



# Y.W.C.A. Newsletter

## REFLECTIONS

As the holiday season approaches, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued partnership.

It is devoted individuals like yourselves, who believe in our global mission, who make our jobs a pleasure and keep us inspired, motivated and persistent to keep hope alive.

It gives us great pleasure to be launching our first National Council Newsletter for this cycle of the Board.

*“This National Board has been elected in December 2008, and since the beginning of its term, both staff and volunteers have been very engaged in the ongoing structural reform, the completion and issuance of the new strategic plan, resource mobilization and fundraising. Since its establishment around 2005, the National Office has focused on all these tasks, but in the last 2-3 years, we have intensified our efforts in seeking and making new global partners, creating a network of friends and supporters, and most importantly building international solidarity in support of Peace and Justice in Palestine.”*

*Mira Rizek, National General Secretary, YWCA of Palestine.*

This newsletter is dedicated mostly to advocacy-related events. Our advocacy is acknowledged and producing substantial results; some of which include our instrumental role in the Peace with Justice Task Force formed by the World YWCA, which resulted in the historic witness visit to Palestine (co-sponsored by the World YWCA office and the World Alliance of the YMCA's in Geneva), in addition to the documentary produced for this event which has helped participating associations and individuals present their experiences and share their reflections vividly. Moreover, our presence and participation at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in March 2010 has been positively received, and the workshop that we conducted in partnership with the YWCA's of Sudan and Sri Lanka produced substantive and lasting relationships and networks. Today, our relationship with the YWCA's in the USA is helping advance our cause and promote understanding of our political, social and economic problems both as a nation, and as women in new and innovative ways.

Our active role in The Middle East Training and Retreat Centres (MEATRC) has gained us lots of respect as a YWCA within this regional partnership. Our participation and vivid presence in the different conferences, international settings and forums will help us promote and enhance our mission and search for Peace and Justice. We realize that this is a long process, but we also know that if we organize our efforts and strategies, we can have the “power to change” perceptions, knowledge and actions. We hope that all of our readers will enjoy knowing what we have been doing, together with our volunteers, to impact knowledge, attitude and perceptions of people in the Middle East region as well as internationally in relation to Palestinian women. May your holiday season and the New Year be filled with much joy, happiness and success. We look forward to working with you in the coming year and hope our relationship continues for many years to come.

*The National Council Team,  
YWCA of Palestine*

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## Organizational Development of YWCA's in Countries of Conflict:

The Norwegian Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS), the Norwegian YWCA Committee (Y Global) and the World YWCA support the YWCAs of Palestine, Sudan and Sri Lanka with Resolution 1325 as a Source of Inspiration (*The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, March 2010*)

In 1995, there was a strong advocacy to include women in conflict as one of the critical issues of concern in the Beijing Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security. In the last 15 years, many women and their families have experienced the horrors of war and of violent conflict. At the same time, the role of women has shifted from being victims to becoming critical change agents and actors in conflict resolution and peace building. In 2000, the United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The YWCA movement has over a century of history in responding to crisis and conflict. Today, with the advent of Resolution 1325, and recognizing the YWCA's own infrastructure and outreach, a strong approach to community peace building is evolving.

The World YWCA has historically been active in the NGO Committee on the Status of Women. The Committee supports the UN Commission on the Status of Women and works to promote women's rights and their advancement worldwide through the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, UN Security Resolution 1325 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)

2010 marked the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW in New York City, and the YWCA of Palestine, represented by the National General Secretary Mira Rizek, the National President Abla Nasir, together with the current Young Woman World YWCA Board Member from the Middle East, Arda Aghazarian, who is also the Media and Advocacy Coordinator of the National Council, participated in the intensive two-week sessions, which included orientations, worships, parallel events, caucuses, high-level plenary conferences, brainstorming and drafting sessions, briefing and evaluation meetings; not to mention side-meetings and lunch discussions.

Ms. Muna Kaldawi-Killingback, an American Palestinian YWCA Member, writes about the 5<sup>th</sup> of March side-event under the title "Strengthening Community Capacities for Peace Building" in the article that follows.



## Strengthening Community Capacities for Peace Building

Muna Kaldawi-Killingback

Three YWCA leaders from Palestine, Sudan and Sri Lanka briefed CSW participants on the status of conflict situations in their countries underlining the role of YWCAs in strengthening their communities' capacities for peacemaking on March 5, 2010.

