

Apartheid Again

I am working for a women's peace group in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we witness, document and publicise human rights abuses and peacefully intervene to prevent them. This blog is a brief account of the things I have seen in the West Bank, more detailed reports on these events can be found on the IWPS web page



THURSDAY, JULY 31, 2008

Doctors pronounce 17 year old boy clinically dead after being shot by soldiers in Ni'lin

Late last night after getting home from Ahmed's funeral, we began to hear reports that another boy had been shot by Israeli soldiers in Ni'lin. This morning, doctors have confirmed that 17 year old Yousef Ahmad Younis Amara, who was shot in the head with 2 rubber coated steel bullets from close range, is now clinically dead. They expect him to survive for just a few more hours.

With tensions running high after Ahmed's funeral yesterday, Israeli soldiers had remained at the entrance to the village. Two hundred boys and young men had gathered on the main street and built barricades to stop the soldiers entering the village. When an Israeli excavator tried to clear the barricades it was met by a hail of stones. In response, 50 Israeli soldiers stormed the village, firing tear gas, sound bombs and rubber bullets at the boys and men who had gathered (when I use the term rubber bullets I should make it clear that they are not just a ball of rubber but a ball of steel coated in a thin layer of rubber).

After the death of Ahmed you would think that the soldiers would refrain from using their weapons or if they really couldn't help themselves they would at least ensure that their actions did not result in death. By the rules of their own army, Israeli soldiers and border police are only supposed to fire ammunition below the waste. The policeman that stood ten metres away from Ahmed had made the decision to fire at his head. You would think the death of a 10 year old child would be so repulsive that the soldiers would not even

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contemplate firing above people's feet yesterday.

But no, in total 3 people were shot in the head last night with rubber coated steel bullets. Yousef was shot twice from close range and in a few hours it seems that he will be dead, like Ahmed, another victim of this brutal occupation.

There was no reason for the Israeli army to be in Ni'lin yesterday. The soldiers knew there would be a reaction to their presence. What group of young men anywhere in the world would not react to soldiers stalking through their village after killing a child? Why could they not just stay away and let the villagers mourn in peace? They knew their would be a confrontation and not one soldier who discharged his weapon yesterday can say he wasn't aware of the consequences.

So in two days, two boys have lost their lives, shot in the head by highly trained military personnel. These were no accidents, this is Israeli policy. This state cannot continue to mask its activities under the cloak of security. These boys did not pose a threat to the state of Israel, they simply asked not to be imprisoned behind a huge concrete wall, where they and their families would have no hope of a future. Taking land from the people you are occupying and transferring your own population to that land is called ethnic cleansing, it is certainly not security or defence.

The longer I stay here the more upset and desperate I feel at the tragedies the Palestinian people have to suffer day after day, while the international community stands by and does nothing. We may think that the support Israel has from countries such as the US and the UK is too great to break, but we cannot ignore what is going on here. Public opinion matters. We only have to look at the role of boycotts and sanctions in bringing down the apartheid regime in South Africa to know that ordinary people can make a difference. While at Ahmed's funeral yesterday I could not help but think of Hector Pieterse, the 12 year old boy who was shot and killed by South African police in the 1976 Soweto Uprising. The image of Hector being carried by another student, as his sister watched in despair, is now a symbol of the horrors of Apartheid South Africa. The death of Ahmed and the imminent death of Yousef are as awful and horrible as Hector's. Let us not look back in thirty, forty or fifty years and see how awful this occupation is, let us realise now and be part of the movement to end it.

Posted by Isabel at 6:12 PM

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