When the state of Israel was initially founded, it provided a much-needed sanctuary for Jews around the world whose communities have been oppressed for thousands of years, particularly crucial for the tens of thousands of refugees who narrowly escaped extermination during the Jewish Holocaust. Having sought asylum in numerous countries and been rejected, they came with relief to Israel to find refuge and repose.

Tragically, the state of Israel was formed at the expense of the Palestinian people. In 1947, a UN resolution partitioned the land, giving the Israelis about 56 per cent of the land despite numbering only one-third of the population. In the war that followed, over 700,000 Palestinians were driven off the land, 400 villages were depopulated, and innumerable Palestinians were massacred. It is therefore no coincidence that Israel's independence day is the same day that Palestinians observe al Nakba, the day of catastrophe.

As the global balance of power shifted from Britain to the US, and as Israel proved itself to be a strong and capable player in the region, the US found it strategically advantageous having Israel as a junior partner to its empire. Despite what many perceive as strong US support for Israel, the current situation is not beneficial for the people of Israel, except perhaps in the very short term.

Since September 2000, with the beginning of the second intifada (literally, uprising), extraordinary violence has come from both sides of the conflict. It is clear that the waves of suicide bombings commited by fundamentalist Islamists and/or underground guerrilla organizations are both morally reprehensible and politically counter-productive. However, Israel's army has killed more civilians than have the Palestinians, and has implemented: severe restrictions on movement between towns, internal closures which function as seiges (preventing the entry and exit of people, food, or goods), and curfews, which effectively imprison entire populations in their homes — violations frequently result in arrests, indefinite incarceration and torture, or death.

The suicide bombings are directly tied to this occupation and the violation of international law, and so it is unrealistic to imagine the Palestinians unilaterally halting all aspects of their uprising — attacks on the occupying military as well as suicide bombings — without any concrete change in Israeli policy. As Stephen Zunes writes, in Tinderbox, "International law sees terrorism as a war crime, but recognizes the right of people under foreign military occupation to armed resistance against the occupying forces. Unfortunately, both sides have muddied the issue. Some Palestinians claim that suicide bombings against Israelis civilians ... constitutes legitimate resistance. On the other side, the American and Israeli governments condemn Palestinian attacks against uniformed Israeli occupation forces as 'terrorism'."

All civilians of the region effectively have their hands tied. A large majority of Israelis in a 2002 public opinion poll supported peace talks, and said that the problem of terrorism couldn't be resolved without them. The Palestinians, for their part, suffer under what Zunes says "may be the worst leadership of virtually any national liberation movement in recent decades", with large segments of the population alienated by Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

Although it is clear that there is nothing grassroots about the structure or funding of the Palestinian Authority, or some other players in the intifada, many individuals and families are coming together to create new forms of resistance, and to provide much needed services and infrastructure to their communities. They are being joined by international activists working with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), which was formed shortly after the beginning of the second intifada. ISM has a mandate of nonviolent direct action against the occupation, and has facilitated participation and solidarity work for hundreds of internationals who join Palestinians in putting their lives on the line in an effort to stop the violence and open a space where peace can take root and flourish.

International Solidarity: accompanying ambulances in Palestine

By Ewa Jasiewicz

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time ... But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

- Lilla Watson, aboriginal educator and activist

People have often viewed the Palestinian/Israeli struggle as somehow outside of the anticapitalist movement. Palestinians want their own state. Anti-capitalists, by and large, want to see the dissolution of the state, since the state reproduces and reifies capital, perpetuates capitalism. The Palestinian resistance, in mainstream media representation, is often reduced to one for an Islamic state, waged by masked fundamentalists. What can activists do in the face of so many competing armed factions? Do you really want to

be complicit in the creation of an Islamic state? Where does the struggle fit in our imagining of a world without borders when so much of it is about securing borders? On the surface, the struggle does not fit neatly into the trajectory of anticapitalist international struggles which we can identify with in the West, those which mirror our aims and desires, such as that of Argentineans rejecting politicians and government; the West Papuan Freedom Movement which resists the state and technocracy, or the direct democracy-generating Zapatistas.

