

A MONTH IN PALESTINE



The Apartheid Wall bordering Aida refugee camp, Bethlehem

MARCH 29 – APRIL 28, 2025

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

I spent the month of April 2025 in the occupied Palestinian territories (East Jerusalem and the West Bank) as well as a few days in Israel (often informally referred to as '48 Palestine). My goal was to learn more about Israel's settler-colonial practices and how conditions had changed for Palestinians since my last visit in late 2022.¹ In contrast to previous visits, I spent less time "doing" and more time meeting people and listening to their stories.

For eleven days I took part in a political study tour centred in the West Bank and organized by the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions (ICAHD).² I was then based in Ramallah and Bethlehem for two weeks before joining Peter Larson of Ottawa Forum on Israel / Palestine for a few days. My travels took me throughout the central and southern West Bank, south to Bedouin communities in the Naqab (Negev), north to Nazareth and Kawkawb in the Galilee, west to Jaffa (also known as Yaffa), and east to Jericho and the Jordan Valley.³

Highlights of the trip included visiting the Naqab as well as learning firsthand about settler terrorism from members of the Jordan Valley Solidarity Coalition and a Palestinian herding community in Mukmas in Area C. A few hours with Manal and Bilal Tamimi in Nabi Saleh filled my heart with respect for front line activists. The many conversations with Palestinian university students, activists, human rights defenders, intellectuals, and professionals were informative and enriching. Encounters with left-wing Jewish journalists and human rights advocates were helpful, and listening to the co-founders of the One Democratic State Campaign share their ideas provided a ray of hope. I gained much insight from spontaneous conversations.

I came away from my visit aware of how Israel's oppression has increased. Soldiers and settlers have been freed from all restraints and are working to terrorize Palestinians and take their land. The situation is dire, and fear and despair are widespread. Palestinians clearly understand the complicity of western governments and their abandonment of international law. The last hope for Palestinians are the solidarity movements worldwide.

I am deeply appreciative to ICAHD for organizing the study tour, to Peter Larson and his friends, and to the many, many kind Palestinians who manifested their generous hospitality by opening their hearts, lives, and homes.

Two points. Due to increased Israeli surveillance and harsh punishment for dissent, many Palestinians I spoke with did not want their names or likenesses published. I have respected their wishes. The views expressed in this report are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of ICAHD or UNJPPI.



Philip Sherwood by the Apartheid Wall, Bethlehem

¹ CJPME published a report of that trip. https://www.cjpme.org/delegation_2022

² ICAHD is a left-wing Israeli-based political organization that opposes and exposes Israel's settler colonial policies and practices (icahd.org).

³ Several Palestinians advised me not to travel north of Ramallah in the West Bank as it was too dangerous.

THEMES AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED SINCE OCTOBER 7

October 7 has changed everything. Almost every conversation about daily life and conditions began with “Since October 7, . . .” Everything changed after October 7. After Israelis elected their most far right government in history in late 2022, Palestinians predicted that Israel would abandon any lip service to the rule of law and intensify its oppression and theft of their land. Since October 7, this has proven true.

LAND CONFISCATION

A landowner told us that the biggest challenge for Palestinians is land confiscation. From its inception, the Zionist enterprise has been premised on the dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian people and the seizure of their land. This has accelerated in the last eighteen months – whether the destruction of Bedouin villages or the expulsion of Palestinian herders and farmers in the West Bank. The Jewish state is doing everything it can to seize as much Palestinian land as possible.

INCREASED MILITARY VIOLENCE

The Israeli military in the West Bank has become increasingly violent. For several months, the army has been conducting a brutal pacification campaign – some call it the Gazafication of the West Bank – designed to erase all resistance and convince Palestinians that their best hope for survival is to submit or leave. The government has released them from constraints and encourages the dehumanization of Palestinians. Since October 7, soldiers have killed more than 900 Palestinians, including over 200 children, and demolished nearly 6,000 properties. The army also supports and protects settlers as they attack Palestinians.

Military checkpoints –almost 900 exist throughout the West Bank – are especially dangerous for Palestinians. Students told me that the beating of women at checkpoints is common, and humiliation is a constant. My Ramallah host explained that while checkpoints are an inconvenience for me, a westerner, for Palestinians they are literally a life and death ordeal. “The soldiers seem eager for blood,” a travel industry executive observed. “At checkpoints, it’s possible that soldiers shoot someone for no reason. There’s no accountability, and no one cares.” The Hamara checkpoint is known as the “killing checkpoint” because of the number of Palestinians killed there. A human rights lawyer said, “All of this is normal now. Palestinians are treated as cattle.”

The army is targeting the refugee camps, which are centres of resistance. The goal is to forcibly integrate the refugees into the surrounding communities so that they will no longer be refugees and lose their claim to the right of return. In the northern West Bank cities of Jenin and Tulkarm,



An IDF flyer warning the residents of Dheisheh refugee camp not to resist

the army has destroyed much of the camps, expelled about 40,000 residents, and attacked UNWRA, which operates the camps. The residents will not be able to return any time soon. The U.N. believes this may constitute forcible transfer.

While I was in Bethlehem, soldiers entered the neighbouring Dheisheh refugee camp, vandalized dozens of homes, and handed out leaflets with the following text:

Residents of Dheisheh Camp, Be Alert!

As you have already seen, the camps in the northern West Bank have paid a heavy price due to terrorist and militant activities.

Wherever there is terrorism, life is damaged.

Security forces will use all available means against any attempt or activity of this kind.

The one who has been warned is now without excuse!

The army ruthlessly suppresses any form of dissent. A low-key student gathering at al-Quds University to show support for Gaza was invaded by soldiers who tear-gassed and beat the students. Social media is monitored, and even a “like” on an offending post can result in arrest, interrogation, and possible imprisonment.⁴ Thousands of Palestinians have been imprisoned and tortured for months without charges. A director of a refugee camp youth centre explained how he was on his way home to Bethlehem one evening when he was arrested at a checkpoint and vanished into an Israeli prison for nine months. He was tortured but never charged. Currently there are 9,900 Palestinian political prisoners, double the number of 2022. Over 3,000 are in administrative detention, held without charges.



Entrance to Far'a refugee camp in the northern West Bank, one of several camps recently attacked by IDF soldiers

INCREASED SETTLER VIOLENCE

Extremist settlers play an increasingly important role in Israel’s plans to seize as much of the West Bank as possible — Area C and possibly B — and drive the Palestinians out. Settler violence is up 30 percent over 2024. During April, 122 attacks resulted in property damage or casualties, and over 370 Palestinians were displaced.

After October 7, settlers have exploited the rage of Israeli society and waged an unrelenting war on villages and herding communities throughout the West Bank. Huge commercial billboards purchased by settler groups convey their central message — “No future in Palestine.”

We visited a herding community near Mukmas that is attacked almost daily by armed settlers from a “shepherding outpost.” An elder told us, “October 7 brought hell upon us. Now the violence is never-ending along with threats to our sheep, which are our livelihood.” In the northern

⁴ I was told that facial recognition is used at some checkpoints. One young Palestinian executive told me, “The Israelis know everything.”

Jordan Valley village of Bardala, we were told that in recent months settlers had attacked nine times damaging irrigation pipes, vandalizing olive trees, stealing livestock, and assaulting villagers. Soldiers accompanied them, firing tear gas and arresting Palestinians. As in other locations, settlers direct the army units.

The Tent of Nations farm near Bethlehem, owned by the Nassar family, has escaped violence from the neighbouring settlements so far. Daoud, the head of the Naasar family, credits this to international volunteer workers who form an unofficial “protective presence.”

But the settlers are camping on the farm’s perimeter, and the future is uncertain.

Settlers also attack cars. My host in Ramallah had his car windshield smashed twice by settlers during his weekly trips to Nablus. Locals advised me to travel between Ramallah and Bethlehem on a Saturday, as the settlers are at home for shabbat. This worked, and the ninety-minute trip in a *serveece*, a shared Palestinian taxi minivan, was uneventful.



A settler-sponsored billboard in the West Bank proclaiming to Palestinians “There is no future here.”

RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENT

During previous visits, I travelled uneventfully throughout the West Bank by public transportation. Checkpoints existed, but delays and scrutiny were not common. Since October 7, the army has drastically restricted freedom of movement with more checkpoints and arbitrary road closures. It is now almost impossible for Palestinians to travel between cities, towns, and villages without encountering potentially lethal checkpoints and enduring lengthy delays. Many people told me of spending hours in a lineup at a checkpoint without moving. Some watched two Netflix movies in one spot. Then soldiers searched their car and their persons, interrogated them, and verbally and physically abused them.

Hisham, a human rights defender in Hebron, explained that if he has an appointment in a neighbouring village at noon, he goes the night before to ensure he gets there on time. M. occasionally drives from Bethlehem to Jericho for work — a fifty-minute drive. Now it can take up to four hours. A trip between Ramallah and Jerusalem, about fifteen kilometres, involves a bus or taxi ride through chaotic lineups to the monstrous and claustrophobic Qalandia checkpoint, which must be navigated on foot. Then transportation must be found on the other side. An uneventful trip took a Canadian friend over two hours. For Palestinians, it can take much longer.

Soldiers also arbitrarily and without warning close roads and highways. One day



An IDF barrier blocking the entrance to the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh

during my stay, soldiers closed the main road between Ramallah and Bethlehem. On another day, they suddenly closed the main checkpoint from Bethlehem into Jerusalem at 1:00 p.m. Hundreds of strategically placed road gates outside villages, towns, and cities ensure that soldiers can transform any community into a prison in two hours. I saw dozens of these gates. The army has also created dozens of semi permanent earthen road closures that effectively isolate communities.

All of this has caused enormous hardships for Palestinians and made their lives even more dangerous and unpredictable. Workers cannot reach their place of employment, patients cannot attend medical appointments, and businesses cannot transport their goods. Countless hours are wasted, and many vehicles are damaged in attempts to negotiate backcountry tracks.

Students are also affected. Bethlehem University attracts students from the southern West Bank. “The checkpoints have a huge influence on our daily lives,” one told us. “We wake up each day with no idea — no plan of how our day will go. Will we make it to class? We hope but we cannot plan.” One day I encountered students from Al-Quds University on a picnic excursion in the village of Battir. They explained that because of the checkpoints and road closures, the thirty-kilometre trip was an ordeal full of uncertainty.

These restrictions on movement have further fragmented an already fragmented society. People tend to stay at home more, and there is less and less discretionary travel between towns. My Ramallah host used to visit his family regularly in Nablus, a forty-five-minute drive. Now the trip might take two, three, or more hours and be fraught with danger and uncertainty. Why risk it?

A lawyer confided that he feared these restrictions might become permanent.

ECONOMIC DEVASTATION

The West Bank economy is in near ruins. Israel has cancelled 80 percent of work permits for Palestinians who work in Israel and withheld over a billion dollars in tax revenue from the Palestinian Authority. The PA has not paid its employees for eight months and cut funding in every sector of society. Compared to pre-October 7 figures for the West Bank, GDP has declined by 17 percent, unemployment doubled to 29 percent, and poverty more than doubled to 28 percent.

In Aida refugee camp, 70 percent of the population lost their jobs overnight after October 7. Hebron and Bethlehem have seen a huge drop in tourism. The old city of Hebron is a ghost town, with 80 percent of the shops closed.

Bethlehem has been devastated. Manger Square is deserted, and most of the hotels are closed. Two guides said we were their first customers in eighteen months. A visit to the grotto where



Closed shops line a deserted street in the Hebron souq

Jesus was born in the Church of the Nativity normally means a lineup of an hour. Now there is no one, except for a few vendors desperately trying to sell trinkets.

FEAR, DESPAIR, AND A FEELING OF ABANDONMENT

Fear, despair, and devastation are words I heard often. Fear of the present and future is widespread, compounded by a sense of abandonment. Whether it was in the West Bank, occupied East Jerusalem, or '48 Palestine, every Palestinian I spoke to, young or old, is afraid — they see that what is happening in Gaza is taking place in some form around them. Conditions have never been so bad, and day to day life is full of danger. “I am hurt, bleeding and hemorrhaging,” one Ramallah entrepreneur confessed, “because what is happening today and has happened every day for the last eighteen months is beyond comprehension.” Another Palestinian told us, “You can’t talk to Palestinians about hope, as our very existence is under threat.”

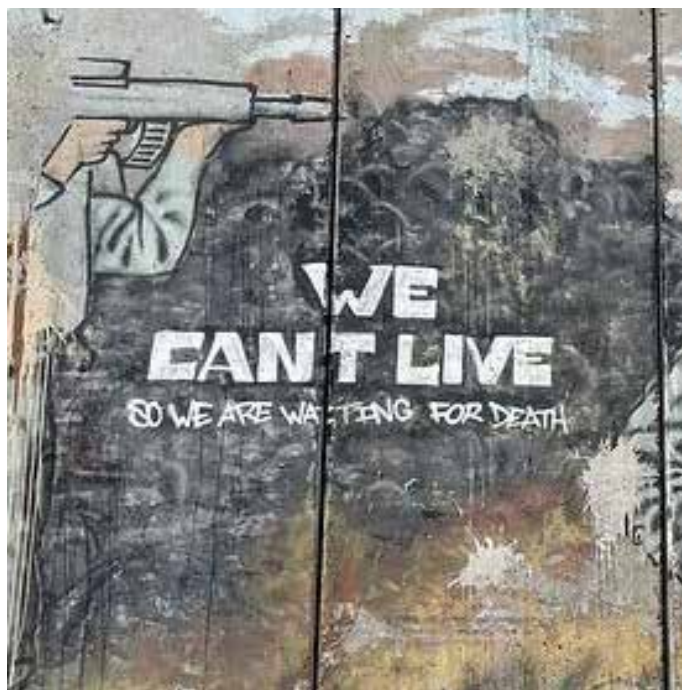
A student at Bethlehem University said, “We are beaten and murdered, and there is nothing we can do. We can’t process what we see every day. No one knows what is going to happen, and we don’t know when we will die.” She continued, “When Israelis tell you they are going to demolish your house, you can’t resist. They are armed and ready to shoot you. This is what our ‘normal’ life looks like. What can we do other than hope?”

An executive from Bethlehem observed, “There is much fear in Palestinian society.”

Not everyone shows it, but everyone is afraid. There is no accountability for the Israelis. If I throw a stone at an Israeli, I go to prison. If a settler shoots me, there is no punishment. Sometimes I feel like my wife’s relatives in Gaza who said, “We are only alive because we haven’t been targeted yet.”

A human rights lawyer in East Jerusalem confided that he is “very fearful,” scared, pessimistic, traumatized, and afraid for the next few years. He hopes he and his family will not be forced out of their home. “If things continue as they are, Israel could physically wipe the Palestinians out as they are doing in Gaza.”

In '48 Palestine, a Palestinian intellectual feels threatened by organized crime, which he believes is used by Israel to stifle any dissent. His life had been reduced by fear, as he knows that if he protests too loudly, criminals might beat or kill him. A Palestinian resident of Jaffa said that everyone in his community is desperately afraid. “We are not second-class citizens,” he said, “we are citizens who are seen as enemies.”



Detail of a mural on the Apartheid Wall at Aida refugee camp

Compounding this despair is an acute sense of abandonment. One colleague on the ICAHD trip wrote, “Palestinians are staggered by world governments that not only support Israel’s genocide, but who facilitate it.” Palestinians know — they’ve known for decades — that the United States and other western governments like Canada have betrayed and abandoned them. Human rights and the protection of international and humanitarian law are for others, but not for them. But even the most cynical have been shocked at the indifference of the West during the last eighteen months.

“What is going on represents an utter and total collapse of the international system of governance,” observed Sam Bahour. A member of the Jordan Valley Solidarity Coalition told us, “There is no support from the international community. Why even talk about human rights? It is a shame.” Rabbi Ascherman of Torat Tzedek concurred. “I have no faith in help from the international community. There is no one to turn to.” Daoud Nassar of the Tent of Nations is disappointed at the lack of support for Palestinian Christians from the churches in the West.

