

Building PEACE through Personal Experience

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FOR STRONGER MOVEMENTS

This is What Unconditional Support of Israel Means

By Aric Clark, Member of IFPB-Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Delegation



Aric Clark is pastor of United Presbyterian Church of Fort Morgan, Colorado and was one of 28 Presbyterians that traveled to Palestine/Israel with Interfaith Peace-Builders and the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship this January. He published this op/ed in the Fort Morgan Times following the trip.

Since the delegation's return, Aric and other participants have benefited from an online training curriculum designed by IFPB. The curriculum is preparing them to advocate for Palestinian rights at the Presbyterian General Assembly this summer. For more info on the trip, and to access the blog, see www.ifpb.org/del49.

January 30, 2014 - On Tuesday evening President Barack Obama delivered this year's State of the Union address. Among the many things he said was a reiteration of our longstanding unconditional support of the state of Israel. Specifically, he said, "American diplomacy is supporting Israelis and Palestinians as they engage in difficult but necessary talks to end the conflict there; to achieve dignity and an independent state for Palestinians, and lasting peace and security for the State of Israel — a Jewish state that knows America will always be at their side." I recently returned from Israel and I've seen what it is we are unconditionally supporting.

Two weeks ago I was walking through the Palestinian refugee camp of Aida outside Bethlehem in the West Bank. I was there to meet a man named Mohammad Al-Azraq who is the program director of a youth center located in the camp. Mohammad took me on a tour of Aida Refugee Camp which was created in 1948 after the forced evacuation of 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and villages by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Most of the residents of Aida Camp came from villages in the near vicinity, but in violation of international laws guaranteeing all refugees the right of return to their place of origin they have never been allowed to go home.

They live in perpetual limbo. What started as a gathering of tents and shacks 65 years ago has become cinder-block construction. The 3,500 residents of Aida Camp have intermittent electricity and water that Israel regularly shuts off, so they have learned to rely on rain-water collection tanks on their roofs. Due to a strike by United Nations Refugee Workers there has been no trash collection, the schools are closed, and no one has been staffing the medical clinic for four months.

As if the situation of these refugees wasn't dire enough, Aida Camp is under constant siege by the IDF. When the separation barrier went up it cut Aida Camp off from agricultural land that had been sustaining the residents. A checkpoint in the barrier near the camp has become the site of daily clashes between the IDF and Palestinian youth. Tear gas canisters litter the



Scenes from the IFPB-Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Delegation. Clockwise from top left: Group together in Jaffa's Old City; at the Sea of Galilee; dinner underground in a cave at the Tent of Nations; and touring the Wall in Jerusalem. Photos by Ruth Kuo, Mitch Trigger, and Kori Phillips.

This is What Unconditional Support of Israel Means (cont.) . . .

ground throughout the camp. Every one of them has "Made in the USA" printed on the side. You can smell yesterday's tear gas in the air as you walk through the alleys. Less than an hour after I left Aida camp I looked back over the separation wall to see plumes of tear gas rising from the camp again.

Mohammad Al-Azraq tries to create a little normalcy in the lives of the children of Aida Camp through his work at Lajee Youth Center. There is a playground, a computer lab, and a soccer field. Children come there for dance lessons, tutoring, and just to escape the stress for a few hours. On Tuesday afternoon, mere hours before Obama reaffirmed our unconditional support of the state of Israel, Mohammad Al-Azraq was shot in the head by an IDF soldier while he was inside the Lajee center when he stuck his head out a window to call to youth who were protesting in the street. He fortunately received medical attention and survived.

This is what it means to unconditionally support the state of Israel. It means we bear responsibility for that wall, for those tear gas canisters, for those children without schools, and those parents without medicine. With my tax dollars I helped pay for the gun and the bullet that spilled the blood of a man whose hand I shook a couple weeks ago.

This piece appeared first in the Fort Morgan Times on January 30, 2014 and is reprinted here with the author's permission.

Board of Directors Lays Groundwork to Strengthen Work for Peace and Justice

Interfaith Peace-Builders' Board of Directors and Staff met at our Washington, DC offices for our annual meeting during the first week in February. The meeting gave us the opportunity to focus on our strengths, celebrate the important work of the organization, and plan for the future.

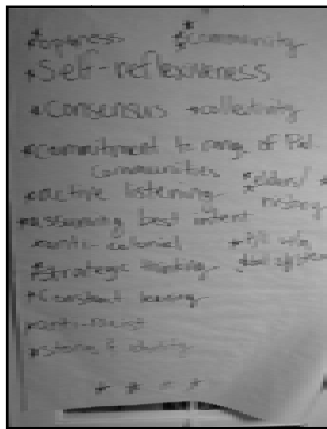
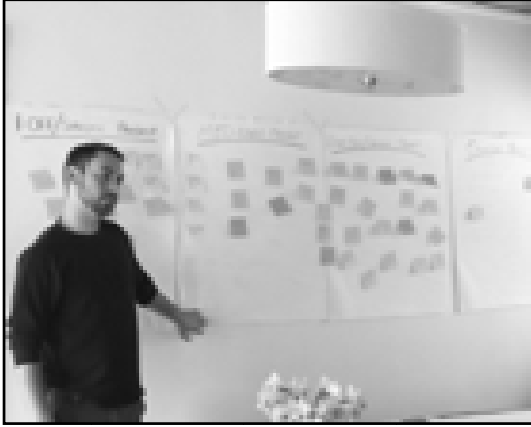
The meeting's theme this year was **"Strengthening Our Core, Increasing Our Impact"**, and at the heart of the event were discussions and visioning sessions about IFPB's unique role in the movement for justice in Palestine/Israel.

