



The Galilee Society Newsletter

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Terror Attack in Shefa-'Amr: A Community Still in Shock

The northern Israeli Arab town of Shefa-'Amr, home to the Galilee Society, was shaken to its core on the afternoon of August 4th 2005, when 19 year-old Israeli settler and army deserter Eden Natan Zada opened fire on the passengers of bus number 165 in the center of Shefa-'Amr. Four Arab citizens of Israel, Ms. Hazar Turki, 23, her sister Ms. Dina Turki, 21, Mr. Nader Hayek, 55, and Mr. Michel Bahouth, 56, were killed and 15 more wounded.



The following day thousands of people reacted to the brutal act of terror by taking to the normally quiet streets of Shefa-'Amr and expressing their anger and solidarity with the victims. More than a month after the attack, life in Shefa-'Amr is slowly returning to normal, but the events of August 4th have not been forgotten and many are still angry and shocked.

The Government's failure to recognize those killed as victims of terror, effectively denying their families recognition and full compensation, has provided an additional source of frustration. This decision is a sign of the increasing racism directed against the Arab community in Israel, and in particular of the legitimacy given to this by the biased judicial system, as well as by some ministers and mainstream politicians. The murder of innocent Palestinian citizens of Israel can be seen as a direct result of such institutionalized racism, of the delegitimization of their citizenship as well as the ongoing incitement directed against them. Such discrimination of the Arab population inside Israel is in turn a consequence of the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories.

We at the Galilee Society continue to struggle for the equal rights of all citizens of Israel and we condemn all forms of discrimination as well as the terror and violence the existing prejudice continues to generate.

Settlement Continues: From Gaza to the Negev and the Galilee

The disengagement from Gaza has dominated news headlines this summer and Israel has been praised for taking the step to withdraw from the area after nearly 40 years of occupation. However, it is by now widely agreed that the real motivation behind the disengagement was not a wish to end the occupation but rather a concern with demography and a desire to focus settlements in other, more strategic areas.



As Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon himself put it in a speech on August 29th 2005, "we are leaving the Gaza Strip when it is clear to everyone that it

will not be part of the State of Israel in the future, so that we can ensure those areas which have a greater strategic importance for us. The significance of the Disengagement Plan is not only the evacuation of the Gaza Strip – it is also an increased effort to develop the Negev, the Galilee and Greater Jerusalem” .

The Arab minority in Israel today makes up around 20%, or more than 1 million, of the total population in Israel. What is noteworthy however, is that around half of the Arab population in Israel is currently aged 20 or less, and with a birthrate significantly higher than amongst Jewish Israelis, the demographic balance in the country is set to see a dramatic change in the near future. There are two regions that are of particular demographic concern to Israel: the Galilee in the north, which has a high ratio of Arab inhabitants, and the Negev in the south, where most of the country's Bedouins reside. These are also the two regions in which the Galilee Society's work is focused.

Israel's response to the perceived demographic threat has therefore been to encourage Jewish settlement in these two regions, the least prosperous in the country. This has been the government's policy throughout Ariel Sharon's term as prime minister, but what better opportunity to accelerate the process of “developing” the Galilee and the Negev than the return of some 8000 Gaza and West Bank settlers. In order to encourage the new arrivals from Gaza to settle in these so called priority areas the Government is willing to pay the settlers a grant of 135,000 NIS (\$29,000) per person, in addition to the compensation they already receive for leaving their homes behind in Gaza.

This decision to build new settlements in predominantly Arab areas seems to be part of a more general land and planning policy that aims to disconnect Arab communities from each other and break up the unity of the Arab population. Adding insult to the injury is the disparity in standards of living between the Arab and Jewish communities.

In the Negev this is particularly apparent, given that around half of the Bedouins live in villages unrecognized by the state and therefore lacking basic facilities such as water, electricity, health care and schools. The Galilee Society has a long history of working with the Bedouin population, trying to improve their situation in terms of receiving better health care and other basic services and infrastructure. Nevertheless, building and working the land of the Negev is judged illegal as Israel continues its attempt to force the Bedouin population to move into the seven government-planned recognized townships.

Regarding plans to build a settlement for up to 400 families in the Negev on the other hand, Housing Ministry Director General Shmuel Abuhav is quoted in the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz as saying that the suggested locations in the Negev were chosen “because they would permit a large number of families to conduct a lifestyle similar to the one they led in Gush Katif, since they are all close to jobs and agricultural land” . Jewish settlers are thus given land and all the facilities desired to settle this land, while the original inhabitants of the region are prevented from continuing their traditional nomadic way of life.

<http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/PMSpeaks/speech290805.htm>
<http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/spages/623097.html>

Raising AIDS Awareness among the Palestinian Minority in Israel

“Through this program, the Galilee Society is taking a new, progressive approach on the issue of sexual health education and HIV/AIDS in the Arab community in Israel”

- Dr. Cameel Makhoul - Director of the Galilee Society's Health Rights Center for the Palestinian Minority in Israel



Many stereotypes and taboos surround the issue of sexually transmitted disease, and HIV/AIDS in particular, among the traditional Arab population of Israel. As a consequence young members of the community are not educated on important issues of sexual health and therefore not conscious of the dangers they might be exposing themselves and others to.

Because of the stigma associated with the disease and the consequent lack of information, few HIV carriers are actually aware of their condition until they develop the symptoms of AIDS. On the other hand, those who do find out they are carrying the virus at an early stage, find the risk of social seclusion to be such that they are rarely willing to speak out about it. This means, first of all, that the potential partners of HIV carriers will continue to be put at risk, while at the same time those infected are also denied access to antiviral drugs that could significantly extend and improve their lives.

In an attempt to remedy this situation, the Galilee Society has initiated an AIDS Awareness Program, aimed at better informing the Arab minority in Israel on issues of sexual health and encouraging a more progressive and open attitude towards HIV/AIDS. The program is still at an early stage, but the director of the organization's Health Rights Center, Dr. Cameel Makhoul, is positive about the development of the project so far. “The process is not easy”, he says, “but it is going well.”

At this stage of the program participants are being chosen for the project's Health Education Training Course. Dealing with sensitive subjects such as sexual health and AIDS, the Galilee Society has developed a course that is “specific but diverse”, as Dr. Makhoul puts it. Those chosen to be Health Educators for the AIDS Awareness Program will attend lectures and workshops on a wide range of topics, from general health dangers and children's accidents to the risks and consequences of drug abuse and sexual health awareness. The skills and knowledge they gain through this training are then applied through activities organized for other young Arab citizens, in schools and in the community. HIV/AIDS awareness is the focal point of these activities, however raising the issue as one of many health concerns makes a program such as this more socially acceptable.

The course is taking place in two Arab towns, Shefa-'Amr and Nazareth, in the Galilee region of northern Israel. In Shefa-'Amr, 17 young high school students have been selected to take part in the Training Course and they all show great enthusiasm to work on the project. The group that is being recruited in Nazareth, on the other hand, faces more social pressure and is more reluctant, seeing as they are all former drug abusers. Dr. Makhoul nevertheless points out that taking part in a project such as this, spreading HIV and general health awareness among their peers, might actually give them a chance to be accepted back into the community and to rid themselves of some of the social stigma they carry as former drug addicts.

In addition to the Training Course, the Galilee Society is in the process of preparing a booklet on AIDS awareness. This is to be printed in Arabic and widely distributed, and will also be available free of charge on the Galilee Society's website. Such easily accessible, confidential information about HIV/AIDS is crucial to raising awareness and changing a situation where social taboo means the disease remains hidden and therefore more dangerous.

The Galilee Society Participates in DPI/NGO Conference at the United Nations

On September 7-9th 2005 Felice Nassar, Director of the Resource Development Department at the Galilee Society, took part in the Annual DPI/NGO Conference at the United Nations in New York. Organised for the 58th time, this conference invites NGOs associated with DPI (Department of Public Information) from all over the world for a yearly meeting. This year's conference, entitled Our Challenge: Voices for Peace, Partnerships and Renewal, was unique in that it was held only a week before the 2005 World Summit at the UN, one of the largest gatherings of heads of state and government ever to take place in recent history.



As a precursor to the 2005 World Summit, one of the main issues considered during the DPI/NGO Conference was the process of implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). More than 2,500 civil society representatives from all over the world were thus given the opportunity to recount their experience, and voice their concerns over the implementation process, also one of the main topics to be discussed at the World Summit.

Due to be realized by 2015, the MDGs include pledges to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development. As the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, pointed out at the closing session of the conference, NGOs are crucial partners in implementing the MDGs, and play an important role in monitoring the results of the World Summit and evaluating the extent of reforms made.

Another topic that was widely discussed during the conference was the importance of partnerships for development. Governments alone cannot bring about social change, but they need the cooperation of various civil society organizations as well as global corporations. In the Arab world in particular however, as Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, pointed out, the foundation for fruitful partnerships is often weak. Speaking on the topic In Larger Freedom: The Challenge of Partnerships, Mr. Samad emphasized that development in the Arab world operates within a highly politicized environment where threats of conflict, terrorism and occupation are ever-present. One result of this is that Arab states lack a concrete agenda for development, which often comes second to political independence. In addition, there are cultural challenges, noted Samad, in that many civil society organizations in the Arab world tend to remain purely at the level of social welfare, lacking any significant policy influence. Empowerment of civil society organizations is a must, by ensuring an adequate legal framework to influence policy and encourage democratic development.