Students at Bethlehem University showed us an example of American hypocrisy. Pointing to a building on campus that had been hit by a missile, one said, “The United States helps finance the university. It built the missile, and then it donated funds to repair the damage.”

Manal Tamimi eloquently sums up the sentiments of many of the Palestinians that I encountered. In a 2024 news piece, she explained, “After October 7th, we lost faith in everything. We lost faith in international law, international humanitarian law . . . We lost faith in justice, freedom, and equality. I’m sorry to say this, but this is the truth: we are alone, and the message that we get from the world is that you can die, we don’t care . . .”⁵

ISRAEL’S REPRESSION OF ‘48 PALESTINIANS

A March 2025 poll further confirmed the extreme right-wing views of most Israeli Jews.⁶ Over 80 percent support expelling the people of Gaza, and 56 percent favour the same fate for ‘48 Palestinians, who are citizens of Israel. Among those under forty, the figure rises to 66 percent. Almost 50 percent agreed that Israeli forces should follow biblical precedents and slaughter the inhabitants of any city it conquers. Israeli peace activist Ayala Shalev confirms these findings, saying that “most Israelis believe that what Israel is doing in Gaza falls somewhere on a spectrum between ‘we have no choice, or they’ll kill us’ to ‘this is our chance to get rid of them and take their land.’”



Ruins of the demolished Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran in the Naqab

These attitudes reflect both continuing rage over the October 7 attacks and the enormous influence of radical, religious, messianic Zionism, which has been gaining ground for decades and now permeates every sphere of Israeli society.

⁵ <https://www.weavenews.org/stories/2024/3/4/manal-tamimi-on-life-and-resisting-alone-in-the-west-bank-after-october-7>

⁶ For more details, see Haaretz article “Yes to Transfer: 82% of Jewish Israelis Back Expelling Gazans” <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-05-28/ty-article-magazine/premium/yes-to-transfer-82-of-jewish-israelis-back-expelling-gazans/00000197-12a4-df22-a9d7-9ef6af930000>

Attorneys of the NGO Adalah in Haifa briefed our study group on how these beliefs have translated into increased repression of '48 Palestinians.⁷ Land policies are the clearest example of the apartheid nature of Israeli society, they said, and since 2022, the number of home demolitions in unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Naqab has increased dramatically.

The Israeli government has also targeted freedom of speech among '48 Palestinians, especially university students. Social media posts are scrutinized, and any prayers, Quranic verses, or expressions of Palestinian identity or solidarity for the people of Gaza are labelled as “support for terrorism.” Even one post can mean trouble. Hundreds of students have faced disciplinary proceedings that have resulted in suspension or expulsion. Many more have been arrested, and nearly two hundred have been indicted using counterterrorism laws. They remain in prison awaiting trial.

Conversations with '48 Palestinians I encountered — many of them successful professionals and business owners — confirmed what I had heard from Adalah. They are angry and spoke passionately and at length about the racism, hatred, and humiliation they endure daily and how the situation is getting worse. One told of a respected Palestinian doctor at a Jerusalem hospital who lost his job because he gave a candy to a Palestinian child who had been shot.

A prosperous business owner said, “When I wake up, half my thoughts are about the normal things I will do that day, and the other half are about the problems I am going to deal with because I live in a deeply racist society.” His children don't want to learn Hebrew as they know what is happening in Gaza. He dreams of leaving so that his family can just live a “normal” life. However, his wife favours staying, claiming that to do so would be an act of resistance.

A political activist in Nazareth told us that during the first demonstration after October 7, everybody was arrested including elected leaders. Today Israel is a “fascist dictatorship,” and life is a struggle against government, police, and patriarchal systems.

Adding to the outrage and anger is the frustration of not being able to do or say anything lest they lose their jobs or are arrested. '48 Palestinians feel increasingly unwelcome in their own country.



An apartment block in the illegal settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. Many of the settlements surrounding Jerusalem are modern satellite towns and cities. Ma'ale Adumim has a population of nearly 40,000



Caption. Israeli border police are a constant presence in the Muslim quarter of occupied East Jerusalem's old city.

⁷Adalah — the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (adalah.org)

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

CONVERSATIONS WITH JEFF HALPER

Jeff Halper led our study group in several discussions and took us on an “alternative” tour of occupied East Jerusalem and the illegal settlement of Ma’ale Adumim.⁸

Some takeaways:

- Israel is largely a segregated country. '48 Palestinians and Israeli Jews usually live in separate towns and neighbourhoods. Jews mostly refer to Palestinians as “Arabs” to negate any national identity.
- Since 1948, Israel has been “Judaizing” historic Palestine. The purpose of Zionism is Judaization — to take over an Arab region and society, transform it into a Jewish one, and develop a new national narrative.
- Judaization is particularly evident in East Jerusalem (EJ). After Israel conquered EJ in 1967, it expanded the municipal boundaries by 300 percent to include as much territory and as few Palestinians as possible. Israel then illegally annexed EJ, which was overwhelmingly Palestinian.
- Currently the Palestinian population of EJ is 40 percent. Israel wants it to drop to 28 percent. All municipal planning decisions are politicised and made with this in mind. The campaign, which is deliberately cloaked in bureaucracy and difficult to expose, takes many forms.

Some examples:

- The construction of illegal Jewish settlements, many of which are small satellite cities. These increase the Jewish population and are located to separate EJ from the West Bank and isolate Palestinian neighbourhoods. As a result, no contiguous Palestinian East Jerusalem exists that can serve as the capital of a future Palestinian state.
- The zoning of vacant land as “open green spaces” reserved for future use. They will eventually be rezoned for settlements.
- Substandard infrastructure and delivery of municipal services in Palestinian neighbourhoods.



Eyes painted on several Palestinian homes in the Silwan neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem. They are part of the Eye Witness Silwan international public art project that supports Silwan's longstanding fight against Israeli occupation and evictions. Facing the Old City, the eyes tell the Israelis, “We're watching, and we know what you are doing.”

⁸ Jeff Halper is an Israeli American anthropologist, author, lecturer, political activist and longtime defender of Palestinian human rights. He is a co-founder of ICAHD and The One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC) and has written several books, including *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine*.

- No expansion of Palestinian communities and the denial of building permits for Palestinians. Since 1967, a freeze on housing construction in Palestinian neighbourhoods has resulted in a shortfall of 30,000 homes. Applying for a building permit is complicated and costly, and as the rejection rate is 98 percent, few Palestinians apply. Instead, they build illegally and hope they won't be found out. When they are discovered — 20,000 outstanding demolition orders exist for EJ — the government issues a demolition order that never expires. Homes are demolished randomly, so that no one feels safe.
- Most — 70 percent — of EJ Palestinians — live below the poverty line, yet they pay more taxes due to stringent collection methods.

Overall, Israel aims to make life so difficult that EJ Palestinians — especially the middle class — will choose to leave.



A street in the Muslim quarter of occupied East Jerusalem's old city

A SETTLER COLONIAL FRAMEWORK

Halper stressed the importance of viewing the Israel / Palestine situation in the framework of settler-colonialism. Only then can we understand the logic and structure of Israel's policies and practices and where they are going.

This commitment includes using anti-colonial language. It is not a "conflict," it is colonization. Conflict implies symmetry — there are two "sides," and eventually the conflict will be resolved through compromises. "Both sides should end the fighting."

However, colonization is unilateral as the Palestinians are not a "side," they are the colonized. They never picked this fight. There is only one side — Israel — which declared, "We are taking over."

Another term is "resistance." Halper says we cannot compare the violence of Judaization, colonization, and genocide with the "violence" — resistance — of the colonized people. If we acknowledge that Hamas is a resistance organization, we recognize that they are a national group with a valid claim and are resisting something.