Yet ultimately, the Palestinian struggle is a fight against colonialism, state fascism, and endemic racism. The final outcome of what it is for and what shape this will take is undecided. It may be an Islamic state, a Marxist-Leninist state; a liberal parliamentary democratic state; a US-overseen free market-driven state; a police state; or an autonomous zone recognized as an independent state. The land that Palestinian people live upon is a resource exploited by Israel and the US, and requires the eviction of the Palestinian populace, numbering just 3.5 million – approximately half the population of London. The struggle

Monsanto's genetically engineered Bollgard cotton. The protesters wear black headbands and brandish swords while burning scarecrows along with two tons of GMO cotton. They demand that all transgenic crops be banned from South Sulawesi.

>> September 17 >> One hundred-thousand farmers gather in New Delhi, India in a last ditch battle against plans by the World Trade Organization to liberalize

agriculture. Farmers are worried about highly subsidized imports of agricultural goods from rich countries flooding their country. Mahendra Singh Tikait from the Bharatiya Kisan Union says, "Unless you organize and come into the streets, nobody will listen to you."

>> September 17 >> In Cochabamba, Bolivia, the third conference of Peoples' Global Action begins, despite having been described as a meeting of "potential"

terrorists" by the Governor. Post-September 11 panic among security forces results in the stranding of thousands at the Bolivian border, threatened deportation of delegates, and immigration authorities stating, "Visas for PGA people are no longer valid." In this chaotic environment, 300 delegates meet from 35 countries, and reaffirm their commitment to the struggle against capitalism and for life.

is against that exploitation and expropriation, and its dynamic is mirrored throughout the world.

As internationals, we come as spanners in the corpse machine. We come as a small chance to free up new possibilities, for resistance and imaginings of a new reality - whatever that will finally be. It means walking with people, listening to them, absorbing their stories and pain, then speaking it out to death-numbed Western audiences. It means accompaniment, riding with ambulances, witnessing atrocity - often with no powers to stop it - staying with the kids in the street when they're fighting back and dying. All the camera-grabbing stuff - the placing of your body between soldiers, guns, and tank-fire - that's minor compared to the living-with, daily, non-spectacular emotional support solidarity is about. An international grassroots presence can also help break down barriers of suspicion and myths of Western populations' acceptance and support of what their nation-states are perpetrating with the help of their taxes and silence. As my Irish friend says, "We go also to show that the West has more to export than just bombs and bloodshed." We go to show that their oppression is linked to ours, that we are fighting our own states as much as they are; and that ultimately, their liberation will be ours too.

I came to the Occupied Palestinian Territories by myself and immediately hooked up with the main coordinating body for international volunteers in Palestine – the International Solidarity Movement. ISM was created to bring internationals into the territories to witness, document, demonstrate, and protect people living under the occupation. This is to be done by exploiting the enduring pathology of white supremacy, wherein a Western life is worth more than that of a Palestinian. Spilt Western blood is a global news story; spilt Palestinian blood is adde, usual, as regular as breathing.

I've been riding with the ambulances of the Jenin Helal Ahmar Falastini (Palestine Red Crescent Society—PRCS) for three weeks now. For all intents and purposes, the Helal is the equivalent of ambulance service in the UK, but smaller, more decentralized, and aims to minimize hospital admissions by carrying out emergency procedures in mobile clinics and Red Crescent Centres. Many of the ambulance drivers and doctors are also highly qualified surgeons and physicians with ample experience and verve in dealing with all types of emergency and chronic cases.

Started up in 1968 when the Palestine National Council issued a mandate to provide social health and welfare services for the Palestinian people, the PRCS relies heavily on medical volunteers – local and international – plus donations for its survival. It represents the largest Arab Red Crescent Society, constituting a network of over 70 hospitals, 300 clinics, and dozens of health and social welfare centres. Since this intifada and the escalation of the occupation, it also occasionally doubles up as a taxi service, fire-engine fleet – when water trucks or fire engines are blocked – and, since the Palestinian Authority cops scattered during the first invasion in March, the local police service.

The Helal centre is basic. The walls are adorned with

glossy shaheed (martyr) posters of Dr Khalil Suliman. Dr Suliman was incinerated in March when a tank fired a shell at the ambulance he was in. The IDF said the ambulance was booby-trapped, stacked with bombs, but everybody in Jenin knows that it was attempting to reach the dying in the refugee camp.

