."

I was curious about his views on the rise of Muslim fundamentalism among the Palestinians. "The Ikhwan fought alongside the Palestinians in 1948; they were the bravest of friends. Under Nasser they were brutally suppressed. Earlier the Israelis seemed to have given them a green light, hoping that they would cause dissension among us, but they are no longer so sure. The fundamentalists are fiercely nationalist. They have identified themselves with the Intifada. Many of them play a very positive role in our struggle. We differ on the issue of secularism, but we have a common goal right now." In response to another question, he added, "There is nothing more false than the accusation

that the PLO uses coercion upon local people. Yes, several collaborators have been killed, but no one has received any injury because of his political views."

It was well past noon when we walked out of Dr. Abdel Shafi's office. We had started the day late and the riveting comments of our interviewees had made us forget the passage of time. Now suddenly we became aware that (1) we were hungry and that (2) all the stores were closed in accord with the Intifada. But our hosts had been most considerate: there were bags of sandwiches and fruit in our van and the driver took us to a spot on the ocean-front where we could munch on falafel and drink coke and watch the glittering but empty surface of the Mediterranean. A question revealed the fact that for many months now the fishing boats had been grounded—for "security" reasons.

On our way to the beach, we passed a sprawling military camp, all barbed wires and guard-towers, and also a prison. We also saw what may be called the more prosperous part of the city of Gaza, with attractive houses and much new-but-unfinished construction. But all the stores were closed, except for pharmacies, and not many people or cars were visible on the streets. However, every few minutes or so, we would see some sign of the occupation: a jeep loaded with soldiers, a hideous vehicle with a device in front to knock down roadblocks, armed soldiers on foot patrol, and everywhere -- on every visible, plain surface -- graffiti in Arabic denouncing Israel, proclaiming faith in the eventual success of the Intifada, support for the PLO, support for HAMAS (the Muslim Movement in the Occupied Territories), and so forth. Given the density of these "writings on the walls", I thought the Israelis had given up in Gaza their practice of randomly forcing Palestinians to deface or paint-over such graffiti. But I was mistaken. As we drove back from the beach, down a broad but deserted road, we saw a patrol of soldiers in front of some closed stores. And there in the midst of these young men with automatic rifles and sub-machineguns was a middle-aged Arab, either washing or painting-over some graffiti. As we leaned across each other for a closer look and to click our cameras, our driver quickly turned the first corner he found. But the brief glimpse was enough to give us some idea of the terror and outrage that the lonely Arab—who couldn't possibly have written the signs—must have felt at that time. The soldiers seemed to be enjoying themselves.

We continued on to visit the site of a house that had recently been demolished by the army. It was on a street that looked like any street in a not-so-new middle-class colony in New Delhi or Karachi. This house had been bulldozed, not dynamited as the houses we had seen elsewhere. The effected family—husband, wife, four (?) children, and the in-laws—were living with some neighbors and came to tell us their story. For some reason I couldn't make myself listen to them; I had already heard or read several such stories, of entire families being punished for what one member may or may not have done to challenge the Occupier. In all such cases, this collective punishment had been meted out without any investigation or trial. Sick to my heart, I stood across the street from the pile of crumbled concrete and wires, with bits and pieces of the normal signs of habitation still visible in the dirt, the refrigerators and stoves saved and set aside, and watched my colleagues ask questions and take notes. I took pictures and felt ashamed of myself.

Right adjacent to the town of Gaza is Jabalia, largest of the eight refugee camps in the Strip. As we drove towards it the driver became more careful. He drove slowly and stopped a few times to let army vehicles go by. The cityscape changed; houses became more humble and congested, roads less even. We passed some parts of the city that were still under curfew. Then houses became hovels. We made a right turn, followed a road full of holes and in a few minutes we were in the camp itself: a vast, sprawling conglomeration of shanties made of cinderblocks and tin sheets, their roofs bristling with patches of barbed wire and TV antennas. Small piles of garbage lay here and there. Fifty yards from where our van stopped was a small pond. On the other side was what looked like a mosque or prayer area surrounded by a low white wall. A couple of trees by the side of the pond made the scene look very peaceful. The dirt and dust, the still water and muddy holes, the glint of tin sheets, the total effect of the low-lying sprawl was very South Asian. It could have been in India. But the young people who came over to us looked cleaner and healthier than would be the case in similar places in India, and, as I began to look more carefully, the total effect too was somehow cleaner.

The young men were suspicious of us. Recently there had been reports that Israeli intelligence-men had masqueraded as foreign journalists in order to question people and make arrests. The driver explained to them who we were, as did the Palestinian in our group, and soon there were smiles all around. One of them asked me if I was from India and was pleased to know that I originally was. We didn't stay very long. We didn't want to encounter any army patrol inside the camp. So we turned around and returned to the city, this time as speedily as was possible.

Our next stop was a "martyr's" house. The previous week there had been a major blowup in Gaza. Men from Israeli Border Patrol, who are notoriously more violent and ill-trained, had been involved. They ordered a crowd of Arabs to disperse after the Zuhr prayers at a major mosque. This turned into a confrontation. The soldiers opened fire, using live ammunition. Three Arabs were killed, twenty-five injured; five of the injured were still in serious condition seven days after the incident. One of the "martyrs" was a nineteen-year-old named Muhammad Abd al-Nasir whose body was found inside the mosque. Three days after his death, when neighbors and friends had gathered for a ritual, soldiers had raided the house, thrown tear gas and fired rubber bullets. The house was not in an affluent area. It was a three-story building but when we went in it became apparent that at least a dozen families lived in it. Abd al-Nasir's family lived in the back on the ground floor; they had two or three rooms and a tiny yard—at most 10 x 15 feet—surrounded by a high wall. A number of people were already there and more came after we arrived. We sat down on chairs in the yard; they stood in front of us. Overhead were some wires that supported a grape vine, in one corner was a solitary fig tree.

The members of the family came out: Abd al-Nasir's mother and his three sisters; also his one older brother, who had part of one leg cut off in an accident, and his five younger brothers. For the first time during our trip I saw angry people and heard raised voices. They denounced Israel, they cursed Shamir and the Zionists, and they accused the United States of conspiring against them. For the first time on that trip I also felt afraid. Not of the people in front of me but of the numerous soldiers we had passed in the street and

who could possibly raid the house again and do what they had done in that tiny, confined area only three days earlier. Abd al-Nasir's sister showed us the bruise where a soldier had hit her. His mother described how she had been knocked down. Others told us about a cousin named Riyaz, who had received the full brunt of a can of rubber bullets in his face and was listed in serious condition at the Shifa Hospital. (For the umpteenth time let it be noted: the so called rubber bullets are not bouncy little pellets made of rubber; they have a heavy core of solid metal, with only a thin coating of hard rubber. They can't penetrate the human body, but, shot from high-velocity rifles, they do shatter bones and severely damage nerves, causing loss of sensation and motor control.)

We sat with bowed heads and listened to their blistering words. I repeated the few, trite Arabic phrases Muslims learn to say on such occasions in India. I wanted to cry but couldn't. They offered us tiny, half-full cups of tea, which we dutifully drank. In one corner of the yard there was a kind of memorial, with a picture of Abd al-Nasir. I asked his mother to stand beside it; she asked her youngest son to join her and raise his hand in the victory sign. We took two pictures, and then filed back to our van, feeling ashamed and angry and useless. There was nothing we could do to help that family. In fact, it was they who had honored us by letting us glimpse their grief and pain.

By late afternoon we were back at the office of the Churches Committee, where we found waiting for us a doctor from the Al-Shifa Hospital, the only state-run medical unit in the Strip. A man in his middle forties but looking more haggard and tired than his years, Dr. Ahmed Elyazji spoke with great anguish and urgency. I wish I had a tape recorder to take down everything he said. But soon the words were not enough for him. He got up and asked us to come with him to his hospital, to see the victims of Israeli violence ourselves. Three of us went with him. What follows is an approximate summary of his words.

"I'm one of the main surgeons at the Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza. No one can imagine the actual number of the injured since the Intifada started. Not all them are brought to hospitals. Many are cared for privately at home. They fear the army would arrest them. Army also often prevents people from being brought in. They stop them on the way and arrest them or put them in detention without charging them with any crime. Six months ago the army put a check-post inside the hospital.

"As a surgeon I don't feel I am able to serve my patients the way I can and should. We are harassed. The army raids our hospital regularly, sometimes more than once during a day. They push and beat people inside the hospital; they also make arrests. Often, even after they have arrested a person, the soldiers continue to beat him. Two persons were actually beaten to death inside the hospital, and the soldiers also turned on those who tried to intervene. One of the two had come to the hospital to keep his pregnant wife company; the other had come to give blood.

"We have ten ambulances, but none has any equipment in it.

"I'll tell you about the bullets they are using. Whatever kind they use they are all fired from high velocity rifles. They are using bullets that shatter inside the body. When these

bullets enter the abdomen they shatter and cut to pieces the intestines. We have many cases of colostomy. The rubber bullets don't enter the body but they strike with tremendous force. They seem to cause great damage to nerves. I have noticed an increase in cases of paraplegia and quadriplegia.

"Now the soldiers use a special device: a can filled with spherical plastic bullets. Rubber bullets are also fired in a canister; 15 at a time. They can cause severe fractures. Plastic bullets are made in France, rubber bullets in Israel. Two days ago I saw some patients with shrapnel wounds. We suspect they are beginning to try out a new bullet. The army asks us to provide them with detailed reports on the types of injuries the different kinds of bullets cause. We are sure the Israelis experiment with their new weapons on our people.

"Yes, they are also using different types of gas. Sometimes there are complications. There have been several instances of miscarriage among pregnant women. With some people the gas causes spells of convulsions. The soldiers themselves use masks then leave the area immediately. We suspect the gases are more toxic than they say. We send viscera for autopsy to Tel Aviv. But we don't get reports though we ask for them.

"This is how they beat people. They start by beating them on their hands, first the right hand then the left. Then they hit the man on his head to make him unconscious. When there are no injuries on the head I always find both hands badly damaged. They beat women too, also children of any sex. Many cases of beating come at night. Five men were beaten to death in Gaza; I know of fifteen cases of deep coma from concussions. One man disappeared for fifteen days. He was beaten then thrown some-where far away. He returned with dog bites on his body; he was covered with animal shit.

"My own experience? I have been confined to Gaza for 10 years. I was assaulted three times inside the hospital. When I tried to prevent the soldiers from taking away my patients, the military governor said to me, 'I can kill you if I want to.' All my brothers are also confined to Gaza. My father needed corneoplasty; it took eight months to get him the permission to travel to France. I have five children.

"Only the PLO can make negotiations on our behalf. One day I saw 15 soldiers beating up a young boy. I told them he was a nurse. They said: why don't you negotiate with us, you should negotiate with us. I told them how could we make negotiations when you can attack us anytime you want.

"No, we are not allowed to have volunteers come in; we cannot receive gifts either. Once an Israeli neuro-surgeon came to help us. He was forcibly removed by the army, and the Palestinian doctor who had worked with him was harassed for not letting the authorities know. Even the local people who volunteered to clean the hospital were not allowed to do so.

"We are still paying a 3% tax on everything. It is the 'Peace in Galilee' tax. We don't have a CAT Scan machine of our own, so we must send our patients to Israel. We must also

pay for them. Every three months we pay the equivalent of the cost of one machine, but we cannot buy one of our own.

"Come with me to my hospital. I'll show you some of the wounded.

"(1) Middle aged woman—she is a mother; she was defending her children; bullet wound in lower leg. (2) 60 yr old woman—fracture of hip, pushed down by soldiers inside her house. (3) Man—gunshot wound, hit on the street. (4) Young man—gunshot, chest, right side. (5) Young man—high velocity bullet, shattered inside; colostomy. (6) Brother of a martyr who was killed on Saturday—this boy, Riyaz, was hit by four spherical bullets. [We looked in horror at the swollen and scarred face; barely an hour earlier we had heard about him at the house of the “martyr.”] (7) Boy, 17—abdominal wound, colostomy. (8) Boy, 13—abdominal wound. (9) Boy, 19—abdominal wound, colostomy. (10) Boy, 13—beaten on face, broken teeth, fractured jaw. (11) Young man—beaten on the street, fractured skull, suffered a concussion. He will recover. (12) Young man—Dumdum type bullet; colostomy; critical condition. Shot inside his house. The soldiers came, shot and left. Has received 11 units of blood since his arrival last night. (13) Young boy—gunshot in the groin, shot in his bathroom. [The boy grinned mischievously as the doctor showed us his wound.]