Israeli settler colonization reshapes the region in its own image with a new narrative in which indigenous Palestinians are irrelevant. Any resistance or claims of legitimacy on their part is criminalised. As a result, most Israelis have no understanding of Palestinian history and their claims to the land. Israel has normalized occupation in their eyes (and those of the international community). "We are peace-loving, we are normal," they say, and so when



Checkpoint 56 in Hebron, one of dozens of checkpoints in the city

Palestinians attack them, it is not resistance but criminal terrorism against a peaceful population.

Genocide of the indigenous people is a characteristic of settler colonialism. The mere existence of the Palestinians reminds Israelis of the uncomfortable truth, and they live in a state of permanent insecurity. Any aspirations of Palestinian nationalism must be broken.

HEBRON AND THE ATTA JABER FAMILY

Hisham Sharabati of the Hebron Defence Committee showed us around the old city of Hebron and the souq. Both are nearly deserted with most of the shops shuttered. Tourism and visits by solidarity groups stopped after October 7, and Israeli road closures make it difficult for nearby villagers to shop in the city. The result has been economic devastation. As well, extremist settlers who live in the city are increasingly acting with impunity, protected by the soldiers. It was sobering few hours.

We enjoyed lunch in the nearby Bakka Valley as the guests of Atta and Rudina Jaber and their family. Like Hisham, Atta is a long-time human rights defender in the Hebron region. His family has lived there for over 600 years, and prior to 1967 they owned a farm of forty hectares. For the past thirty years, soldiers and settlers from the nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba have harassed and terrorized Atta and his family hoping that they will leave. All



Human rights defender Atta Jaber

but six hectares of his land has been confiscated by Israeli forces — this despite Atta having a title deed dating from the Ottoman era. Soldiers have twice demolished their home (twice rebuilt by ICAHD) and destroyed their crops and wells. Atta has been imprisoned several times, and family members have endured countless threats and beatings.

Still, as an ICAHD report stated, the Jaber family “struggles on, farming their tiny bit of land, trying to eke out a bare living, confronting the settlers, courageously challenging the police and army, and speaking out; Atta has even testified before the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.” They are steadfast in their determination to remain on their land.

I left feeling honoured to have shared a meal with Atta and his family.

AIDA REFUGEE CAMP

During our time in Bethlehem, we visited the neighbouring Aida refugee camp where we met Anas Abu Srour, a director of the Aida Youth Centre. He and a colleague explained that the camp was founded in 1950 for Nakba refugees from Jerusalem and Hebron. Over 7,000 refugees live



The Apartheid Wall as seen from the rooftop of Aida Youth Centre

in .07 square kilometres, one third of them children under eighteen. The camp is partially surrounded by the Apartheid Wall, seven military towers, and an Israeli army base. Soldiers regularly enter the camp, often on nighttime training exercises. At one point Aida was the most heavily teargassed place on earth. More recently, the use of live ammunition is becoming common.



Outdoor mural in Aida refugee camp

The Aida Youth Centre is a community hub and offers multiple programs and services. These include academic tutors and social workers to help children deal with the stress and trauma they experience daily. The Football Academy is hugely popular as are the music classes and workshops for the visual and performing arts.

Anas recounted his experience of being imprisoned for nearly a year without charges. One evening he was driving home from an English class in Ramallah when he was detained at a checkpoint and disappeared into an Israeli prison. For months he was beaten and tortured, but somehow he summoned the will to survive.

The residents of Aida are living in great fear as they see what has happened to the camps in Jenin, Tulkarm, and even neighbouring Dheisheh. Even so, they are determined not to be defeated. “We will not stop our lives,” said Anas.

A DAY IN JAFFA AND TEL AVIV

Our ICAHD group spent a day in Jaffa / Tel Aviv. We first met with Haggai Matar, the executive director of +972 Magazine, an independent, online, nonprofit magazine run by leftwing Palestinian and Israeli journalists. They provide in-depth reporting, analysis, and opinions that highlights “people and communities working to oppose occupation and apartheid.”

Some takeaways from our conversation.

- 972 Magazine was formed in 2010 to combat the narrative of mainstream propaganda. They have several million readers, mostly outside Israel. Their most successful stories are those that go global, such as their April 2024 piece on how AI directs Israel’s bombing of Gaza.⁹
- The Israeli political left has been decimated by the October 7 attacks. Many of its members “sobered up” and concluded that they “got it wrong.”
- The pro-hostage movement is becoming the actual antiwar movement.
- Mainstream Israeli media is indescribably bad and mirrors the apartheid nature of Israel. It does not belong to all Israel’s citizens, only Jewish Israelis. The narrative it promotes is that this is “our” land with no mention of the Occupation or Palestinians. It is constant propaganda, and the people believe it.

⁹ <https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/>

- The Israeli media only employs a few Palestinian journalists, and '48 Palestinians are vastly underrepresented in news coverage. Between 2 and 3 percent of people interviewed are Palestinian for stories mainly related to crime.
- Mainstream media coverage since October 7 IS October 7. There is no mention of the genocide in Gaza or the repression in the West Bank. The media perpetrates the notions of victimhood and that Israel is fighting an existential war. When Israel broke the Gaza ceasefire in March, the media was celebratory and boasted of the huge number of Palestinian fatalities. For years this propagandistic approach has been evident in all coverage of Gaza.

That afternoon, Abed Abu Shehadeh took us on a walking tour of Jaffa. Abed is a political activist, journalist, and community organizer, and his family has deep roots in Jaffa. He explained the history of the city — how before 1948 it had been the largest city in Palestine, a cultural and commercial hub, and affectionately known as the “Bride of The Sea.”

Even though Jaffa was designated as part of the future Palestinian state and posed no threat, Zionist forces attacked it in early May 1948 — before the British left — and ethnically cleansed the city. Of an original population of 120,000, only 4,000 Palestinians remained. They were herded into the al-Ajami neighbourhood which was sealed off and became a ghetto. Just as in the rest of Palestine, Israel seized all the Palestinian homes, businesses, and bank accounts in what has been described as the “largest armed robbery of the twentieth century.”

Today, Abed and the Palestinian residents of Jaffa struggle to maintain their identity in the face of the systemic discrimination that has sharply increased since October 7. They live in deep-seated fear of what the future holds.

A DAY IN THE NAQAB

Our ICAHD group visited the Naqab, the desert and semi-desert region in the south of Israel, to learn about Israel’s increased dispossession of the indigenous Bedouin.

On our way we stopped at British Park, a regional park that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) built in the 1950s. British donors funded the park, hence its name.

The park lies on the lands of seven Palestinian villages that Israel ethnically cleansed in 1948, and today it is covered by forests of non-indigenous pine trees that the JNF planted partly to conceal the ruins of the villages.

The park is a perfect example of Israeli memoricide — the state’s deliberate erasure and destruction of anything Palestinian that disrupts the Israeli national narrative. The signage doesn’t mention the villages or centuries of non-Jewish presence. However, in 2021, a wildfire destroyed much of the forest revealing terraces that farmers had built long ago to cultivate the hillsides.



The unrecognized Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran in 2016. Courtesy Adalah



The ruins of Umm al-Hiran, April 2025

Continuing, we met Khalil Alamour, a Palestinian Bedouin lawyer, retired teacher, and community leader. He is a member of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality and has represented the Bedouins at the U.N. and the E.U. He is also a former field researcher for Adalah and regularly briefs international delegations.

Khalil took us to the recently demolished Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran, about eight kilometres northeast of Hura, a recognized Bedouin city. We stood on a rise overlooking the ruins while Khalil recounted the history.

The Bedouin are Palestinians who are indigenous to the Naqab. Historically they have maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle based on herding and agriculture, but during the last 150 years, they became more settled. In 1948, they numbered about 90,000.

During the Nakba, Israel expelled most of the Bedouin to the West Bank, Jordan, and the Sinai. Even though the remaining 11,000 became Israeli citizens, they were forced off their land, concentrated in the northeast Naqab, and placed under harsh military law. Israel's long-term goal was to seize as much of their land as possible. They have largely succeeded as today the Bedouin, who number 300,000, make up 30 percent of the local population but own only 3 percent of the land.

Israel forcibly relocated the Abu Al Qi'an tribe twice during the early 1950s before permitting them to settle on the site of Umm al-Hiran. For the next forty-five years, tribe members established a prosperous community that grew to 2,000.

Meanwhile Israel created seven "recognized" Bedouin townships to act as "reserves" and contain and urbanize the Bedouin. These towns lacked social services and infrastructure and soon became overcrowded and crime-ridden with the highest rates of unemployment and poverty in Israel. All other Bedouin communities, including Umm al-Hiran, were considered "unrecognized" and refused basic government services such as running water, electricity, paved roads, health clinics, and educational facilities.

In 2001, Israel intensified its campaign to dismantle the dozens of unrecognized villages and force the inhabitants into recognized towns. A lengthy legal process began to evict the residents of Umm a-Hiran, move them to Hura, and demolish the village. The state claimed that the villagers were illegally squatting on state land. This although the state had located them there decades earlier. The land was designated for a new Jewish settlement.

The residents of Umm al-Hiran resisted, saying that they were not city-dwellers, and the town of Hura protested that it was already overcrowded. The legal battle ended in 2015 when the courts

ruled in favour of the government. Soldiers demolished most of Umm al-Hiran in 2017 and then destroyed a few more homes each year until November 2024 when the last building, the mosque, was demolished. Work has already begun on the Jewish settlement of Dror.

While several other unrecognized villages were also destroyed, Umm al-Hiran was intended as an example for the Bedouin. As a former resident observed, “The most determined, legitimate, and righteous struggle that lasted twenty-five years was finally destroyed by force. Now the destruction of any community has become possible.” This has proven true. In the past few years, demolitions of Bedouin homes have increased by 400 percent.

Adalah represented the residents of Umm al-Hiran during their legal struggle. It viewed the court’s verdict as “an act of extreme racism, embodying Israel’s colonialist land policies with the backing of the entire Israeli court system.”

Writing in +972 Magazine, Orly Noy observed that the story of Umm al-Hiran exposes the Zionist “perception of Palestinians’ presence as temporary.”

Palestinians are seen as human dust that can be simply swept away, or as chess pieces that can be moved from one square to another in accordance with Israel’s never-ending project of demographic engineering between the river and the sea. It is an essential part of the dehumanization of those whose lands the state has its eyes on: the deep conviction that these people have no roots, and therefore moving them from place to place cannot possibly be considered displacement.¹⁰

Khalil voiced similar views. “Israel does not care about the future of the Bedouin or their prosperity or development. They just want to take their land and concentrate them in as small a space as possible... They do anything they want... In Israel, democracy and freedom are relatively limited for the Arabs. Israel says it is a democratic Jewish state, the only democracy in the Middle East. Bedouins say, ‘It is democratic for the Jews, and Jewish for the Bedouins.’”

THE MUKMAS HERDING COMMUNITY

Our study group visited a small Palestinian herding community near the village of Mukmas in Area C northeast of Jerusalem. Since October 7, it has come under increasing attack by Israeli settlers.

At the community we met Rabbi Arik Ascherman, who co-founded ICAHD. A former director of Rabbis for Human Rights, Ascherman heads Torat Tzedek (Torah of Justice). For decades he has defended Palestinian human rights and provided a “protective presence” for vulnerable Palestinian communities.

When we arrived, Rabbi Ascherman was taking off his body armour. An hour earlier, settlers had attacked the community, and he had stood between them and the herders.

Ascherman provided some context and explained the role he and other like-minded Israelis play in helping Palestinians resist settler



Rabbi Arik Ascherman at the Mukmas herding community. Note the body armour at his feet

¹⁰ <https://www.972mag.com/umm-al-hiran-destruction-zionist-demography/>



The herding community near Mukmas

terrorism.

The 2022 election and the October 7 attacks were milestones. Since then, the settlers, with the support of the military and government, have exploited mainstream Israeli rage and implemented plans to expel Palestinian farmers and herders from Areas B and C and seize their land.

The settlers increasingly use pastoral or shepherding outposts to accomplish these goals. Unlike a regular settlement, a shepherding outpost typically consists of a caravan, some tents, a farming shed, and some livestock. They are easy to establish, and in recent years their numbers have exploded.

The outpost settlers are violent, religious fanatics who are committed to expelling the herders. They typically position an outpost near a Palestinian herding or farming community — often on Palestinian land — and immediately start grazing their sheep. Sometimes they mix their sheep with those of the herders and accuse the herders of stealing them.

The settlers quickly escalate with threats, nighttime raids and theft of livestock, all designed to terrorize the herders into fleeing. In many cases it has worked — since October 7, they have driven over forty Palestinian herding communities from their grazing lands.

Rabbi Ascherman and other activists help the herders resist by providing a non-violent protective presence.

During a confrontation, they stand between the settlers and the herders. As they are Jewish, the settlers hesitate to attack them. He often sleeps in the community. Stopping the settlers is a Sisyphean task, he says.

Torat Tzedek also offers limited legal and emergency aid. Appeals to the courts for justice have only had limited success as they are biased and fail to uphold international law and the human rights of Palestinians. Nevertheless, Ascherman sees them as the last best hope.

M., a leader of the herding community, also spoke with us. He thanked us for coming and trying to understand what is happening. “It was relatively quiet before October 7,” he explained, but “October 7 brought hell upon us. Now the violence is never-ending along with threats to our sheep, which are our livelihood.” There is no outside work and no place to graze their sheep, and buying feed is expensive. As a result, they have amassed huge debt.



Members of the herding community near Mukmas



The small community hall that ICAHD built for the JVSC

Everything conspires against us. What can we do? We need your help. We're just trying to live, but we are barely surviving. We can't defend ourselves. They say this is a country of the rule of law, but we don't see it. The settlers come right up to our homes. If I go within two kilometres of a settlement, I would be shot. What kind of a world is this when homes are attacked at night?

The theft of sheep has been devastating, M. explained. Each sheep is worth between C\$600 and C\$800. "I could talk for three days. There is a war here no less than there is the war in Gaza. We are hemmed in and can't graze our sheep or sell our milk products. It is a war of survival."

Rabbi Ascherman described the situation as awful, and that the future is "going to get darker and worse. I wish I could give you a more optimistic picture. I can only hope that if we hold on and batten down the hatches and protect what we protect, that 'this too shall pass' at some point." He acknowledges that his efforts and those of fellow activists are a "drop in the bucket, but it is what we can do."

Jewish teachings, tradition, and history have convinced Ascherman that he cannot let oppressed people be alone. He has told the herders that he cannot promise results, "but we will try like hell. I CAN promise you that you will not be alone."

JORDAN VALLEY SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

Our ICAHD group met with members of the Jordan Valley Solidarity Campaign (JVSC) in the farming community of Bardala in the northern Jordan Valley.¹¹

The Jordan Valley, 95 percent of which is in Area C, makes up about 30 percent of the West Bank. Since 1967, Israel has been attempting to annex it and expel the 320,000 Palestinian inhabitants. The strategy involves establishing settlements — there are now thirty-nine and 10,000 settlers — designating swathes of land as nature reserves or closed military zones and

¹¹ <https://jordanvalleysolidarity.org/>

making life impossible for the Palestinians. Making life impossible includes house demolitions, movement restrictions, curfews, arbitrary arrest and detention, and land confiscations as well as denial of access to water, electricity, health and education. Israel's campaign has largely succeeded as today only 56,000 Palestinians remain.

The JVSC is a network of community groups, farm co-operatives, workers unions, and international supporters that was created in 2003 to protect and defend Palestinians. Since then, it has helped build and rebuild homes, schools, and roads; lay water pipes; and raise awareness of the Israeli oppression. International volunteers contribute by providing an invaluable protective presence.



JVSC members welcomed us in their small community centre, grateful that we wanted to learn about their situation. Like so many other Palestinians, they feel abandoned by western governments and international law. “We are not afraid of the occupation,” one said, “but there is no support from the international community. Why even talk about human rights? It’s a shame.” There is no one to protect them.

Over lunch, they explained that their situation is comparable to Masafer Yatta. Since October 7 it continues to deteriorate. The settlers seem to have taken over the government, and they order the soldiers around. A few months earlier, armed settlers set up an illegal shepherd outpost on village land and began grazing their cattle and attacking farms. They also prevent farmers from reaching their lands and regularly sabotage agricultural waterworks.