Agot Valle, Former Norwegian Parliamentarian, Member of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee and President of FOKUS (the Norwegian Forum for Women and Development,) which partners with more than 74 YWCAs gave opening remarks. She noted that

*"Women and children are major victims of war and conflict. Women want to play important roles in peacemaking. Now is the time for implementation; identifying indicators, monitoring on the ground and lifting impunity."*

## YWCA of Palestine Keeps Hope Alive Through Decades of Occupation

Ms. Mira Rizek, General Secretary of the YWCA of Palestine, described how Palestinians have endured 62 years of conflict, dispossession and occupation. In 1948, with the creation of the state of Israel, 726,000 Palestinians became refugees. Since 1967, when Israel occupied Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Israel has expropriated 79 percent of this land.

Since 1967, the Israeli government has demolished 24,145 Palestinian houses, she said, quoting statistics from the Israeli Committee on House Demolitions (ICAHD). Currently, Palestinians only have full control over two percent of their own land in the West Bank; another 26 percent is under Palestinian civil authority overseen by the Israeli military. The rest of the occupied West Bank is fully controlled by Israel. A system of Israeli military checkpoints that Palestinians have to pass through to get from town to town wreaks havoc on everyday life, causing extensive delays in reaching schools and jobs and visiting family. The "separation wall" that cuts through the West Bank has reinforced the isolation of Palestinian communities.



Palestinian women have suffered a lot, said Ms. Mira Rizek:

*“While Palestinian men are the direct recipients of violence, women have to bear its indirect costs, shouldering the entire responsibility for the family.”*

Women are also subjected to violence when Israeli soldiers search their homes looking for their male family members.

Finally, Ms. Rizek said that since 1967, according to B’tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, 650,000 Palestinians, or some 35 percent of the population has been imprisoned at some point by Israel. Among these have been 720 women.

The YWCA of Palestine works to “keep hope alive,” said Ms. Rizek, by offering vocational training for women to help them access jobs and enhance their livelihoods, and preschools in refugee camps, as well as advocacy and leadership training programs. She invited participants to take part in Witness Visits to Palestine and join in the Olive Tree Campaign to plant trees there as symbols of peace.

## YWCA of Sudan Engages Women in Rebuilding Communities

Ms. Modi Mbaraza, General Secretary of the YWCA of Sudan gave an update and overview of the situation there. She talked about how 21 years of fighting had claimed two million lives with four million displaced. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005 ended the fighting, but Ms. Mbaraza noted that conflict may be reignited when a referendum in 2011 enables South Sudanese to decide whether to remain with or separate from the rest of Sudan and asked participants to pray for the peace of her country.

She said there is still extensive humanitarian and development work needed, noting a lack of infrastructure and qualified personnel for schools and health care facilities. Widespread diseases claiming lives included malaria, sleeping sickness and water borne diseases.

*“Women have no control over their own lives,”* she said, noting a high prevalence of HIV and AIDS which she said was also due to *“ignorance and bad cultural practices.”* She called for greater empowerment of women.

Ms. Mbaraza said insecurity exists in South Sudan as a result of incursions by the Lord’s Resistance Army coming from Uganda, who are killing, abducting, raping and destroying property.

The YWCA of Sudan began in 1997 as a local grassroots organization initiated by local women in Yambio. Their programs include training women in reading and writing English and providing micro-credit for women to start their own small businesses.

## YWCA of Sri Lanka’s Peace Camps Build Bridges

Ms. Himali Mudalige, General Secretary of the YWCA of Sri Lanka, said that after three decades the war in Sri Lanka between government troops representing the majority and the Tamil tigers, representing the Tamil minority, was finally over. Nevertheless, a humanitarian crisis continues to exist.

Displaced persons, who were long-suffering, were in need of sanitation and safe water. Children and women especially needed assistance. The 2004 tsunami that hit Sri Lanka also caused considerable damage and suffering. The YWCAs were working on “rehabilitation, reconstruction, and resettlement.”

The military victory also increased the level of political tension in the country. In response, to facilitate reconciliation, the YWCA has set up peace camps, especially in the northeast of the country to strengthen the capacity of local communities in peace building. In this region, more than 5,000 women have participated in the peace center’s programs.