Cream and white marble steps lead through iron doors into a simple reception area, consisting of a grey marble floor, plastic white lattice stools, a cream marble and wood coffee table, an overused payphone, and a simple, bashed up and bandaged phone — the emergency line, which also receives hundreds of hoax calls each day. Volunteers sleep on mattresses on the floor of the office and beds in a dormitory. Mice skip-scuttle across the floor at intervals, and people sit around, tired, trying to keep alert by drinking tiny cups of amber mint tea or thick sweet Arabic coffee. A comfy old ambulance seat rests on the porch. Everyone takes turns answering the emergency phone, and ambulance shifts rotate according to exhaustion levels. The operation runs smoothly and loosely. There are about four ambulances, mostly old 1960s vans with creaky steel door

handles, a driver and passenger seat in front, and a wobbly plastic stool in the middle. The newer model sports sliding doors, three seats in the front and a swifter, smoother ride due to the sophisticated suspension, steering, and gears. The fleet of four serves 200,000 people every night, according to the Red Crescent. Usually though, there's just two in use.

I wandered into the centre one afternoon at 3.30 pm and didn't leave until 8.00 am the next morning. There I met Ashraff, head of the ambulance service volunteers, a wideeyed, animated, irreverent 26-year-old who speaks fluent Ukrainian. Then I was sussed out by a paramedic named Jalaa, a tough, elegant Muslim woman who improved my Palestinian vocabulary in exchange for Polish obscenities.

Our first patient of the night is a pregnant woman. All the pregnant women attended to are either a month or more overdue, or need a caesarean. Our ambulance crew (me, Jalaa, and Ghassan – a nervy ambulance driver and former US resident) has to go to a newly-imposed army checkpoint on the outskirts of Jenin and meet another ambulance carrying the woman. I have to request permission for her to pass the checkpoint and walk with me

>> September 17 >> Activists in Ayvalik-Sarimsakli,
Turkey storm the conference hall where the twelfth
Biotechnology Congress is taking place. Wearing
Frankenstein masks, they hang banners and distribute
leaflets until security forces attack and evict them.
>> September 29 >> Kenyan teachers strike in
opposition to a government housing allowance
initiative, which subsidizes the rent of some teachers

but not others. The strike, which lasts for over a week, ends up with running battles with the police. Meanwhile, Mombasa Council workers start dumping municipal rubbish in the streets to protest against continued non-payment of three month's salaries. The littering protest continues until the Council promises to pay.

>> October >> Hospital workers in Blantyre, Malawi

stage a three week strike over nonpayment of promised wage increases. The central hospital is looted during its shut down, and a large supply of drugs stolen. The strike is resolved when the government agreed to pay interim monthly awards until the wage increases are implemented.

>> October 4-13 >> Massive protests rock the region of occupied Western Sahara and southern Morocco, as

to the other ambulance.

At night the drivers guide the ambulances fluently, slowing just in time to avoid or breach concrete speed bumps, tank-shot trenches, shell-smashed holes, bare end-of-the-tarmac drops and any other Occupation-created hazards. The nights are the hardest. Six military checkpoints ring Jenin. New roadblocks – mini mountains or unexpected valleys – slam up randomly. You never know what might turn up, abort your route and maybe cost a life. And when darkness falls, there's an increase of fear, soldier agitation, and friction between the few Palestinians still moving and the young, edgy troops.

It's dark and balmy on the way there as we wind, with windows down and elbows out, through clear streets lit warm by the lights of garden shisha cafes and grocery stores which double as drop-in centres. The revolving lights splash red over rock-and-rubble side-roads, hillsides, and the wasted outskirts – grey pulverized asphalt, ankle deep, like a moonscape in the dry night. Ghassan tells me. "You know we never used to have this problem with the checkpoints. We used to pass through, they would know us, we would know them. They didn't treat us like they do now."

We approach the checkpoint – a tank and an armoured personnel carrier (APC) – stationed just in front of a broken-through road block. High piles of heavy limestone rubble and dust have been manipulated into a narrow weave-through passage. The air is spiced with the smell of pines, craning from the scrub banks flanking the road.