Beatings and nighttime attacks are common. “The threat to farmers is 24/7,” one member said, “and we cannot enjoy sleep.” Another explained that when he drives between villages, he must have a strategy — if settlers catch him, they will beat him. The soldiers are just as violent, and there have been several shootings at the nearby Hamra checkpoint.

The international volunteers offer an effective, nonviolent protective presence. They often sleep overnight at different farms in case the settlers attack. The settlers do not see the Palestinians as human, but their attitudes soften when they encounter a westerner.

Despite the many challenges, the JVSC communities are determined to remain steadfast on their land and to regain the land and resources stolen from them.

Two weeks after our visit, settlers attacked Bardala in a nighttime raid. After they vandalized water pipelines, they shot and wounded seven villagers, two critically. Then they burned two homes and outbuildings while soldiers and police stood by and did nothing.

SAM BAHOUR AND THE PALESTINIAN ECONOMY

Sam Bahour, a Ramallah-based Palestinian American entrepreneur and activist, met with our ICAHD study group.¹² His presentation analysed Israel's highly profitable stranglehold on the West Bank economy.

¹² Sam Bahour is a frequent commentator on Palestine / Israel affairs and has been widely published. He is co-editor of *HOMELAND: Oral History of Palestine and Palestinians* (Olive Branch Press, 1993). He tweets at @SamBahour, and blogs at epalestine.ps. An engaging profile can be found at <https://lithub.com/the-tallest-man-in-ramallah/>



A nearly deserted café in the souq of Hebron

Some takeaways.

- Israel does not see a Green Line or a Palestinian economy. The West Bank is simply a resource for their economy.
- The Palestinian GDP is 3.5 percent of Israel's. The stark economic inequalities are in themselves a source of conflict.
- The West Bank imports 70 percent of its goods, 50 percent of which come from Israel. Israel makes it difficult to import from overseas, but easy to import from Israel.
- Palestine exports 20 percent of its economy, of which 88 percent goes to Israel, partly to be consumed and partly to be relabelled and exported as "made in Israel." The biggest export sector is stone and marble for tiles. Israeli-owned quarries in the West Bank literally take the land and complete the crafting in Israel.
- Israel has located many of its "dirty" industries in the West Bank. These include paint factories in Tulkarm and plastic bag manufacturing in Hebron.
- Israel controls the West Bank land, water, transportation, and labour. The West Bank depends on Israel for its energy.
- The Palestinian banking system is world class, but western institutions often discriminate against it. Due to Israeli pressure, PayPal won't accept Palestinian accounts.
- Most Palestinians would boycott Israeli products, but the structure of the economy prevents them. Water is an example. Israeli settlements are situated over huge aquifers. Israel extracts the water and sells it to the settlers at discounted rates and then to Palestinians at a 400 percent markup.
- Palestinians develop their own industries when possible. Thirty years ago, dairy products came from Israel. Now only Palestinian brands are for sale.
- Some pockets of apparent prosperity in the West Bank are a result of the informal or "black" economy, which is bigger than the actual economy. This is largely due to corruption, much of which originates in Israel. International aid is another cause.

- The West Bank economy is hampered by several layers of laws. Numerous Ottoman-era property laws are still on the books. Many of the draconian



A view from Nabi Saleh of the illegal settlement of Halamish, which has stolen much of their land

Emergency Regulations from the British Mandate remain in effect along with laws from the eighteen years of Jordanian rule. The Oslo Accords resulted in Palestinian laws. International and humanitarian law plays a part — the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Hague Convention, over 700 U.N. General Assembly resolutions, more than 100 Security Council resolutions, and others. However, Israeli military law, first introduced in 1967, trumps everything. Thousands of Israeli edicts regulate every area of life.

- The Occupation has been profitable for Israel. Before October 7, it generated a \$5 billion profit for the Israeli economy.

NABI SALEH

For a few hours I was a guest of Bilal and Manal Tamimi in the village of Nabi Saleh, about twenty kilometres northwest of Ramallah. The village, which has a population of about 600, lies in Area B, but much of its agricultural land is in Area C. About twenty years ago, settlers from the neighbouring illegal settlement of Halamish began stealing the villagers' land, and in 2009 they took over the village's spring. The following year, villagers started weekly non-violent demonstrations that gained worldwide attention. The protests lasted until 2016. By then, Israeli soldiers had killed two villagers and wounded over 350.¹³ Sporadic demonstrations continued until the soldiers' increasing use of deadly force made them too dangerous. Today, soldiers raid the village two or three times a week.

Bilal and Manal played a pivotal role in organizing and leading the weekly demonstrations, and Bilal became the village's unofficial videographer, documenting the resistance.¹⁴ Both have been arrested many times, and Manal has been imprisoned. Nowadays the village is quiet, with most people just hanging on. Manal said that people are afraid and conscious that Gaza could happen in the West Bank. Nevertheless, she and Bilal do what they can to remain steadfast. Bilal graciously gave me a tour of the village, pointing out the spring and where the demonstrations took place.



Spent tear gas cannisters on display in the garden of the Tamimi home in Nabi Saleh

¹³ Overall, Israeli forces killed ten Palestinians in and around Nabi Saleh.

¹⁴ His Youtube channel "Bilal Tamimi" has almost 300 video clips archived.



An outdoor wall mural in downtown Ramallah

LOOKING FORWARD

Almost everyone I spoke to about the future agreed that “things are very grim,” and “everything is against the Palestinians now.” An entrepreneur observed, “You can’t talk about hope until you can see reality, and the present reality is dark.” Other comments included, “Palestinians are stuck in a very unfortunate phase,” “The short-term future is bleak,” and “it is going to get worse before it gets better.” A left-wing Israeli activist observed, “Israel claims there never was a Nakba, but now they say they’ll do it again.”

We also heard that Palestinians “suffer from a lack of vision” and are waiting for international leadership to get involved. One activist said, “Palestinians are divided with no strong leadership — they are as sheep without a shepherd.” An entrepreneur explained that this is largely because Israel has always worked hard to destroy cohesive Palestinian leadership and political organizations and initiatives. This has included assassinating, imprisoning, or exiling potential leaders.

As for existing Palestinian organizations, I was told that Hamas doesn’t represent all Palestinians anymore than Likud represents all Israelis. Most Palestinians I spoke with had little or no respect for the PLO or the PA. “There is no more PLO and so there is no more Palestinian national project.” The PA is viewed as a collaborationist regime — “Don’t trust Fatah!” some university students warned me. Others describe the PA as a group of bureaucrats that relies entirely on Israel and western aid and is limited to providing security and operating schools and hospitals. It is not in charge of anything, and despite the trappings of statehood, an independent Palestinian state is a mirage.

One activist described the PA under Abbas as a police state and said that the leadership must be replaced. He insisted that there are leaders willing to step forward. Before Abbas cancelled the 2021 elections, 1,400 individuals had signed up as candidates.

Almost no one believed that Israel will fall apart. A left-wing Israeli Jewish activist observed that Israel has a first world economy, superpower backing, and a powerful army. However, no

¹⁵ A leftwing Israeli journalist told me that almost all his likeminded friends had left the country.

Israeli leader is offering real statesmanship, and as there is no appetite for change, Israel could remain an apartheid society for the foreseeable future. “It is a bleakness that we are stuck with.”¹⁵

Several Palestinians and Israeli Jews I spoke with do not see Israel dissolving so much as transforming into a society dominated by a far-right extremist, religious, messianic Zionist worldview. Jeff Halper observed, “The government is a mess, and the country is being transformed into the state of Judea.” According to a Palestinian academic, “the religious Israelis want transformation, and they are stronger than the secular population.” The new religious leaders say they should have finished the job in 1948 — a more complete Nakba.

Many believe that the next year will be crucial, and some offered scenarios. One Palestinian believes that Israel wants to abolish the national Palestinian leadership — the PA — and deal directly with municipal leaders in the West Bank. A consensus exists that Israel wants to annex portions of Area C — possibly all of it — and maybe even Area B. Palestinians would then be confined to Area A, leaving no room for expansion. Land would become too expensive for young people, who would leave. The remaining Palestinians would remain stateless.