The YWCA also helps girls to enhance their self-empowerment offering micro-credit and childcare programs.

## A Lively Discussion

A lively discussion followed, with participants noting that the European Union will be sending observers to the Sudan election, and members of women’s groups in Sudan thanking Ms. Mbaraza for her presentation. One asked whether Muslim women could join the YWCA and Ms. Mbaraza assured them they would be welcome. Some participants asked for action plans for advocacy for Palestine and Sudan.

Ms. Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, a longstanding YWCA leader in Fiji, now with Femlink Pacific concluded the session, urged participants to develop partnerships with global women’s media and generate stories of women’s success as peacemakers so that women are not only seen as *“victims of crisis and war.”* She called UN Security Council Resolution 1325 promoting women’s participation in peace negotiations *“our benchmark.”*

In closing the panel, World YWCA General Secretary Ms. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda along with panelists and participants lit candles decorated with the YWCA of Palestine’s slogan, *“Keeping Hope Alive”* to symbolize women’s resilience and the light that women carry into the world as peacemakers.



## Creating Safe and Secure Communities:

Responding to Violence against Women and Raising Awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and HIV

*(The Middle East Regional Training in Cairo, Egypt; May-June 2010)*



The YWCA of Palestine played a very active role in the YWCA's Middle East Regional Training Institute (RTI) which was hosted by the YWCA of Egypt, in partnership with the World YWCA, and held in Cairo, Egypt from May 27 – June 1, 2010.

Participants included 34 official delegates, 18 observers, volunteers and staff of all ages, representing YWCAs in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. The World YWCA vice-President Reem Najjar (also from the Middle East) was present, as well as a delegation from Geneva which included World YWCA General Secretary Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda.

The team from Palestine was composed of 9 women from the different associations of the local YWCAs; namely the National General Secretary Mira Rizek, the National President Abla Nasir, the National Vice-President Haifa Baramki, YWCA of Jerusalem's Executive Director Hanan Rafidi, YWCA of Jericho President of the Board Erma Darwish, YWCA of Ramallah Board Member Olivia Kandah, YWCA of Ramallah's Program Officer (and young woman member) Faten Husari, and National Council Administrative Assistant (and young woman member) Mayadah Tarazi. The team also included the Young Woman World YWCA Board Member from the Middle East, Arda Aghazarian, who is also the Media and Advocacy Coordinator at the YWCA of Palestine.

Preparation for the RTI started early on with the young women members setting meetings with current and potential young members to target their needs or expectations from the YWCA. The entire delegation from Palestine also corresponded and met several times before setting off to Cairo in order to brainstorm, share information, delegate research accordingly and be in line with the theme of the RTI:

*“Middle Eastern Women Creating Safe and Secure Communities: Responding to Violence Against Women and Raising Awareness on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and HIV.”*

Among the key priorities addressed at the outcome of the RTI were: Women's rights and the family; inter-generational and transformative leadership and membership; violence against women and women's health; and peace and justice.

It is worth mentioning that the YWCA of Palestine shared its experience in advocacy and fundraising with all National Associations in the region, and shared its presentations that were well received.

The five-day event was an enriching experience for all. Inspiring speeches by experts and association members, presentations, skills building sessions, as well as informal exchanges, resulted in general enthusiasm and a clearer understanding of the status of women in the region and the goals to be met.

## The Young Women at the YWCA: Seeking to have a more Active and Dynamic Role

Faten Husari

My experience as a Palestinian YWCA delegate at the Regional Training Institute held in Cairo in May 2010 was different and challenging. Being a young woman and a YWCA staff gave me extra responsibility to reflect on how young women leaders in the Middle East perceive their communities at large, and how they see that in order to be active members at the YWCA they have to have enough confidence and should be given the space to be in the decision making process.

Young women in the Middle East who have participated in different YWCA seminars, trainings and activities do consider the movement as a safe space. In Palestine, as well as in our region, the YWCA has a wide range of programs and activities offered to young women and youth; including vocational training, leadership trainings, drama clubs, Dabkeh folkloric dance lessons, karate lessons and others. Through these activities and programs, the YWCA aims to encourage youth leaders to be more dynamic in their societies.