I walk up to the tank. It and the APC are virtually

invisible, blending into the arid landscape in khaki, encrusted with dust. The smell of the pines makes me feel good, it's like cool caves and frankincense smoke. The tank shines its searchlight squarely onto me. "Shalom," I say, peace, shielding my eyes. I am ordered to go to the APC and am followed by its mounted gun. I have to explain to the APC and unit commander, an olive-skinned, steely-eyed man that the woman in the ambulance 30 feet away from him really is going to have a baby, and yes, it really is an emergency, and could she please pass? He asks me where I'm from, what I'm doing here. I answer and throw the questions back at him. When reminded about the emergency case of the pregnant woman needing to give birth, he flicks his hand as if to say, "Bring her forth." She steps out of the ambulance heavily, supported by her mother, walking gingerly and looking increasingly distraught, as the tank and APC loom closer. The APC gun tracks her. The soldier doesn't take his eyes off her. "Ma-ye, ma-ye," she gasps, water, water. I think she must be thirsty and assure her there's water in the ambulance. She looks feverish and on the verge of collapse, stumbling along, gripping one side of her maroon velvet dress. I take it in my hand and realize it's soaking wet - her waters have broken. The soldier lets us through eventually, after a five minute lecture letting me know that ambulances are regularly used by terrorists to transport weapons and suicide bombers.

Ten minutes later we're back at the same checkpoint. This time it's to bring across a young boy with a metal spike lodged in his throat. Everything has to come out of the ambulance. Ghassan lifts out crutches, plastic blankets, luminous foam neck braces, cotton gauze packets. We're eventually allowed through to bring him further down the road to us. Coming back with him we have to stop and all pile out while they search the ambulance again.

Next it's a boy suffering from a scorpion bite to his knee. Same checkpoint. The soldiers are getting angry now; it's the third time in 40 minutes that they've seen us. Two search the ambulance. The kid looks petrified. This time they say they're holding back his uncle. It's taking them ages to check his ID. My passport is subjected to extra long scrutiny too. Initially I refuse to let go of it. Me and the commander get into a bit of a mini tug-of-war with it, which ends with him finally gripping it, rock-still, and glaring at me darkly. I let go.

Ghassan says he's going to the hospital with the kid and asks the soldier to let the uncle start walking towards Jenin; he'll be back to pick him up. "If the ID is clear then yes," says the soldier. I say I'm staying with the uncle. "OK," says Ghassan and the ambulance doors slam shut, top lights revolve into life; it speeds off. We watch the tail-lights melt

from red to black. The pine trees emit their heady, sweet, musky scent. The soldiers talk to us until Ghassan returns, then they pass down the uncle's ID card from the APC and we walk rapidly to the ambulance.

Back at the Helal, Ashraff is sitting on an old wicker chair, feet on the edge of the coffee table, tapping his knee and singing a popular Arabic chart-topper. We all sit down, chill out for a bit. He answers a few calls - most of them hoaxes. He's getting restless. "Hey, let me show you a picture," he says, brightly, and bounds off to get it. I doodle new Arabic words in my notebook and listen to the sound of the walkie-talkies crackling out commands. He returns as the phone rings, slaps the photos on the table, and answers it. "'Ello?" They say hello instead of marhaba. I take a look. At first glance I think it's a female patient, badly injured, with a doll by her side. A grown woman lying with a doll, a broken and rather creepy looking, dirt-covered doll. On closer inspection I see that it's a little girl with the top of her head blown off. She must be about six or seven years old. The top of her skull is gone, replaced by just a craggy, diagonal, jagged line sloping down to her right ear. Her

demonstrators converge on town halls in Asrir, Assa, El Layoun, and Smara demanding self-determination and independence of the indigenous people, a release of political prisoners, and an end to repression of the Saharawi people. Meanwhile, in order to expedite the plunder of resources, the Moroccan government illegally grants concessions for off-shore oil exploration on the entire Saharan coast to oil companies from the US, UK,

South Africa, and France (Kerr-McGee, Enterprise Oil, Energy Africa, and TotalFinaElf).