Jeff Halper thinks that there must be a political resolution led by Palestinians. Many don't want to deal with it, he says, but if they don't, others such as Trump and the Saudis will.

Halper believes that the near-term threat is normalization. “We are within months of normalization.” Settler colonialism always ends with a not-necessarily-dramatic normalization, he said. However, pacification comes before normalization so that resistance is impossible. Israel is currently pacifying Gaza and the West Bank. Normalization includes the Abraham Accords, which excluded the Palestinians. Once the Saudis sign, normalization is imposed, and the Palestinians won't hold any cards. “It will be over.”

ONE OR TWO STATES

Discussions about a one-state or two-state future generated a variety of perspectives. A consensus exists that Israel will oppose any solution that grants Palestinians significant self-determination.

Since October 7, Israelis don't trust Palestinians, and they view a two-state solution as supporting Hamas. Among Palestinians, the two-state

solution enjoys limited support — chiefly among the followers of the PA and the PLO and people over forty. Some fear that abandoning the two-state initiative could result in a loss of international



An outdoor mural in Ramallah

¹⁵ Abdelfattah is a '48 Palestinian political writer and coordinator of the One Democratic State Campaign. He co-founded the political party Balad.

support and funding. However, Palestinians looking to decolonize see it as a colonial concept.

Halper says a two-state solution would result in several Palestinian bantustans — one in the northern West Bank, one around Ramallah, one in the south, and possibly one in Gaza. They will be non-viable and lack sovereignty.

Awad Abdelfattah pointed out that Israel has a clear vision for a one-state solution — a Jewish state.¹⁶ The charter of the Likud Party states this. Palestinians, he said, need to counter with an alternate vision, a democratic state for all its citizens.

Almost all Palestinians prefer a single democratic state for everyone who lives between the river and the sea — a nation that would guarantee equality, self-determination, and protection for all its citizens. Before 1988, that had been the stated Palestinian goal. A two-state solution was first formally proposed in 1988 as a pragmatic choice — not the ideal, but what Palestinians thought they could get.

A few people emphasized that productive discussions about a single state must affirm that Israeli Jews have a right to be there and to live in safety. A Palestinian lawyer explained that Israeli fear means continual domination. “They are motivated by their fear, and the only way they know how to deal with it is continual domination. We have to negotiate safety for Jews. The only way forward is by negotiations.”

For many Palestinians, recognizing Israeli Jews as a people is difficult. However, a Palestinian activist pointed out that many are second and third generation and are “facts on the ground” that cannot be ignored. Halper agrees. To ignore them or deny them fundamental rights would be “a recipe for civil war. Israeli Jews are here, and they are not going anywhere. Any lasting settlement must recognize this ‘colonial legacy.’”

Abdelfattah reminds himself that Jews too are victims, and that, echoing the thoughts of longtime political prisoner Nael Barghouti, Palestinians must liberate them from Zionism. Upon his recent release, Barghouti affirmed that Palestinians have two goals, “not only the freedom of Palestine, but also the liberation of Jews themselves from the Zionist arrogance, hatred, and racism that it has instilled in them.”

A requisite for a democratic state is decolonization. Halper says that a future democratic state must avoid the mistake that South Africa made and dismantle the colonial structures of domination and control.

Abdelfattah understands that Israel will oppose a single democratic state, as it means the cancellation of Israel. Equality and coexistence negate the core tenets of Zionism. He also admits that the prospects for a single state have dimmed since October 7. He still believes in it but confesses to occasional doubts. “How can we live with Israeli Jews?” Maybe, he says, a one state solution is five to forty years away.

Mahmoud Muna of the Educational Bookstore in East Jerusalem said that the younger Palestinians in the city can't envisage a separate Palestinian state as their daily lives are becoming increasingly intertwined with West Jerusalem and Israel. For example, to avoid the restrictions of movement in the West Bank, more students are choosing to study at Israeli universities. It looks like integration, Mahmoud said, but it isn't. If this trend continues, Palestinian East Jerusalem will gradually be unequally incorporated into Israel society in a de facto one state that lacks cohesion.

ACTIVE EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE

Despite Israel's increasingly violent, oppressive rule in the West Bank and the resulting widespread fear and despondency, I encountered many Palestinians who are resisting as best they can. In most cases, just existing — hanging on and refusing to give up — is the only choice, but given that displacement is the goal of Israelis, it is meaningful. Some talked of “active existence” — of remaining steadfast on their land. An ICAHD writer described what I sensed. “These are people who are scared, wounded, traumatized, sad, impoverished, and oppressed, but they are *sumud*, steadfast.” Abdelfattah recently wrote that “there might be no people on earth with the same astonishing capacity for endurance as the Palestinian people. Still, many Palestinians would implore us not to perceive them as heroes but rather as ordinary human beings left with no refuge except faith and steadfastness.”

The herding community near Mukmas is struggling to resist with the help of Jewish people of conscience. In Bardala, international volunteers are helping the farmers resist the settlers and soldiers. In the Naqab, we saw and heard of demolished villages, but we also visited the unrecognized village of Alsra, which won a long court battle forbidding its demolition. Although it remains unrecognized and lacks municipal services, villagers have developed workarounds and live a relatively peaceful life. One family even has a vacation rental. Khalil Alamour also told us that in recent years the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev has successfully pressured the government to recognize ten more villages.

Even though the international system of governance is in tatters, both Palestinian and Israeli activists see a glimmer of hope in recent international legal rulings and initiatives from the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Previously, these came mostly from the U.N., but now the courts are involved. A legal framework is being established, and a body of evidence is growing that could work in the Palestinians' favour.

A Palestinian human rights lawyer drew attention to Nicaragua's proceedings against Germany in the ICJ. In March 2024, Nicaragua charged that Germany was, among other things, breaching its obligations under the Genocide Convention and Fourth Geneva Convention by supplying arms to Israel. This concept of third-party responsibility — the responsibility of other countries and their connection with Israel's war crimes — bears watching. These developing justice mechanisms are creating what he called “a greenhouse for planting something good.”

Meanwhile, as one of my ICAHD colleagues wrote, “With each new day granted them, they [Palestinians] embrace life and rejoice in every good thing that comes their way.”



Signpost for Alsra, an unrecognized Bedouin village in the Naqab that has successfully avoided demolition

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Most of the Palestinians and left-wing Israeli Jewish people whom I met thanked us for caring enough to come and see what is happening. Our presence alleviated their weariness and gave them hope and a sense that they are not forgotten. One Palestinian business owner said that we “put blood back in his veins.”

Almost everyone voiced their appreciation of the worldwide support from civil society and emphasized that this is their only hope for change. “We need external help,” an activist said. A Palestinian lawyer concurred. “Pressure must come from the outside. Palestinians alone cannot do it. We cannot liberate ourselves without outside support. We will be erased.” Manal Tamimi is adamant that no meaningful change will take place until western governments change their relationship with Israel.

Rabbi Ascherman said that any prospect for change depends on the international community “waking up and pressuring Israel.” Jeff Halper emphasized that “international civil society is the only ally of the Palestinians. The current Israeli apartheid society is unsustainable, and so we must do everything we can to make it collapse.” An Israeli Jewish activist made the comparison to apartheid South Africa, which ended due to international opposition. “We have to educate people,” he said, “so that they are empowered to intervene.”

Everyone encouraged us to continue our solidarity efforts. Things are dire, but we shouldn’t abandon hope. Anas Abu Srouf said, “We need people like you to be eyewitnesses to people in the world.” Rabbi Ascherman told us to “go home and pump some courage into your governments.” Members of the JVSC encouraged us to speak out. “We resist and do our best,” one said, “but go and share the bad, not the beauty. Occupation makes us dwell on the bad.” Other activists told us to work on our governments and emphasize that Israel is not above international law — “Annoy your MPs.”