Our role, as young women who are involved in the YWCA, is to ease the process of creating a new generation of young women leaders; to invest in those young women who could be active in the YWCA, and give them the chance to lead and build a more youth-welcoming culture within the association.

One of the main projects that I am currently working on is the establishment of a youth group at the YWCA of Ramallah. It has not been easy to approach the youth group and try to understand their needs, preferences and what their future plans may be. However, the group was comfortable enough to share with me some of their personal interests, and expressed much interest in the opportunities that the YWCA, as a secure place, could provide them with. After much discussion, I have come to believe that through leadership and other training courses, the young members would feel more committed and involved in the YWCA, as well as in their communities at large.

Through my experience with the YWCA, I believe that the most successful programs for youth should be designed and managed by the youth themselves. This project of establishing a dynamic and forceful youth group at the YWCA of Ramallah is an example that aims to provide young members with the safe and encouraging space to learn as well as take part, and share the skills and the knowledge attained from the experiences at the YWCA to other generations and other YWCA associations.

Notwithstanding the critical circumstances we are facing in this part of the world, it is always going to be a personal challenge for me as a Palestinian woman and as a YWCA staff to work hard and sustain my social and professional responsibility.

## From Traditional to Innovative and Market-Driven Vocational Training Programs

Compiled by Rulla Sarras Zayed

A new and innovative approach has been adopted by the YWCA in designing its new Vocational Training Programs in both Ramallah and Jerusalem's Vocational Training Centres. This shifting in the program stems from the philosophy of the association which believes in the dialectic relation between the status of women's rights in the community and their economic independence. For this purpose, the YWCA conducted different assessments on the employment rate of its own graduates in order to track and evaluate the impact of its own intervention in this field. The results have shown that many of the VTC graduates are not able to get enrolled in the labour market, for different reasons. Amongst others is the lack of successful communication skills for many of these graduates, people's perceptions that tend to undermine qualifications of VTC graduates, and the lack of employment opportunities in the given specialization, and most importantly changing market needs.

Furthermore, for the last 2-3 years, various evaluations and needs assessments were carried out; the latest being the market study conducted by COOPI, an Italian Agency, under the title "*Labour Market Needs Assessment for the Secretarial Training Programs at the YWCA.*" The aim of this study was to expand the opportunities for vocational training and increase the number of young East Jerusalemites enrolled in courses that lead to formal employment. Another study was carried out by the Birzeit Continuing Education Centre to assess Ramallah's market needs and offered programs.

Based on the recommendation of those studies, the YWCA decided to upgrade the VTC structure and programs. This includes changing the naming of the "Vocational Training Centre" to "Vocational Training Academy," and changing the secretarial specialization into office management, which is more market driven and gender sensitive. Additionally, the curricula will be updated and new short-term specializations, like IT, graphic design and others, will be introduced. This will help expand the potential target group, and the potential for recruiting more members and reaching more women. In addition to all these developments, the YWCA of Jerusalem will establish an employment service unit which will be one of the association's main tools in helping its graduates get enrolled in the labour market.

## Weaving the Threads: Naseej Regional Event

Rulla Sarras Zayed

My participation at the Naseej program regional meeting entitled, 'Weaving the Threads,' that was held at the Dead Sea Marriott Hotel from June 28 – 30 was quite an interesting experience. Around 100 participants from five Arab countries (Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Yemen) attended the event.

It was enriching to listen to the different experiences and reflections of the participants, particularly during the thematic group workshops. I was mostly impressed to see that even if we differ in who we are and what we do; our values, concerns and inspiration remain the same.

I do believe that such events establish the platform for regional dialogue, networking and sharing of experiences, strategies and policies. I was amazed by the great and unique ideas that other Arab countries initiated to encourage youth involvement in community work and the revitalization of voluntary spirit. Participation from Egypt was a vivid example when one organization presented a film entitled "El Zabbaleen" (*Garbage pickers*) through which this organization, in coordination with youth, contributed to promoting a cleaner environment in Egypt by collecting various dumped machines, electronics, food, rubbish, etc, which are very hazardous to the environment, and either fix or recycle them. I was very impressed by this project's idea and the positive effects of making Egypt cleaner and environmentally better, particularly with the increasing population and pollution.

