**New Hope for Palestinians? The International Solidarity Movement**

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The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) was founded to support and strengthen the Palestinian nonviolent resistance to Israeli occupation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Palestinian people, who have been dispossessed since 1948 -- over 750,000 driven from their lands for the establishment of the Israeli state, and approximately 3 million who have been living under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 -- over the years have adopted various means of struggle in an attempt to regain their homeland. The overwhelming focus of the international community has been on the Palestinian armed struggle with very little or no recognition of the more powerful and prominent nonviolent struggle of the Palestinian people, the culmination of which was expressed in the 'Intifada' -- the Palestinian uprising (1987--1993). Through the years, the various means of the Palestinian popular struggle have included boycott of Israeli goods and services, rejection of Israeli military administration, neighborhood schools (when the Israeli army would shut down state Palestinian schools and universities), mass marches, strikes, withholding taxes and more.

From the beginning of the current Palestinian uprising in September of 2000, protesters taking to the streets of Ramallah, Nablus, Gaza, Jerusalem and elsewhere were responded to with brute military force, leading to over 100 Palestinian deaths within one month. The Israeli military adopted practices aimed at intimidating and punishing a people for daring to speak out against their repression.

In the first few weeks of the Intifada, the protests involved all aspects of Palestinian society -- civilian men, women and children.

Helicopter gunships, tanks, armored personnel carriers and machine-gun carrying soldiers were used to take on the protesters. The message was clear -- civilians would not be protected; Palestinian men, women and children would be shot if they came out to protest the occupation. In addition, multiplying checkpoints, creating roadblocks, tearing up Palestinian roads and making it 'illegal' and dangerous for Palestinians to move freely, increased Palestinian fragmentation and hampered the ability of Palestinian civilians to organise. The aforementioned, coupled with a growing sense of disillusionment and weariness, made it clear that the Palestinian people needed a new resource at their disposal in order to empower the civil-based nonviolent resistance efforts.

The resources the Israeli government has at its disposal are well-known -- over $2 billion in direct military aid from the United States, another $1 billion in direct non-military aid from the U.S., hundreds of millions of dollars in private funds, and the unquestioned diplomatic support of the only superpower in the world exercised through veto in the UN Security Council on any resolution that would compel Israel to abide by international law. Palestinians have no such resources at their disposal, other than feelings of unorganised solidarity from millions of people around the world. This feeling of solidarity, these civilians, could be realised as a resource that could enable the Palestinian people to challenge their oppressors, and indeed the international community to challenge a brutal system (the Israeli occupation), which must be ended.

The Palestinians, as an occupied people, have a right, enshrined in international law\*, to resist their occupiers using armed struggle.

The ISM recognises this right but at the same time believes that nonviolent resistance can be a more effective and powerful means of resistance, thus is committed to using nonviolent, direct-action methods and principles to confront and challenge the Israeli occupation forces and policies. The ISM strategy is based on addressing four key needs:

1. Protection. Palestinian civilians acting or protesting alone are often confronted with lethal forms of violence. The Palestinian people have been so dehumanised that even their executions are blamed on them. The targeting of Palestinian children has been justified with the excuse that they "throw rocks at the soldiers" as if this somehow excuses putting bullets in their heads, and numerous Palestinian women have died at checkpoints (prevented by soldiers from passing for medical care), shot walking in their own streets and crushed to death in their own homes (when soldiers demolish their homes on top of them). No one holds Israel accountable for Palestinian deaths; the international community has failed to live up to its obligation to the Palestinian people, respect their status as 'protected persons' under the Fourth Geneva Conventions.

The presence of international civilians, however, has provided a degree of protection for those Palestinians challenging the brutality of occupation every day. When international civilians are present, less lethal forms of violence are used.

1. Accurately portraying the struggle / Giving the Palestinians a voice. The forces arguing and/or otherwise working to maintain Israeli hold on Palestinian territory, to prolong the occupation and indeed even to expand Israeli colonisation policies, use extensive media access and resources to manipulate the facts in order to legitimise the widespread denial of basic rights to the Palestinian people. It's important to show that the Palestinian struggle is not against Israel or the Jewish people but rather a struggle against occupation, oppression and a denial of freedom. International civilians taking to the streets with Palestinians help demonstrate that the Palestinian struggle is for universal values of equality, human rights, dignity and freedom.
2. First-hand accounts. By inviting people from all over the world to come to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we are increasing witness and documentation of what is happening on the ground. Rachel Corrie, an ISM volunteer who was killed, crushed by an Israeli bulldozer on March 16, 2003 wrote, "no amount of reading, attendance at conferences, documentary viewing and word of mouth could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here". But we want to make sure that word-of-mouth accounts do reach people and if the mainstream mass media will not accurately portray the struggle against oppression, one by one, ISM activists will. And there will come a day, brought on by such efforts, that the world will look back and say "if only we had known..."  
     
   We are working for that day to come sooner rather than later.
3. Hope. Palestinians feel abandoned by the international community. Years of asking for respect of UN Resolutions and international law have been ignored. This, combined with Israel's complete control of all travel in or out of the Palestinian territories, has created a sense of overwhelming isolation and desperation, which has stripped Palestinians of their hope for a better future. International civilians coming in to stand with the Palestinian people have broken that isolation and provided a crack of hope that people are listening. The kamikaze strategy aimed at Israeli civilians, that has been rightly condemned by the international community, is a direct result of the brutality of occupation and the desperation it fosters. If internationally recognised bodies and governments signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention continue to shy away from direct action to support the Palestinian people's legitimate right to freedom, and only pay lip service to Palestinian human rights, the international community is sending a direct message of hopelessness to people who have suffered long enough under occupation.

A clear sense of justice, community organisation, and the ability to remain steadfast in the face of continued oppression are strengths of the Palestinian people. The ISM is committed to supporting these resistance efforts by using our voices and nonviolent direct action on the ground to confront and challenge the Israeli occupation, and to struggle for freedom long denied.

*General Assembly resolution 37/43 affirms the right of an occupied people to resist foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle*