

# Letters from Palestine

*2013-05-23 - Final letter--uncensored this time!*

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Hello Friends,

If you have the time, please read this whole long letter and watch the videos, too. But, if you only have a moment, please read the first couple paragraphs as they contain the "news" of the letter. I continue to really appreciate your responses, so bring 'em on!

I consider myself a very committed activist. But I have always played it pretty safe, not going to protests where the police might be violent in their "crowd dispersal tactics". But this past month in Palestine I learned that at every single protest of the Israeli occupation, the police might be—and probably would be—violent in their dispersal tactics. I was advised by others that if I attend the demonstrations, several negative things could happen. (This is why I did not mention the protests in previous posts.) For instance: I would surely be on IDF lists or camera recordings, I could be hassled at the airports, I could be arrested and deported immediately, I could be given a "denied re-entry to Israel, and thus Palestine" card, and I could be injured by a sound bomb, tear gas canister, or rubber bullet. I also learned that internationals taking the positions of monitors attending those rallies in order to record human rights abuses—and thus, prevent some of them—usually do not receive violence from the IDF. I weighed the odds of becoming seriously injured as a monitor at a protest, and decided that in order to further understand what Palestinian activists regularly endure and to support their work I would follow my Palestinian and international friends into risky environments. Nothing really awful happened to me, nor did I see any serious violence. But, I was around enough tear gas that now I know what it feels like to have that intensely stinging gas in my eyes. I also now know how jarred my whole body feels after sound bombs explode near me, causing me to feel shocked and to shudder deep inside, stuck with the adrenalin rush for several minutes afterwards, waiting guarded for the next bomb. I now know how intimidated I feel when Israeli Defense force jeeps pull up next to me, or inch down the road directly behind me, like they did for 2.5 kilometers down Highway 60 on Nakba Day. I recall with chills the scenes of armed soldiers holding big video cameras focused on me as I recorded with my cheap little camera the scenes of soldiers throwing sound bombs and tear gas in response to open pleas for a free Palestine. I know how scared I feel for my Palestinian friends who directly face the soldiers, are regularly pushed and thrown to the ground by them.

What exactly are the Palestinians protesting? The day we were assembled outside Omar's house, they were simply opposing the closure of a road and the placing of a locked gate preventing any further car travel between Al Walaja village and Cremison monastery. (Watercolor painting will be completed of this place.) In addition, we were opposing the Israelis' stated plans to destroy olive trees and fields in order to build the apartheid wall around those places. At another demonstration, the protesters were opposing the plans of Israeli settlers to build yet another illegal settlement. (In 1948, the UN gave Israel a clearly outlined gift of land, designating exactly where they were to settle. However, hundreds of illegal settlements have been built on land that the UN had designated to specifically remain Palestine. 22 settlements surround Bethlehem, for instance.) The protesters were completely justified in opposing the unjust plans to develop yet another new settlement at Ush Ghraib in Beit Sahour. The two other protests I attended were in commemoration of Nakba Day, May 15, 1948. The youtubes following this letter capture some of the things that happened at those demonstrations. Unfortunately, I did not capture on video any of the sound bombs or tear gas thrown at us at the Al Walaja or Beit Sahour protests. I did capture some of the tear gas thrown at the Nakba Day commemoration, along

with the scene of many people running to escape the sting of the suffocating gas. The other youtubes show footage of Palestinians speaking out about their unjust treatment directly to the soldiers and the cameras. Mazin Qumseyah asks the soldiers some important questions in two videos.

So, when I think of my time in Palestine, I first remember the beautiful scenery and people. I will be spending this summer completing the several unfinished paintings and drawings of some of the scenes and people to show you later. But, as I remember this past month, upon closing my eyes, I also see men in helmets holding big guns, throwing tear gas and sound bombs; I see watch towers, walls, big jeeps, barbed wire, gates, checkpoints, as well as exclusive highways, exclusive tunnels, and exclusive buses. I only endured this for one month! I have not grown up experiencing night raids of houses, demolition of houses, arrests of fathers, mothers, and even children. I cannot imagine what it must be like to endure this as a way of life. Just the day before I left, when I was in Jerusalem, I talked to a woman volunteering for an ecumenical monitoring group. She told me that in the past two days three children, aged 6, 7, and 8 had been forcibly taken from their homes in the middle of the night to be questioned.

What is this? This is barbaric behavior. War crimes of this nature happen every single day in Palestine. Just see this website which keeps track of reported abuses: [arij.org](http://arij.org). Go to the link "Eye on Palestine" and then click on "Daily Report". The global citizenry has at its disposal very clear international laws for prosecution of these crimes. However, the government of the US not only regularly blocks UN condemnation of these crimes (and does not even recognize the International Court), but it also demands that its citizenry sponsor these crimes with their tax dollars, to the tune of over \$3 billion per year of subsidies to the Israeli government. The money is given to them in the name of "security" for the state of Israel.

Who would stand for this type of treatment? Unfortunately, very few Palestinians are outwardly fighting the occupation as activists on the streets. Why? From what I gathered (in my very limited, four-week stay), the majority of Palestinians have few choices when it comes to putting food on the table and a roof overhead for their families. Palestinians must compete for the few decent jobs available and many of them will certainly lose their jobs if they are arrested for attending a protest or participating in any other activities opposing their own oppression. Not only will they lose their jobs if arrested, they might be stuck in prison for months or years, with no specific charges against them, held in what the Israeli government vaguely labels "administrative detention". Right now 4,900 Palestinians are in jail. Several times over this past month I was told that almost all Palestinian males have spent time in prison at some point in their life. Just see the ARIJ reports to read of the constant arrests. Many women and children are also regularly "administratively detained."

Just to clear something up: I am absolutely NOT anti-Semitic. Rather, several of my best friends throughout my life have been Jewish. I have thought a great deal about the Jewish people ever since my childhood, when I learned of the horrifying Nazi holocaust. I often wondered, "What would I do if I lived in a place like Germany and my own life would be endangered by doing favors for Jews?" As I have grown older, I have learned to answer that question with increasing awareness of what I can do to help those who are oppressed. But, up until this trip to Palestine, I have never in my life had the opportunity to stand up for the oppressed at the risk of my own safety.

Please see this wonderful, clear and impassioned speech by Juan Cole to understand more about Palestine: <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/display/ContentDetails/i/39421/pid/3584>

See these youtubes: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xG2n-1fb0M>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z\\_Ut1GX\\_vLc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_Ut1GX_vLc)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjaxvt1\\_2v0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wjaxvt1_2v0)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZjRFPm9NSA>

And, finally, this segment from a recent article from Ray McGovern regarding what one of the Boston bombers wrote on the side of the boat while he lay bleeding. The article was posted online in Commondreams May 19, '13

Other “mainstream media” and government officials will keep blaming terrorism on Islam, as the *Wall Street Journal* does Friday in repeating the claim that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev told the FBI earlier that he and his dead brother “were acting as jihadists motivated by Muslim religious anger at the U.S.” (In other words, pay no heed to what he scribbled on the side of the boat as he thought he was dying.)

Rarely has there been any official or quasi-official acknowledgement of the main problem. But there was a major exception in the fall of 2004 in an unclassified study published by the Pentagon-appointed U.S. Defense Science Board. Directly contradicting what President George W. Bush was saying at the time, the board stated:

“Muslims do not ‘hate our freedom,’ but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the longstanding, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Gulf States.”

That’s not spin. That’s the assessment of professionals who were reading the handwriting on the wall.

Now, I end with this: Let’s step up our work for peace and understanding, all you good, precious people!

Love, Deb