The event was inaugurated by H.E. the Minister of Social Development Hala Bseiso Latouf, and it brought together representatives from civil society pillars including non-governmental organizations from different sectors, relevant governmental bodies, international NGOs and donors, private sector representatives, researchers and research institutions, and media entities. It also aimed specifically at taking an in-depth look at and presenting other stakeholders' perspectives on the conditions of civil society's working environment and work, as well as its impact based on actual experiences of active non-governmental organizations. In addition, the regional meeting strove to bridge the stakeholders' perspectives on, and understanding of, the Arab Civil Society's conditions, and to develop a plan of action that would improve current practices and enhance relevant policies in the near future.



## Time to be AWAKE! A Different Experience at the Quadrennial Assembly 2010

Maha Shihadeh

I have travelled often and participated in many international conferences and seminars, but attending the Quadrennial Assembly organized by the Global Ministries, on behalf of the YWCA of Palestine from the 21st –27th of June, 2010 in Greensboro – North Carolina was quite different.

The Quadrennial Assembly is an every-four-year gathering for women of the Disciples of Christ and Global Ministries, and is an event that has brought women together for over 50 years. The 2010 event was the 14th meeting. Thousands of women attended from all over the world, including international guests and missionaries from many countries. We were so fortunate to be invited as YWCA of Palestine to such a meeting

The reason I say it has been a different experience is because it was a new type of participation for me; a religious meeting. At first, when I was asked if I would be willing to participate and represent the YWCA of Palestine in the Quadrennial meeting for the Disciples of Christ, I wondered what I'd be doing there. However, after actually spending a week in Greensboro and having had a wonderful chance to meet with women from different nationalities, exchange experiences and thoughts, I realized how wonderful it was to be part of that meeting.

In my first week, I had the chance to meet with people throughout Illinois; going from town to town and meeting with seven church groups. I also had the chance to share some information about the YWCA of Palestine, and for sure the political context in which we work.

The meeting itself offered many workshops and forums. The programs, as well as the worship during the Quadrennial Assembly were filled with music, drama, sermons and speeches. The Assembly, which had the theme "AWAKE!" really made me awake, and I believe I also succeeded in making many others be awakened to our situation in Palestine. I had the chance to make a presentation about the situation in Palestine and the difficulties women and children in particular face, and about what we as the YWCA are doing to help women overcome their hardships.



The Global Ministries, who are our long standing partners and invited us to this event, wanted us to highlight the different programs that we do which are sponsored by them. My presentation was described by many as an eye opening session. Many people contacted me and approached me whenever they had the chance to get further details and information with regards to the different programs we carry out; the Olive Tree Campaign being one of them, which is managed by the Joint Advocacy Initiative (JAI); a joint program between the YWCA of Palestine and the East Jerusalem YMCA. I also had the chance to show the documentary “The Iron Wall” in the Global Ministries’ booth. The film aroused many viewers’ interest in knowing more about realities and facts of Palestinian daily sufferings on the ground.

On the whole, I believe the trip was an enriching experience that I hope would positively reflect on our work as a local association, especially as some have already started inquiring about another potential witness visit to Palestine. This affirms, once again, the importance of the advocacy and information sharing that is managed by the National Council. In addition, I also saw how important partnership building is, and the difficult role that the national office has to educate the international community on our cause and build the solidarity in our struggle for Peace and Justice.

## Changing Perspective... One Person at a Time

Joelle Logue

As I’ve told hundreds of people during my many presentations on the Witness Visit to Palestine in September 2010, the experience for me was an intense immersion into the Palestinian fabric of life; one that has led to a soul search of dramatic proportion.

The urgent message heard every day of the trip in a variety of ways was strong and clear: that for 60 plus years the Palestinian people have been living under conflict; their land and natural resources taken away, a two-state solution for peace evaporating, and that things have gone from bad to worse.

Many emotions were expressed by the 42 persons from across the world who came together on that last day of the trip to reflect on what they saw. A position paper was written and re-written and is still in draft form. Language becomes a problem for people coming from different backgrounds and different government approaches to foreign policy. Although we were all appalled by the scope of the human rights violations we witnessed, we realize it is tightly tied to history, religious differences and politics; locally, regionally and globally.

But reliving history and focusing on religious extremism will not help bring peace to the Middle East. It is the here and now – a very real humanitarian crisis that has to be addressed with the help of international law, face-to-face negotiations and UN resolutions.