>> October 26 >> In São Paolo, Brazil, police captain Francisco Roher is pied while attempting to present his master's dissertation thesis on human rights, while 150 protesters block the room in which he is meant to present. Captain Roher was commander of the force that violently repressed demonstrations against the FTAA six

months previously. As a result of his command, 100 people were injured, 69 were arrested, 10 were tortured in prison, and one was shot. His dissertation, apparently without intended irony, is on community policing, and explores the difficulty police officers trained during the military dictatorship face under civilian rule.

>> October 30 >> In solidarity with their striking teachers, Nigerian students invade the main highway



mouth is slightly open, a long caked streak of blood stretching out across her cheek, and her eyes are looking slightly down, not bulged in shock, just normal, but slightly forlorn. Her and her mother's clothing are drenched and charred dark black-red with blood. "They were shot by a tank," says Ashraff, slamming the phone down, tapping his thigh, looking about. "They were out picking olives."

Abdel Rahim walks through the door. He's tall and skinny with bright black eyes and a small moustache furring his upper lip. He's the shyest but one of the hardest working volunteers at the centre. He got involved after the April invasion, giving up his days and nights, four days in a row sometimes, to drive the endangered. The Israeli Occupation Force (IOF) demolished his house a couple of days ago. I was on shift when we got the call. Abdel's brother was the military head of Jihad Islami in the West Bank. He was a huge, combat-wearing, out-and-out fighter, who walked around the camp armed to the teeth and ready, as many wanted people have to be. He was also incredibly gentle, always stopping to ruffle kids' hair, muck about, make jokes, responding all the way to the greetings and

questions shouted to him. He was eventually captured during the April invasion. Now he's locked up in an Israeli jail, sentenced to hundreds of years.

We had gotten in an ambulance and driven up as close as possible, and then walked, hands up, yards apart, towards the operation. Two white Mohabarat (Israeli M15) jeeps, three ordinary jeeps, a couple of trucks, and about 20 soldiers were at the scene, relaxed, idly watching a military bulldozer claw into Abdel's home. There was no one inside. Most of his stuff was gone. We knew we couldn't stop the demolition itself, but we were concerned about the neighbours, wondering if evacuation procedures had been carried out properly. A few months ago during a home demolition, a woman in a neighbouring house was severely disabled and two children killed.

We all watched as the bulldozer gnashed its way through painted walls. On a wall still standing, a picture of al-Aqsa Mosque still hung, while the floors collapsed from above. We spoke to the commanders about the safety of other residents. Captain Hosney, the "good-cop" counterfoil to the area's insane "bad-cop," Captain Jamal, assured us

into Lagos, blockading the road and bringing rush-hour traffic to a standstill. The professors, who are not being paid and have been on strike for several weeks, reiterate their opposition to the government's position on salary payments and conditions of work.

>> November 6 >> 500,000 people rally in New Delhi, India to protest the World Trade Organization. The Indian Peoples' Campaign Against the WTO calls for a sustained movement to stop the Government from surrendering India's economic sovereignty and destroying the Indian economy and peoples' livelihoods.

- >> November 6-14 >> Global Day of Action, WTO, Doha.
- >> November 8 >> Local government officials and thousands of people stage a mass rally, organized by labour unions, in Ankara, Turkey, protesting the government's subservience to IMF policies.
- >> November 15 >> Students in Ghana siege government buildings and about 300 more blockade the University of Ghana campus in protest against non-existence of loans promised to them for their studies.
- >> November 19 >> More than 2,000 demonstrators converge on three major dams in the southern African nation of Lesotho. Protesting the lack of compensation for property lost to the dams, the people demand a ten

procedures had been followed. The soldiers just eyed us.

The next few nights we were woken up by the sound of building-shaking explosions. I learned to strain my ears for the rushing sound of streaming dust, debris, broken furniture, burst water pipes - the physical after-sigh of a house falling down. And then we'd jump into action, driving to smoking slabs of floor criss-crossed over broken walls, where children sat in saucer-eyed silence, wrapped in blankets, or talking energetically, breathlessly. The Helal guys would check them out, treat them for shock, sometimes take them to the hospital. Sometimes we'd get a call instead. Woman having a breakdown. House demolition about to begin. She'd have to be gently dragged. She'd have to be listened to. Everything she was telling you, how she'd lost her sons, one to a targeted Apache helicopter assassination, the other in jail, and now her home.... You'd have to take it in, over and over and over, how ever many times she repeated it, however many times it got harder and harder to make out.