A Palestinian lawyer told me to ask my government, “Canada, what are you doing to prevent war crimes?” He also advised that if a government has a choice between recognizing Palestine as a state or imposing sanctions, it should choose the latter. Recognition is symbolic and has no practical meaning, but sanctions will have an effect. “If Israel is not enjoying normal relations with countries, then it will change.”

Sam Bahour said that demonstrations are important, but we need to identify and invest in sustainable ventures. Some possibilities.



A mural at Bethlehem University "The Palestinian woman: Resilience and Hope"

¹⁷ Another executive mentioned that BDS can be very restrictive.

- Support the Boycott Divest Sanctions movement (BDS). It is a tactic — a tool — not a strategy. It has its own rules, but we can also do each of B-D-S on its own¹⁷
- Buy Palestinian products
- Ask our public library to carry Palestine-themed books
- Look for mainstream possibilities and cultural initiatives that humanize Palestinians, such as twinning communities.
- Try to work and organize in community — within the sectors in your personal and professional circles, such as trade unions

Bahour emphasized that we must question our own political systems and hold our governments accountable. “Speak out in the loudest voices in professional circles and in the face of authority. Awareness of Palestinian rights is higher than ever before, and it is no longer acceptable not to have a position on Palestine.”

Translating solidarity into policy is the hard part, but we must chip away and avoid personalizing the issues. Trump and Netanyahu are only in power because of the support their views enjoy within their societies. “Democracy is a verb,” and we must take part every day, not just during elections.

CONCLUSION

I departed Palestine acutely aware of how Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians has drastically increased since October 7. All restraints have been removed, and soldiers and settlers are acting with impunity, intent on terrorizing Palestinians and confiscating as much of their land as possible. Things are bad and likely to get worse. As a result, fear and despair are widespread.

I also clearly understood that all of this is happening only because western governments allow it. If they confronted Israel with sanctions and supported the ICC and ICJ rulings and findings, Israel would have to relent. Instead, their continued, calculated silence and deliberate abandonment of international and humanitarian law makes them complicit in the genocide in Gaza and the oppression in the West Bank. This is just as much their war on the people of Palestine as it is Israel’s.

Everything I heard and experienced impressed on me the importance of people of conscience around the world continuing to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people. We must do all we can to raise awareness and pressure our governments to change and act. We cannot lose hope.

As Rabbi Ascherman put it, we cannot guarantee results, but we can resolve to “try like hell,” and promise the Palestinian people that “you will not be alone.”

This is our task.

Philip Sherwood, June 2025



An outdoor mural in Ramallah

SIGNIFICANT PLACES I VISITED

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

East Jerusalem (Old City and Silwan, Abu Dis, Jabal Mukaber neighbourhoods)

Palestinian Museum, Bir Zeit <https://palmuseum.org/en>

Bethlehem

(Banksy) Walled Off Hotel, Bethlehem <https://walledoffhotel.com/index.html>

Aida Refugee Camp — Aida Youth Centre <https://aidacenter.org/>

Bethlehem University <https://www.bethlehem.edu/>

Hebron

Battir

Beit Sahour

Nabi Saleh

Ramallah

Yasser Arafat Museum, Ramallah <https://yam.ps/index-en.html>

Ma'ale Adumim (settlement)

Jericho

Bardala

Mukmas herding community

ISRAEL / 48 PALESTINE

British Park <https://www.plands.org/en/articles-speeches/articles/2022/britannia-park-burial-and-treachery>
West Jerusalem

Naqab — town of Hura, village of Alsra, and demolished villages of Umm Al-Hiran and Wadi Al-Khalil

Jaffa / Tel Aviv

Haifa

Nazareth and the Galilee

Liwan Cultural Café, Nazareth <https://www.facebook.com/liwannazareth/>

Umm al Fahm

SIGNIFICANT MEETINGS

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Al Haq — Palestinian human rights organization — Ramallah <https://www.alhaq.org/>

Adameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association — Ramallah <https://www.addameer.org/>

Dr. Mazin Qumsiyeh, Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability <https://www.palestinature.org/>

Human rights defenders Hashem Shirabati, Atta and Rudina Jaber in Hebron <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-aEyTv6Jro> <https://icahd.org/2024/11/04/sumud-my-west-bank-farm/>

Daoud Nassar, Tent of Nations <https://tentofnations.com/>

Sam Bahour, Palestinian American entrepreneur, Ramallah <https://epalestine.ps/sambahour/>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkeJ_cTyAf8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5vDxJLuKZM>

Ahmed and Mahmoud Muna, Educational Bookstore, East Jerusalem <https://educationalbookshop.com/>

Rabbi Arik Ascherman and M., Palestinian herding community, Mukmas <https://www.facebook.com/arik.ascherman/> <https://www.torat-tzedek.org/>

Jordan Valley Solidarity Campaign, Bardala, Jordan Valley <https://jordanvalleysolidarity.org/>

Manal and Bilal Tamimi, Nabi Saleh <https://mikopeledpodcast.podbean.com/e/manal-tamimi-nabi-saleh/>
<https://vimeo.com/153905347>

Students of al Quds University

Airbnb host, Ramallah

M., tourism industry expert, Bethlehem

Munir Neseibah, human rights lawyer and academic

S, tour guide

Anas Abu Srour, Director, Aida Youth Centre <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/10/12/israels-mass-detention-of-palestinians-is-aimed-to-break-our-spirit>

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Jeff Halper. Co-founder ICAHD and One Democratic State Solution. <https://icahd.org/category/jeff-halper/>
<https://icahd.org/get-the-facts/matrix-control/>

Abed Abu Shehadeh, journalist, Jaffa <https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/jaffa-gaza-palestinians-honour-the-dead-displaced-dispossessed>

Khalil Alamour, Bedouin lawyer and community leader in the Naqab <https://icahd.org/2024/08/22/icahd-uk-webinar-the-plight-of-the-palestinians-in-the-unrecognized-villages-in-the-naqab-recording/>

Awad Abdelfattah, political writer, co-founder of Balad, and coordinator of the One Democratic State Campaign. <https://icahd.org/2020/03/29/icahd-uks-interview-with-awad-abdelfattah/>

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/war-gaza-how-palestinians-are-resisting-existential-despair>

Adalah — human rights organization promoting the rights of the Palestinian minority in Israel.

<https://www.adalah.org/>

https://www.adalah.org/uploads/uploads/Primer_Palestinian_Citizens_of_Israel_July_2024.pdf

Nabila Espanioly, Al Tufula Centre, Nazareth <https://altufula.org/en>

Hagai El-Ad, former executive director of B'tselem <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2025-06-09/ty-article-opinion/.premium/theres-no-way-to-explain-this-war-away/00000197-510c-debf-a39f-759d9ece0000>

David Sheen, freelance Canadian / Israeli journalist <https://www.davidsheen.com/>

Haggai Mattar, executive director, 972 Magazine <https://www.972mag.com/>

Palestinian families in Haifa and Umm al Fahm

RESOURCES RECOMMENDED TO ME

ONLINE MAGAZINE

This Week in Palestine – <https://thisweekinpalestine.com>

BOOKS

Brokers of Deceit: How the US has Undermined Peace in the Middle East by Rashid Khalidi. 2014, Beacon Press

Hidden Histories by Basem L. Ra'ad. 2010, Pluto Press

Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians by S Lynd, A Lynd, S Bahour (ed.). 1990, Interlink

Kingdom of Olives and Ashes by M Chabon & A Wideman (ed.). 2017, HarperCollins

Mother of Strangers by Suad Amiry. 2023, Vintage

Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880-1948 by Mark LeVine. 2005, University of California

Palestinian Refugees in International Law by F. Albanese & L. Takkenberg. 2020, Oxford University

Stranger in My Own Land by Firda Jiryis. 2024, Hurst & Co.

The Case for Palestine: An International Law Perspective by John Quigley. 2005, Duke University

The Moment of Truth: Tackling Israel / Palestine's Toughest Questions by Jamie Stein Werner (ed.). 2018, OR Books

The Iron Wall by Avi Shlaim. 2014, WW Norton

What is Modern Israel? by Yakov M Rabkin. 2016, Pluto Press