We spent much of the meeting discussing how IFPB can better serve our delegates and donors; we passed proposals to provide staff with benefits consonant with our principles; and we empowered an ad hoc committee to lead the organization through a process of Strategic Planning. The movement continues to grow and evolve and Interfaith Peace-Builders' own role must also evolve with it. We look forward to updating you as this process unfolds.



Interfaith Peace-Builders Board of Directors and staff at 2014 annual meeting in Washington, DC. Front row (left to right): Rami Natsheh, Gerald Lenoir, Allie Perry, Lisa Nesson, Manal Fakhoury, Lorraine LeBlanc, Mark Johnson, Hanan Idilbi, and Cathy Sultan. Back row (left to right): Mike Daly, Ilise Cohen, Jacob Pace, Sarah Scruggs, Darryl Jordan, Richard Moss, Emily Siegel, and Doug Kerr. Not pictured: Adam Horowitz, Sasha Gelzin.

Interfaith Peace-Builders Staff Holds 1st Ever Retreat!



Back in the days when Interfaith Peace-Builders was a fledgling organization, just learning to succeed outside the fold of our parent organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, all the staff was gathered in DC. Of course, in those days there were only two permanent staff in the organization! Today, with four staff spread in three locations, the work looks different and communication between us has been key to IFPB's success.

Now, with growing staff and growing aspirations, IFPB held our first ever staff retreat during the first weekend in March. The retreat gave us an opportunity to bond and share laughs, but more importantly, it helped us focus on strategic questions facing our growing organization.

We spent Friday and Monday meeting in Oakland where members of the Palestinian Youth Movement and IFPB Board Member Gerald Lenoir joined us for political education sessions. Those sessions grounded us in the intricacies of joint struggle and solidarity frameworks and gave us essential background on the history and current reality of the Palestinian-led movement in the US.

Over the weekend, we were hosted by a community in Northern California's Mendocino County. Surrounded by nature and idyllic landscapes, the retreat was formative for our own thinking and visioning.

Interfaith Peace-Builders' first ever Staff Retreat. Clockwise from upper left: Education and Advocacy Coordinator, Jacob Pace, leads a workshop on identifying volunteer needs and priorities; Looking up through second-growth redwood and pine during a walk; Mendocino County's hills, looking southwest over the Anderson Valley; Notes from a session on visioning details IFPB's practices and principles.

You can count on seeing the results of our work very soon. Among the immediate take-aways from the weekend are a recommitment to working closely with IFPB delegation participants and re-investing in the political education of our community. We hope you will volunteer for an upcoming project and participate in the new programming we are developing!

2014 OLIVE HARVEST DELEGATION TO PALESTINE/ISRAEL

Led by Anna Baltzer and Hassan Fouda • October 25 – November 7, 2014

Join IFPB's most popular delegation and participate in the Palestinian Olive Harvest! The harvest season is a time of great community activism, where people of all ages from Palestine, Israeli peace and justice groups, and international groups join farmers as they reap their harvest. You will hear from Palestinian farmers and learn of the importance of agriculture to the Palestinian economy and culture. As with other delegations, you will also meet additional Israelis and Palestinians working for peace and justice.



DEADLINE TO APPLY: JULY 15, 2014

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO DOWNLOAD AN APPLICATION: www.ifpb.org/del51

Give Yourself - and IFPB - Peace of Mind!

Make Your Donation Monthly and Provide Funds IFPB Can Count On

In 2014, Interfaith Peace-Builders will send our 50th delegation and 1000th individual delegate to meet and learn from Palestinian and Israeli peace and justice activists! We are not stopping there. . .

IFPB delegates know that their trip is only the beginning and these 50 delegations are but the start for IFPB as well.

In honor of our Palestinian and Israeli partners, we are redoubling our efforts to build a stronger and lasting movement in North America. And we need your help to do it!

Your gift to IFPB provides the funding we need to maintain our work for peace and justice in Palestine/Israel. We count on your donation to ensure that our important work continues.

This year, as we mark our 50th delegation and 1000th delegate, we invite you to make your donation monthly. \$5, \$10, \$15, or \$20 each month gives IFPB a solid foundation which we know we can rely on.

Consider making your donation monthly and give a gift that sustains IFPB's work all year round.



MAKE YOUR DONATION MONTHLY!

*Use the enclosed envelope to fill in your credit card information and **check the box** to make it monthly!*

or visit

www.ifpb.org/donation

ANNOUNCING 2014 AFRICAN HERITAGE DELEGATION

Led by Lucas Johnson • October 25 – November 7, 2014

Interfaith Peace-Builders is proud to announce our third African Heritage Delegation to Palestine/Israel! The delegation will travel October 25 – November 7, 2014 and include activists, artists, and leaders in African American communities around North America. Join IFPB on this important delegation for a unique opportunity to learn about the current situation in Palestine/Israel and the effects of the Israeli occupation.

The African Heritage Delegation program is built upon existing efforts within African American communities and is designed to strengthen work focused on civil rights in Israel, justice in Palestine, and the growth of boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns nationally. Little can do more to amplify such voices than an on-the-ground experience which allows participants the chance to develop strong and lasting relationships with Palestinian and Israeli activists. **Please spread the word and help us recruit for the African Heritage Delegation!**



DEADLINE TO APPLY: JULY 15, 2014

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.ifpb.org/africanheritage