Back at the Helal, Abdel is sitting on the ambulance seat outside, smoking, staring down. I ask him about his brother. What happened to him? He tells me the story. The April invasion was drawing to an end. After the ambush and killing of 13 soldiers by the resistance, the soldiers went nuts. That's when the demolitions, the bulldozers, and escalation of killing really intensified. His brother and two others were cornered in a wrecked house and had been fighting from within. They had used up all their ammunition. He had nothing left, trapped inside with

nothing but a knife. He and the others had been told by the Israelis that if they didn't surrender, they'd carpetbomb the entire camp. At that point, 350 homes had been levelled and 52 people from the camp had been killed. No relief agency, no ambulances, nothing had been allowed in the camp for ten days. People had bled to death from easily-treatable shrapnel wounds, yards from the local hospital. Tanks had deliberately flattened a wheelchair-bound man into a sheath. They didn't think the Israelis were bluffing, they really thought they would do it. So he gave himself up.

Everyone has a story. I discovered my friend Mahmoud, a driver and medic from Tulkarem was the driver of a famous as-seen-on-TV ambulance, plowed into by a tank. The footage is repeated almost every night on the intifada montage of attack and resistance, all set to a militant fighter hymn background. It follows the Syrian-broadcast Palestinian news. "My wife was so worried about me," he hoots when I ask him what the hell it was like. "It was crazy. She saw it on the TV and she was frantic. I was injured in the head, chest and right shoulder, from shrapnel." The second PCRS ambulance crew were not so lucky. The driver, Ibrahim Mohammad As'ad, was shot in the shoulder. As he tried to escape his ambulance, which was riddled by flying bullets, he was chased by soldiers and fell to the ground. As he attempted to crawl to safety, they ended him, shot him at point-blank range in the head.

The following days would see *Helal* medics Ashraff, Ghassan, and two other medics arrested during a second invasion. Arbitrarily. They were returned to us before the day was out, giving us a grim re-enactment of the incident, mock-stumbling out of the back of the ambulance, blindfolded, with their wrists bound with plastic cord. They didn't get beaten. But the blood keeps flowing. They shot an Irish woman in the leg, deliberately; they shot and killed Ian Hook, the head of the UN in the area; they demolished my family's house in Nablus with dynamite, taking out half the neighbour's home too; they killed some more kids, assassinated some wanted men. The daily gulps of fresh horror sink undigested. Only the winding rides from Jenin to Shuhada at three am, fighter music on the stereo, swapped for Fairouz or Lionel Ritchie when a roadblock looms ahead, wild dogs gnashing and barking up our ambulance, bounding behind us on the bullet torn roads. The checkpoints keep breeding. The pines keep releasing their cool, heady scent. The Helal Ahmar keeps moving....

Ewa Jasiewicz is a 25-year-old Polish Londoner living in Jenin, who has been active in the anticapitalist movement since 1999. Recently she has worked as a freelance interpreter, mainly with Polish Roma refugees, and did the odd bit of radio presenting on Resonance FM with the SlowSmallPeasants.

Resources:

- » International Solidarity Movement website: www.palsolidarity.org
- » News, commentary, and analysis from a Palestinian perspective: www.electronicintifada.net

per cent share of royalties generated from the dams and an inquiry into the dams' impact on local people. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project is the World Bank's largest infrastructure project in sub-Saharan Africa, and is designed to divert water from Lesotho to the urban and industrial Gauteng region of South Africa (including Johannesburg). The first three dams in the plan of six have displaced 27,000 people, only 2,000 of whom have

been resettled.

>> November 21 >> About 30 Okinawa citizens begin a hunger strike to protest the dispatch of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to lend noncombat support to the US military operations in Afghanistan. The hunger strikers hold their protest at an open space in front of the Okinawa prefectural government office in Naha.

>> November 21 >> Angry protesters storm the Buenos Aires stock exchange after MerVal, the leading stock index, falls more than six per cent, leading to the resignation of a top economic aid to Finance Minister Domingo Cavallo. Trading is halted for 20 minutes as chanting and drumming protesters take control of the exchange.

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