

Letters from Overseas

Lenora Yarkie Writes from Palestine and Israel

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Since February I've been working with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. I've been in Hebron, one of the most contested cities in the West Bank, and one with a past history of violence. When I came here, Israelis told me I was entering "hell." Imagine my surprise when my West Bank neighbours welcomed me into their homes, sat and visited as is proper with a guest, serving tea or Arabic coffee, and not rushing in any way. We Canadians can learn a lot from them.



My team of 4 "EAs" is often on the street with Palestinian children going to and from the Cordoba Elementary School, who must pass by an illegal Israeli settlement in Hebron. In the past Israeli settlers who live in the settlement have physically attacked Palestinian residents of Hebron, including young children who are students at the Cordoba School.

One day during *Pesach* (Passover), a boy of maybe 10 began yelling at me, first in Hebrew then in English. "Go home, get out of here, do you hear me? I said go home. This is my country. You are not welcome here. Leave. Do you hear me?"

I was shocked. He was so close to my face, yelling right at me. I tried to calm him, then realized he was not going to stop. So I ignored him. He moved away. Then came back, "Are you still here? I told you to go, leave. Get out of here. If you don't leave something will happen to you!"

The Israeli soldier posted by the settlement only two metres from us did nothing. I saw him shrug his shoulders and shake his head. Nothing more. As the boy continued, I turned to see children on the stairs not coming down. They were frightened by the boy.

Turning to the soldier, I yelled, "You need to do something. These children are afraid to go home. You must do something!"

At that point an adult settler who was nearby called the boy back. The boy listened, went inside. I turned to the children who were watching wide-eyed, and smiled, telling them it was okay to come down now.

The children went home, the settler boy was gone, I was shaking.

The adult settler who had stopped the situation came over to me explaining that the boy had seen some friends die, that he thinks we internationals are helping only the Palestinians when they need help too. We spoke for five minutes. I was glad to hear a



calm voice which I know does exist but which unfortunately is so rarely heard. We would not change each others minds; we would agree to disagree and part as human beings.

Israeli settlements are illegal according to the 4th Geneva Convention of the United Nations, as the occupying force is not allowed to move a civil population into occupied territory. Israel is a signatory to this convention.

Why is there no peace here? One Israeli woman put it this way: "Yes, I want peace, but real peace." I asked what "real peace:" meant to her.

"Palestinians must leave this land. God gave it to us."



To learn more, visit Lenora's blog at Accompany Me in Palestine (<http://accompanyme.wordpress.com>), or view photos of EAPPI work taken by United Church accompaniers (<http://unitedchurch.smugmug.com/IsraelPalestine>).

Lenora works for The United Church of Canada as an ecumenical accompanier serving on the World Council of Churches/Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) (<http://eappi.oikoumene.org>). The views contained herein are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of her employer (The United Church of Canada) or the WCC. If you would like to publish the information contained here or disseminate it further, please first contact the EAPPI Communications and Advocacy Officer (eappi-co@jrol.com) for permission.

