

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI), PO Box 741, Jerusalem 91000  
[www.eappi.org](http://www.eappi.org) [eappi-co@jrol.com](mailto:eappi-co@jrol.com) +972 2 628 9402

## Eight days in the life of Hamam Mohsem

By Jerusalem EAs, 29 December 2008–5 January 2009



*EA Liz Burroughs visiting Hamam at the hospital. Photo: EA Fofolerefo.*

He was on a ventilator in the Intensive Care Unit – a sixteen-year-old boy who only yesterday was revising for a school examination. Now he lay motionless and heavily sedated, his head and face swathed in bandages. The neurosurgeon, a small dynamic lady with steel grey hair, told us that he had undergone a 6½ hour operation to remove three rubber-coated bullets, one from the left side of his face, two from deep inside his brain. Some of his brain tissue was damaged and had to be removed. Half an hour after surgery he was moving, trying to remove one of the tubes. But now there were concerns that his brain might be swelling – a not uncommon reaction to injury – so he was to be sedated and ventilated for the next three days.

The doctor was guardedly optimistic that he would survive. However, he had suffered significant damage to the parts of his brain that control movement of the right side of his body, speech and comprehension. He would require lengthy rehabilitation and it was impossible to say at this stage how much recovery would be achieved. It is not easy to be certain exactly what happened on the evening of Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December but what does seem beyond doubt is that this was a peaceful demonstration: a group of women marching to protest against the Israeli air attacks on the Gaza Strip. They walked steadily up the main street towards a waiting line of Israeli soldiers, the three

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*Canister of rubber-coated bullets. Photo: EA Bente Bertheussen.*

teenage boys at their head.

Suddenly a soldier – or maybe more than one – who had been hiding behind a shop stepped out and fired a canister of rubber-coated bullets at the boys. Rubber-coated bullets are in fact small metal balls with a thin covering of rubber: they are designed to cause pain but not to penetrate. About fifteen bullets are stored in a metal canister, which is fired from a gun. The canister bursts open releasing the balls, whilst the canister falls to the ground.

The soldier fired at Hamam less than five metres away (some say as little two metres) and the metal canister hit him on the head, fracturing his skull. He fell to the ground and was dragged to the side of the road by a soldier. An ambulance was called but took 20 minutes to reach the scene. There was then a forty minute delay before the soldiers would allow paramedics to leave the vehicle to tend the boy. Eventually he was taken to the Maqassad Hospital in East Jerusalem. But his parents were not allowed to go with him since they did not have permits to enter East Jerusalem. And that was how we came to be involved: on the Sunday evening we were telephoned by a contact in Abu Dis who told

us what had happened and asked if we would go along to the hospital to find out how the boy was. We saw Hamam several times over the next few days: he remained in a critical condition. We were allowed to read his hospital records – most of which were in English – and learned that the skull fracture and brain damage was more severe than we had originally thought, and that bone fragments as well as bullets had entered his brain. His parents arrived shortly after we did on Monday and we saw them most days – although sometimes they were not permitted to pass through the checkpoint. On two or three occasions the doctors tried to reduce his sedation and wean him off the ventilator but without success. We were all getting anxious.

When we arrived one morning, not having seen him for two days, we were delighted to see how much Hamam had improved. He was propped up in bed, his eyes wide open and breathing on his own. Even better, he was moving his right leg a

little although not his right arm. His neurosurgeon is delighted at his improvement, although she stresses that it is early days yet and things could still go wrong.

This has been a stressful week for everyone involved – Hamam’s family and friends, the hospital staff, and us too. We feel very privileged that we have been able to offer our support at this time. Hamam has a long road ahead of him. He will need a great deal of rehabilitation which we hope will be made available to him, and it will be at least a year before we know how much movement he can regain in his right side and whether or not he will regain his speech and comprehension how much speech and cognition he will have. But he has come a long way in eight days. As to the incident in which he was wounded, we believe that it was an abuse of his human rights.

*[The Jerusalem EAs continued visiting Hamam until they handed over to Group 30 in the beginning of February. Hamam was later moved to a rehabilitation centre in Beit Jala.]*

## The war on Gaza is felt everywhere

By Hebron EAs (5 January 2009)

No question – while our mind tells us that there are quite a few kilometers between us and Gaza, the traces of the war are clearly visible in Hebron. Hardly anyone does not have family or friends living there, and even if they do not, they still suffer with the Gazans as if they were their own brothers and sisters. Students tell us how hard it was for them to concentrate on their exams for the last two weeks, and a few of them cannot keep back their tears. Helplessly, in the midst of discussing, we often fall silent, together with them.

