

WHAT IS THE UK GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DOING AS ISRAELI MILITARY TARGETS AND DESTROYS MUSLIM CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS IN HEBRON?

On 5th June, 2008 whilst attending Conference in Bil'in on Nonviolence, I was invited by friends, who are members of Christian Peacemakers' team based in Hebron, to go with them to see what is happening in Hebron.

On arrival in Hebron we met with the Administrator of the Hebron Orphanages. He explained that the Israeli army is threatening to close 14 schools and orphanages in the Hebron district. Eight of these schools and orphanages belong to the Islamic Charitable Society, while the remaining six belong to the Muslim Youth Society. (On 26th February the Israeli army forces handed over military orders of closures and confiscations of two bakeries, administrative buildings, a warehouse, three schools and two orphanages -- all of these owned by the ICS.)

He took us to see a newly built school owned by ICS, (cost of one million) which was due to be opened in August, but is now closed. The Israeli Military has welded the gates of the school closed and the reason given, as for all these closures are, 'security'. Beside the school we visited a large warehouse and met the caretaker. He explained that in March the Israeli Military arrived at 3 a.m., and left at 9 a.m., they tied him up and proceeded to pack and removed all the food and clothing in the Warehouse and destroy the interior of the buildings, smashing everything in sight. The contents of the warehouse were for the orphans and the poor and the premises run by Islamic Charitable Society. We then visited a burnt out bakery (there was another destroyed bakery but time did not permit a visit). Again the Israeli military destroyed the entire interior, burning completely the huge baking oven. This bakery cooked over 3,000 loaves of bread, and was subsidized by charity, to feed the orphans and poor. The jobs created by these Islamic Charitable projects, are gone and in the short time not able to be replaced. We also visited a Boys' and Girls' Orphanage both under military orders of closure. The ICS will challenge these closures in court, but in the meantime the Israeli military are systematically during the night, raiding and destroying the buildings. The fear now is that the Orphanages and school will be raided and destroyed. In an attempt to stop this, the Islamic Charitable Society have people, including Internationals, to sleep overnight in these buildings in the hope that the presence of Internationals might deter the Israeli military nightly raids of destruction. I join 4 friends in sleeping overnight in the Girls' Orphanage, and we were alone in this building, as the children have gone to friends for the Summer school period. Luckily the Army did not arrive, but what will happen when there are no internationals to sleep over? And the world sleeps while this destruction takes place. Before our sleep-over we met local Muslims and were hosted to a beautiful meal and great kindness and gratitude for our presence.

The outside world, for the most part, is unaware of this Israeli Government's Policy of demonization, wilful destruction, of the Muslim Institutions, one by one, in an attempt to destroy the spirit and resilience of the Muslim communities, not only in Hebron, but throughout the illegally occupied Palestinian territories. It was for me horrific to witness, the Israeli Government, (and the USA/UK Governments' War on terrorism), come to be played out on the streets of Hebron, against Orphan children.

(If the schools and orphanages continue to be closed down, and the military continue to destroy completely these institutions, then 7000 children will be without school and 4,500 children will be without homes). The excuse given is that these Islamic Institutions are a "front for Hamas"

but the Islamic Charitable Society was established in 1962, and all their financial dealings and accounting are completely open. The money for the school and orphanages comes from local investments (they have their own businesses) from donors abroad and from Arab and Western countries (Prince Charles, through a UK Trust has donated towards these orphanages).

I was shocked and horrified to see the destruction of these Islamic Institutions. The threats of the Israeli Army (and Government) against Orphans must be loudly Resisted by all of us who are concerned for a non-violent free and peaceful world for Muslim children, indeed all our children? This behaviour is immoral, unethical and illegal And the Israeli Government should be held accountable, by the International Community, for its abuse of the rights of the children to safety and education. As occupiers of this country they have legal obligations to protect the occupied, especially women and children.

The United Kingdom has many questions to answer here too. Tony Blair is based in East Jerusalem, (a few hours from Hebron, so he is well aware of this systematic wilful destruction of Islamic charitable institutions) and his brief is to help Palestinian economic reconstruction. How ironic whilst he is suppose to be helping businesses etc., the Israeli military are in the dead of night, spreading terror and destruction of the Islamic communities. What is Mr. Blair and the UK governments doing about this?

One of the things that struck me during my visit to the illegally occupied territories was the courage, friendliness and resilience of the Palestinian people. But I was also conscious of the fact that so many of them are traumatized by what is happening, and in bewilderment that the outside world is silent and inactive in face of their tremendous suffering, and blatant dispossession and persecution. The World must act against this ongoing destruction by Israel of the Palestinian people and their institutions, and by Israeli racist and apartheid policies, in the villages and cities of occupied Palestine, including the siege of Gaza.

All Occupations come to an end, as this one surely will, but if this occupation continues, it will begin to destroy the very soul of the Jewish people, and leave a legacy of anger and resentment within some the Arab people, especially the young, which will take generations to heal.

It behoves the Israeli (and International community) to awaken now to the urgency of justice for the Palestinians, by ending the Siege of Gaza, the Occupation of Palestine, and moving to build justice and reconciliation, whilst there is still time to turn this around, and before more blood of Israeli/Palestinians brothers and sisters is shed.

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5th June, 2008.
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