"You see that building outside. It is our new unit. It was started 12 years ago. It is still unfinished and it will remain unfinished. Now I'll take you back to your friends."

We trailed after him as he briskly walked through the wards, talking to us, pointing at the wounded, answering the questions of the relatives, comforting the patients if they were in pain, without a break in his stride, without a pause between his sentences—an angry and frustrated man, devoted to his work and his people and yet unable to do all that he would like to do. We had shared an hour of his life but only as mere observers; he had taken that hour out for us because that too, he felt, could possibly help his cause. If he had his doubts he didn't show them; on our part, we certainly didn't look very confident of ourselves. He left us at the office of the Church Committee; we numbly stood and watched him turn around his battered car and disappear down the road as the last light of the day began to fade around us.

Our last stop was the office of a lawyer, Raji Sourani. As I recall it now, nearly two months later, it was a most dismal feeling that took over me as we climbed the many stairs to his office, which was probably also his home. The twilight hour, the sight of deserted streets, locked stores and slogans-covered walls, the shards of the day's encounters cutting away into my memory—I felt drained of hope as well as of energy. And Mr. Sourani's initial remarks didn't do much to change that feeling.

"Until two years ago no one paid any attention to the in-justices prevalent here. Only after the 'volcano' erupted that the media began to come here. Did you know that there were 43,000 detainees here even before the Intifada? Do you know that one-third of all the land in Gaza has been confiscated and given to 2,900 settlers? Let me tell you something else that you may not have read about at all. We have a big water problem

developing here. There is much underground water here, and those are the very areas that the Israelis have taken away from us and turned into settlements. There they pump away our water to Israel. It is causing salinity here, both above ground and underneath. Soon our soil will be ruined and we may not have enough sweet water to meet our needs.

"They don't want us to do anything to help ourselves. They want us to be dependent on them. In the camps, the boys set up teams of volunteers to do some cleaning up. The authorities moved in, made arrests, accused them of all sort of things and sent them into jail for one to eight months. Some people have been fined for just finding themselves a job here. There is only one trade union in Gaza, and even that is not allowed to function freely. In 1967 the Israelis put a collaborator to head it; so far there have been three attempts by nationalists to kill him. How can he represent us! One year some Israeli trade-unionists came here to observe the elections—the authorities cancelled the elections."

I finally got a chance to ask my question: when the entire situation was so blatantly illegal and unjust, when the Israelis paid no regard to any international convention relevant to the fact of the occupation, what did he as a lawyer expect to accomplish here? Could he in fact accomplish anything?

Mr. Sourani's reply opened my eyes. "In the 22 cases I handled before the Intifada my clients were acquitted in three cases. Now we are handling 20 to 30 cases every month. Sometimes we manage to get the sentences reduced. We try to exploit technical details. If nothing else, we show solidarity with the prisoners. We believe that they have the right to have a lawyer, that we must be there to allow them to assert at least that right."

Mr. Sourani was himself arrested and jailed twice, once for six months, the second time for eight. "They are very experienced in torture. Very few marks are left on their victims. I was kept blindfolded and handcuffed for several days while they interrogated me. Then they tied me to a door and kept me in that position for 37 days. During that time they also beat me. It was a man from Shin Bet [Israeli Intelligence]. At one point he remarked, 'You know what's wrong with you? You believe there's democracy under occupation.' They hate us, the Israelis, and such hatred doesn't come about in one day or one week, it has been there all through the years."

We asked him about women prisoners. "There are" he said, "three kinds of women prisoners: (1) those who are detained under what they call 'administrative detention' even before they could have done anything; (2) those who are arrested for taking part in demonstrations; and (3) those who are accused of engaging in some kind of political action, e.g., trying to set up some voluntary group. In relative terms, punitive measures against women are less severe." When asked about sexual harassment of women prisoners, he remarked that only one such case had come to his attention.

Under the current laws, children above the age of twelve are treated as adults, and are given similar sentences and punishment. Those under 12, when arrested, are detained in camps and their parents must come and pay fines—from 500 to 1000 shekels,

approximately US\$300-600, for their release. The parents or other relatives must come up with whatever fine is levied otherwise they themselves may be arrested or manhandled. "In one case," he told us, "a ten-year old was arrested and his mother was asked to pay the fine. She couldn't. So the soldiers came to her house at night; they beat her; they beat her father, and told her they would keep coming every night until she pays up. So the relatives and neighbors contributed and the fine was paid."

The lawyers in the Strip had been on strike from 27 Dec. 87 to 21 Nov. 88. To us, it seemed such a futile gesture. After all, by their own account, they had never been able to accomplish much in the courts since the occupation. So why go on strike?

The answer was provided by Mr. Sourani's partner, who had also been detained earlier. "After the Intifada started, the authorities put greater restrictions on visitations, both for the lawyers and the relatives of the detainees. The trials themselves became much more problematic. They started bringing fifty to sixty people every day to the court without any charge-sheets. They wouldn't let us meet with them. The courts wanted deals: confess and you will get reduced punishment; no confession will mean increased punishment. They made the lawyers totally irrelevant. The judges stopped paying us any attention. What caused the explosion of our anger was the fact of beatings. People were brought into the courts with clear signs that they had been severely beaten, but the judges wouldn't allow them bail. One person was brought in on a stretcher; he was denied bail. Another came with a fractured arm and two bullet wounds in the leg -- he was charged with throwing stones at the soldiers. Instead of sending him to a hospital for treatment, the judge remarked, 'I wish his hand had been amputated.'"

Yet all the time the authorities could claim that a "normal" process of justice existed, that people accused of security crimes were being "properly" given their day in the court and only then punished. The lawyers decided that the only way to bring the situation to world attention was to go on a strike. The media in Israel had to report such a major development. International agencies concerned with legal issues had to make enquiries. The killings and woundings, the beatings and torture became public knowledge. Foreign journalists and TV crews started coming to Gaza in greater number. Eventually the lawyers felt they had accomplished the little they could, and in November 1988 they returned to the courts in Gaza to pursue the same futile efforts they had earlier.

By now it was quite dark. We said goodbye to the lawyers and to our guide from the Committee, and then set off for the rendezvous with our taxi outside the limits of Gaza. We were all very silent as the Committee van took us through the dimly lit city. We looked out at the locked stores with their graffiti-marked shutters, the houses and flats that showed little light, the sidewalks that had very few people. We had spent not even twelve hours there, and yet our grief and anger, our utter dismay and frustration were unlike any we had felt earlier. We were pressed down with the thought that we were going back to our comfortable, civic assumptions and predictable routines, leaving behind a people whose life for more than two decades had been governed by nothing but uncertainties, by the whims and vagaries of a ruthless occupying army. And we, as American citizens, had been and still were a party to that occupation.

Soon there loomed, in front of us, that monstrous arch. Now the message in English said: "Happy Voyage." Snaking towards us, in the opposite lane, was a continuous line of cars. They were bringing back men who had gone to Israel for day labor, who had the permission of their masters to work there but not to spend the night or set up homes. At the main checkpoint, the line of cars waiting to be allowed in seemed endless. We were waved out as easily as we had been waved in, and soon found the taxi that was waiting for us in the dark by the roadside. Another moment and we were speeding back to Jerusalem. Our day in Gaza was over; unlike our hosts we could be sure that tomorrow would be a different day. Like the French journalist in Alain Resnais's film "Hiroshima Mon Amour," we had come and seen—in her case the museum, the photographs, the ruins; in our case, the hospitals, the wounded young men, the demolished house, the rubber and plastic bullets, the empty gas shells with the name of a company in Pennsylvania, the grieving mother standing beside a photograph of her dead son, the six year old brother of a "martyr" with his fingers raised in a sign of victory—and yet what did we know of the pain, the anger, the courage and determination that lay behind all that we had seen?