When we visited the al-Aroub refugee camp last Sunday, people asked us what we thought – “as internationals”. Some of the older refugees, who had actually lived through many a war since they first fled in 1948, lamented that the latest attack on Gaza made them re-live every details of the wars. Some said: “it is all the same, nothing new.” In the city centre of Bab a-Sawiya, angry youngsters have been gathering to have a go at Israeli soldiers. Palestinian military and police have had their hands full trying to keep the situation under control. The first few days the IDF replied with tear gas, sound bombs, grenades and

even bullets against the Palestinian forces who tried to clean up. Some observers said it was just a matter of time before fed-up Palestinian soldiers fired back.

The Cordoba school has had short days. Principal Reem nevertheless keeps opening the school in the mornings and children come to school as usual – a brave and resilient act to keep routine as normal as possible. But then they have been let out early, before the young men begin throwing stones at the Israeli soldiers. When we showed up to do the school run in the morning, the area in front of the checkpoint was covered in rocks and grenade splinters.

*Teacher demonstrating against the war on Gaza. 13.01.09. Photo: EA Gosia Juszcak.*



## Wishes for the New Year

By Jayyous EAs (8 January 2009)

At our second English conversation class with students from Al Quds Open University in Qalqiliya, we spoke about wishes for the New Year. Starting with some personal ones we quickly arrived at a main, basic wish – peace! Three boys explained that they liked the thought of everybody being equal to each other. For example, during Ramadan, all differences, be it societal or personal, disappear as the people who have more

## Living in the shadow of the south gate

By Jayyous EA (10 January 2009)

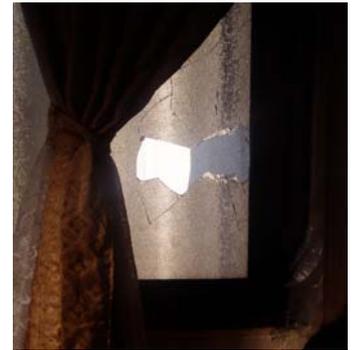
It is Saturday and so the machinery of occupation, hydraulic excavators, multi terrain loaders and compactors, destroyers and usurpers, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking and burning their way through the land to clear the area, are quiet and still. If I close my eyes to shut out the separation barrier it is easy to imagine the landscape restored to its former glory before the barrier was completed in 2003. The image is beautiful but makes the pain of occupation all the more difficult to bear.

This scene is far removed from that of yesterday, Friday, when the community practiced their right to resist the occupation of their land and to protest about the ongoing war in Gaza. Demonstrations have been taking place every Friday since the beginning of November. The protestors gather in the centre of the village and make their way towards the south gate. The Israeli army is always present and ready to react. Last Friday however, the army employed new tactics to disperse the crowds. Dressed in civilian clothes and hiding in the olive groves, the soldiers surprised the crowd by opening fire using live rounds of ammunition without warning. The sound of their weaponry was controlled by silencers. Three people were injured immediately and taken to hospital for medical attention. The clashes between the army and demonstrators continued until nearly 6pm, exhausting the people, damaging their homes and bestowing fear and terror on the families and homes of the people at the south of the village.

A family of eight, the mother and father and six children from eight to twenty years, are confined to their home each Friday. The father has a heart

take care of the ones who have less.

“But shouldn’t this equality and sharing extend beyond this month a year?” we asked. “For sure!” they said, “This is our basic belief, the basic belief of Islam, and has to be practiced in general, in daily life.” While listening to those three young men, speaking calmly about values that are important for them, about their understanding of how people should treat each other, we saw three young men giving reason to the hope that one day there might be peace...



*One of the broken windows in the house near Jayyous' south gate. Photo: EA Ingrid Colvin.*

condition and each week brings new possibilities of it being aggravated by the tear gas that inevitably comes into their house. Last Friday, three windows were broken by the army's rubber-coated bullets. “Yesterday we didn't study, we didn't eat or play – we were just watching from the window.” The daughter had a college exam on Saturday and was unable to study, her education affected by the occupation. Being so close to the south gate, the family home becomes a place for people to gather, take shelter, take photographs, and for the injured to be treated. The army accuses the family of providing sanctuary to the people participating in the demonstrations and of sheltering young people who the army blames for throwing stones and so they come frequently to search the house. The father explains “all of this is happening around us and it makes us tired and worried, we think about it all of the time.”