A short presentation on this trip was delivered during the National Association of YWCA USA Executives meeting where it met with some strong criticism. Several asked why the trip

was taken in the first place. Some felt it to be offensive and one-sided, and many demanded that the Israeli position should be presented in conjunction with the Palestinian viewpoint. Fact is we could only tell what we saw, what we felt. That was the reality.

In my presentations, I openly admit that the trip was one-sided but I give extensive background on how and why the trip came about to frame it and give perspective. And I begin with the historic 2007 resolution jointly sponsored by the YWCA of Palestine and the YWCA USA at World Council.

When the presentation on Palestine appeared on the agenda for my regional meeting, I got a call from my Regional Director who said someone was objecting to the presentation and wanted it removed. I asked who it was and she said the person wanted to remain anonymous. Then I asked my Regional Director to call the person and ask her to call me personally. Two telephone conversations ensued; one somewhat constrained and the other more relaxed. In the end, she agreed to remain silent if the presentation was given. Fortunately, my executive committee supported the presentation and it stayed on the agenda. For them, to ignore that fact that 11 YWCA women from the USA travelled to Palestine at the request of the World YWCA and at the invitation of a sister association (YWCA of Palestine) would be unpardonable.

In the presentation, I talked admirably about the work of the YWCA Palestine and the unique challenges it faces in carrying out its day to day work stymied by check points, a separation wall, all while trying to serve women and children who live as refugees on their own land.

I also told my YWCA sisters that at a UNIFEM meeting in NYC recently, I had heard Jewish women on the ground in Israel speak to the fact that the occupation has had a negative impact on civil society there and that NGOs have a hard time getting support for the work they are trying to do in a variety of spheres. So for the majority of people, both Israeli and Palestinian who seek to co-exist harmoniously, and because human rights, particularly human rights for women and children is a big part of our mission, I thought we should pay attention to the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. We need to realize that Americans, including a growing number of American Jews, can question illegal settlements and the use of a preponderance of force without being anti-Semitic.

The presentation seemed to be readily accepted by everyone, Jewish women included. And I’m happy to say that the person who originally objected to the presentation and at one point questioned whether the YWCA USA should be part of the world movement has informed me she is going to World Council 2011.

One comment was made that solidified for me why it’s so important to talk about Palestine. It was simply: *“Thanks for sharing this. We never hear this side of the situation.”*

\* The YWCA of Palestine, together with the East Jerusalem YMCA through the Joint Advocacy Initiative (JAI) produced a short documentary for this visit, which is available at the National Council Office. All members of this Witness Visit got a copy of this documentary and are using it in their presentations.



## YWCA/YMCA Young Members in Norway have Palestine on their Agendas

Y-Global, Norway

Early this year, two young Norwegian Scouts from the Norwegian YWCA-YMCA Scouts and Guides Movement participated in the Olive Tree Campaign of the JAI (The YWCA of Palestine and East Jerusalem YMCA's Joint Advocacy Initiative.) The two young scouts, Joveig and Ragnhild, had a great experience in Palestine and came back to Norway as ambassadors for the Olive Tree Campaign that they would implement in Norway. They shared their experience with the scouts online as well as on-stage in front of 4000 young Norwegian YWCA-YMCA Scouts during the summer. The result of this initiative was a renewed interest for JAI's campaign and a lot of curiosity from the YWCA/YMCA in Norway (which has a membership of around 13,000.) Not to mention that 600 new olive trees would be planted in Palestine through the JAI as a result of this initiative.

The GoCy, which is a partnership program between the JAI and Y-Global of Norway, is another advocacy tool for informing the

youth in Norway about what is happening in Palestine. During her stay in Palestine and also after going back to Norway this year, the Norwegian goCY intern Marie Redergaard has been answering within the church, during the Ecumenical week for Solidarity with Palestine, and also in a few national and regional newspapers to various questions regarding the Kairos document that was published in Palestine and has been translated to Norwegian.

Moreover, all three GoCY participants served as a valuable source of information this year in Norway, an example of which was in the Risøya campsite; where over 200 members from the YWCA/YMCA in Norway got to learn about some of the activities of the YWCA of Palestine and organized a fundraising race to collect money for these programs partnered with Y-Global.

## "To BDS or not to BDS..." Is that the Question?

Arda Aghazarian

In her essay "Israel: Old or Young?" published in Ha'aretz newspaper on the third of May, Dahlia Schendlin reveals a dangerously anti-democratic bill recently proposed in the Knesset:

*"The first, proposed by Kadima, would declare any civil society organization to be illegal, that which passes information to foreign bodies or in any way aid the prosecution of IDF figures for war crimes. That means that if a civil society organization should post critical observations about Israel's activities on a website that could be read abroad, it could be silenced."*

In that case, Ms. Dahlia poses, why bother having a civil society at all? The bill's initiators have determined that any information damaging to Israel's image, must be "incorrect and lies." This is anathema to basic democratic principles."

Reading this reminds me of the conference I attended in March of this year under the title "The Goldstone Report: Does International Law Really Matter?" held at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York during the 54th Session of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In that conference, the U.N. Rapporteur Professor Richard Faulk illustrated that "the final and most important obstacle inhibiting international law in Israel is insufficient engagement of civil society." Dr. Faulk summarized that "Israeli fear of Global Justice today far surpasses their fear of radical terrorism."

During that same presentation, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, who apparently was the first woman to be ordained in the Jewish Renewal Movement in 1981, kept insisting on the role of civil society to call for a nonviolent boycott and divestment from

all companies, corporations and institutions that profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian people and lands. Gottlieb was adamant that:

*"Those who call boycott and divestment immoral or not useful, I would say to you, you are on the wrong side of history. Boycott and divestment is not about demonization. It is about changing the climate of acceptance for illegal actions by governments, corporations and institutions that profit from illegal occupation."*

To answer hesitation in our minds, Rabbi Gottlieb adds that:

*"Boycott and divestment is not directed at ending the state of Israel, nor does it represent an existential threat, nor is it anti-Semitic, which must also be resisted. Rather, boycott and divestment is a tool for social change aimed at ending illegal acts through nonviolence."*

She finished her strong speech with the words of a father who had actually lost his daughter due to the conflict. Despite his anger, the man wrote:

*"There is no wall so high it can keep apart those who want to love each other. Which do you want to be?"*

### What is BDS?

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions "BDS" refers to an International economic campaign initiated by the July 9, 2005 Unified Palestinian call for the "BDS against Israel until it complies with International Law and the Universal Principles of Human Rights."





According to the Global Movement, the underlying principle of calls for BDS is that:

*“It is no longer denied that Israel has oppressed the Palestinian people for decades in multiple forms: occupying, colonizing, ethnically cleansing, racially discriminating, in short, denying Palestinians the fundamental rights for freedom, equality and self-determination. Despite abundant condemnation of Israel’s policies by the UN and all relevant international conventions, the international community of nations has failed to bring about Israel’s compliance with international law or its respect for basic human rights. Israel’s crimes have continued with utter impunity. The time has come for action, not just words. BDS are the most effective non-violent, morally consistent means for achieving justice and genuine peace in the region through concerted international pressure similar to that applied on South African apartheid.”*

Since 2005, activists around the world joined up, and the economic/consumer boycott of occupation went a step further and started to include an academic/cultural and sports boycott. Internationally renowned figures such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ken Loach, and now one of Britain’s most successful bands, Massive Attack, are publicly backing the boycott. The campaign is now internationally recognized and an increasing number of human rights organizations, trade unions, student unions, church leaders and fervent individuals are signing up to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

For those who live in the region, “boycotting Israel!” becomes a challenging mission; if not outrageous. A large number of Palestinians find it difficult to practice the boycott campaign on a daily ground; seeing that they are consuming Israeli products without any choice in the matter and with little possibility to “pick and choose.” Nevertheless, it still continues to be a matter of urgency to call

upon the government of Israel to honor and implement the right of freedom of movement, academic study and instruction controlled by it. Freedom, after all, “is not divisible and cannot be selective.”

As the internationally-recognized author Naomi Klein recently emphasized, it is important for her “not to boycott Israelis, but rather to boycott the normalization of Israel and the conflict.”

Perhaps “To BDS or not to BDS” has ceased from being the question at this point. Maybe the question to be raised right now is whether there’s “any other option left?”