At last week's demonstration, hundreds of chickens belonging to one farmer were killed from the tear gas. Those organising the demonstration recognise the price that the people living in the south pay and have offered to support them with repairs to damaged property. When we ask the father what we can do to limit the effects of the army's response he tells us, “They always come here first because we are the first house; you can have a great effect by being here. Here my family is under occupation every day, you can tell people about this, tell your governments and ask them to talk with Israel and make them stop.”

## “People are dying in Gaza and the whole world is watching”

By Tulkarem EAs (11 January 2009)



*Women's demonstration in Tulkarem (11 January 2009).  
Photo: EA Pauliina Mäkinen.*

The war in Gaza has caused hundreds of demonstrations to be organised in the West Bank. The demonstrations have been the main outlet for Palestinians to vent sadness, anger and other emotions after watching the horrors of Gaza unfold on television. The purposes of the demonstrations were clear: the Palestinian people wanted to protest against the war and also to show the unity of the Palestinian people.

The Tulkarem Team attended three

## A quiet weekend in Susiya

By Hebron EA (11 January 2009)

It's Friday afternoon and we are leaving for Susiya, a little village in the South Hebron Hills where the inhabitants live in tents very close to a settlement with the same name. After half an hour in the "servis", we arrive in Yatta, the closest town to Susiya. In Yatta, Nasser, an inhabitant of Susiya, picks us up to take us for the last part of our way in his car. The car is jumping forward, slowly, on a road that I wouldn't really call a road. It's only sand and rocks.

After a long dinner with bread, zatar and olive oil and a lot of tea in the kitchen tent together with one of the elderly men, we walk over to the village's TV room, which is also used as our "international" tent. At 9pm, we fall asleep listening to the sounds of sheep, donkeys, hens, dogs and cats plus a few cars passing on the way to the settlement, about a kilometre away.

In the morning, we wake up at 6am, when all the animals start making their noises again. We get up and the sun is rising over the hills and everything is beautiful... Except for a big Israeli settlement that destroys the view and makes the life in the village hard because of the harassments from the settlers

demonstrations which were organised in Tulkarem. The first demonstration was held by Dar Qandil (a cultural centre), the second by the medical personnel of the Red Crescent and the local hospitals. The third one was organised by the women of Tulkarem, who were joined by many school children, as well as the Governor who said that "people are dying in Gaza and the whole world is watching." It was great to see and be a part of the empowerment of women in the patriarchal society of the West Bank. During the women's demonstration, we had a chance to talk one of the demonstrators. She clearly expressed that she did not believe in demonstrations but also said that protesting in this way was the only option people had in these times. She told us that, even in these difficult circumstances, she believes in humanity and she still has hope for the future. It felt good to hear a Palestinian woman, whose spirit has not been broken, talk about her hope, in the face of all the hopelessness and helplessness we felt due to the war in Gaza.



*Sunrise over Susiya. Photo: EA Gosia Juszczak.*

towards the people of the village. On another hill there is a settlement outpost and a military base. And then there is the settler road... I get very upset when I see the settler road. It is for settlers only and is a straight and paved road all the way to Yatta. Palestinians are not allowed to use that road and have to drive their cars more or less on the mountain and take a much longer route. The weekend was very quiet in Susiya and we travelled back to Hebron, trying to remember only the beautiful Susiyan sunrise.

## Fine Palestinian hospitality in a tent

By Tulkarem EAs (12 January 2009)

On 30 December, we travelled to Jbarah, one of the villages in the Seam Zone between the Green Line and the Separation Wall. This day, we engaged the assistance of a local contact to accompany us and serve as translator for a visit to the Iraki family. We passed through the Jbarah checkpoint (CP), unfettered, although the soldiers did ask to see our passports and recorded the numbers and our names. We explained to them that our contact person was our translator and they also let her pass. She was surprised and pleased to be visiting Jbarah for the very first time.

Once through the CP and on our way to the Iraki family house, we were sidetracked and summoned by two young men who live in a tent in a field not far from the road. The tent consists of a series of tarps, blankets and plastic covers with some support beams holding up the structure. They built a fire in a bathtub, which served as their fire pit. They welcomed us, put on the kettle and made us a cup of tea. They had fashioned rather crude cupboards in a corner of the tent, had mattresses on the dirt for sleeping and the stuffing of a decrepit couch was used to start the fire.

We learned that the two men were cousins in their early twenties and had lived in this accommodation for six years (since the separation wall was built). They rented the field from a farmer, lived there and grew sage to sell in Israel. Any profits they made

*EAs  
Pauliina,  
Anna and  
Milena at  
the tent in  
Jbarah.*



went to support their families. They told us that the Israeli army had destroyed their tent on at least one occasion but for the most part, they were left alone. One of them had burned a heart into the side of the tent as a reminder of a girlfriend he once had. They said they were very happy to live a simple lifestyle. They also seemed blissfully unaware of what was transpiring between Palestine and Israel with no access to the news or the world outside Jbarah.

On our return to the CP after visiting the Iraki family, the two men ran out to the road with five large bags of sage to give to us. This is the amazing Palestinian hospitality that we encounter almost daily as we attend to our business.



*EA Susan Palmi  
inside the tent.*

## An encounter at Kafriat checkpoint

By Tulkarem EA



*Kafriat checkpoint. The Iraki family's house is on the left hand side.  
Photo: EA Milena Aviram.*

One day, an Israeli woman who was in touch with a former Tulkarem team called and asked me to tell my team and all our contacts that there are Israelis that care about the situation of Palestinians and are against the occupation. We set up a meeting with her at Kafriat checkpoint, which leads from the West Bank to Israel. The Israeli woman stood on the Israeli side and we stood on the Palestinian side together with a

local contact, and neither of us could cross. Between us was a fence.

The meeting started in a very particular manner, as there were members of the Iraki family – an elderly man, his wife and two teenage girls – who wanted to cross the checkpoint to get to their house in Jbarah. The soldiers did not want to let the family pass, so our local contact and the Israeli woman intervened, saying that “the sky will not fall down” if he lets the family pass and that this Palestinian couple could be the soldier’s grandparents. After checking with their commander a second time, the soldiers finally let the family pass.

It was a moving experience to see the Israeli woman and our Palestinian contact successfully work together to make the soldiers open the checkpoint to allow the family to pass.

## Right to Education

By Tulkarem EA (13 January 2009)

We monitored Beit Iba checkpoint (CP) on a Thursday afternoon in December. There were long queues and delays as students from the An Najah University in Nablus returned home to their towns and villages. When the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) imposed a closure, there was heightened tension among the waiting crowd. I stood with a group of female students and for the first time heard of the many problems that students face at CPs, such as delays in getting to university on time or returning home, arbitrary waiting in the holding pen, soldiers kicking students and detention if found walking cross country to avoid CPs. We stood at a two metres distance from a soldier who imposed 'discipline' at gunpoint, and a group of male students indicated that they appreciated our presence. I had a long conversation with Ala' who is pursuing an MA in medical research in Nablus. She was angry and defiant saying that the soldiers were in a bad mood and 'wild'. The students did not believe the reasons and rumours given for the closure such as a bomb, a knife, a blade, but thought that it was a training exercise imposed on them.

I accepted Aala's invitation to visit her department and also arranged to meet with Bissan Ramdan, an active student member of An Najah's 'Right to Education Campaign' (R2EC). She introduced me to a group of students who are also part of the

campaign, which encourages students to record human rights abuses encountered at CPs. R2EC is jointly organised with both Bethlehem and Birzeit universities.

Since 2002, Nablus is surrounded by seven CPs. Sixty percent of the university's 19,000 students come from outside the city, meaning either the daily experience with soldiers at the CPs or the added expense of student accommodation. Some students leave their homes at 4:30am for lectures that start at 9am. A journey from Anabta to Nablus which should take some 30 minutes can now take up to five hours.

The Nablus University 'R2E' campaign has two phases: first to collect and record stories on difficulties encountered by students at CPs, and second to have a counselling clinic on the campus. The clinic will also provide information on human rights issues.



*Scenes from the youth club in Aqraba.*

## The youth club in Aqraba

By Yanoun EAs

The Youth Club in Aqraba is open every Tuesday and Thursday from 2–4pm. Six educated young men and women accompany, teach and involve the young people aged between 9–14 in a range of activities. The programme is varied, consisting of painting, music, drama and theatre, enhancing social skills.

Fifty girls gather in the youth club to play games and have a relaxing and enjoyable time. In the upper part of the building, and sometimes outside, 20–30 boys also meet for a range of activities of interest to them. We believe that the youth club in Aqraba is doing excellent work in extending young people's experiences and encouraging creative activities.



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