A similar prioritization of the political can be seen in the context of Israel, largely due to the highly charged situation of conflict and this makes implementing development goals very challenging. The Galilee Society has nevertheless built many successful partnerships on both NGO, governmental and private levels, and continues working towards a number of the MDGs – in particular improving maternal health and ensuring environmental sustainability. The security situation, another important question considered at the conference, nevertheless continues to pose an obstacle to development, in Israel, the Middle East as well as many countries worldwide. But, as this notable conference concluded, there is no development without security, and no security without development.

R&D Center Scientists Meet with Initiator of USAID/MERC Program

On Monday August 15th, Dr. Isam Sabbah, Scientific Director, and Dr. Sobhi Basheer, Senior Researcher, from the Galilee Society R&D Center participated in a meeting with Congressman Henry A. Waxman at the American Cultural Center in Jerusalem.



The meeting involved several different organizations presenting their Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) projects to the Congressman, who in 1979 sponsored the legislation that created the MERC Program. Having been closely connected to the program from the beginning, Congressman Waxman now wanted to follow up on the progress of the projects and evaluate the program itself more closely.

The R&D Center representatives took this opportunity to present to the Congressman and the other participants the recently completed project on "Reducing the Environmental Impact of Olive Mill Wastewater in the Middle East", a collaboration between organizations from Israel, the Palestinian Territories and Jordan. (For a full article on this project and its regional importance, see Issue 15 of the Galilee Society newsletter). Other presentations detailed various projects of Israeli organizations in cooperation with partners from Morocco, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority. At the end of the meeting an open discussion was held about the general impact and benefits the MERC program has in the region.

Overall the representatives of the Galilee Society R&D Center felt the meeting had been interesting and fruitful. As Dr. Sabbah put it, "Congressman Waxman seemed very happy with what had been done and he was keen to increase his support for the program in the future".

Other News in Brief and How to Donate

PROFESSOR REBHUN PAYS A VISIT TO THE R&D CENTER

On July 28th the scientists of the R&D Center were delighted to receive a visit from Menahem Rebhun, Professor Emeritus from the Beatrice Sensibar Chair of Environmental Engineering at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, Israel.



Professor Rebhun is one of the pioneers in the field of environmental engineering, particularly concerning water and wastewater treatment issues, and has held a number of influential positions and headed several governmental committees in Israel. This visit to the Galilee Society R&D Center was his first and it included a tour to the wastewater treatment pilot site set up in Sakhnin as part of the MERC funded project "Appropriate Technology for Wastewater Treatment and Reuse in Rural Middle East Areas".

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CENTER CONTINUES ITS CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE INCINERATORS AND MEKOROT WATER COMPANY

Shadi Azzam, the lawyer of the Galilee Society's Environmental Justice Center, recently sent a letter to the Israeli Ministry of the Environment and the Interior Ministry, demanding they stop the plans to build a solid-waste incinerator in the Arab town of Shefa-'Amr. The letter specified the various health and environmental hazards the building of such an incinerator involves, and also pointed out the procedural mismanagements involved in the planning process. The next step in the dispute over the incinerator in Shefa-'Amr is a public campaign, involving a demonstration in front of the Committee for Planning and Building in Nazareth and a Study Day aimed at raising public awareness on the issue.

Concerning the incinerator in Ibillin, following the Haifa Administrative Court rejection of the previous petition, the Galilee Society has taken steps to prepare for further action. The Environmental Justice Center has organized meetings with the local authorities and other organizations to discuss a possible petition to the High Court of Justice or legal action against the owners and operators of the incinerator. At the request of the Environmental Justice Center an invitation was also sent out from Makom, a mediation center, for negotiating and solving the dispute between the owners of the incinerator on the one hand, and the local authorities and health and environmental groups on the other.

The department also recently sent a pre-petition letter to the Government General Attorney requesting him to order Mekorot, the national water company, to put an end to its policy of cutting off water supplies of whole Arab towns. The company uses this as a means of collecting debts from the local authorities, however, as the Galilee Society lawyer Shadi Azzam pointed out in his letter, this policy fails to respect the rights of the Arab citizens affected and furthermore poses other serious health and environmental risks.

INTERN AT THE GALILEE SOCIETY R&D CENTER PRESENTS THE ORGANIZATION TO THE AUSTRIAN EMBASSY

Earlier this month, Markus Ortner, an Austrian intern at the R&D Center, participated in a meeting at his country's embassy in Tel Aviv. The recently appointed Cultural Attache at the Austrian Embassy in Israel arranged the meeting in an attempt to bring all Austrian volunteers in Israel together to meet and present their organizations.

Markus Ortner thus gave a brief presentation about the different departments of the Galilee Society and about his own work at the R&D Center. He was the only participant working for an Arab organization in Israel and the Cultural Attache and the other volunteers were very interested in his work and in the Galilee Society.

Unfortunately the Ambassador himself could not be present at the meeting since he had to return to Austria on an urgent matter. However, Markus Ortner invited him to visit the Galilee Society at a later date.

ACSUR LAS SEGOVIAS, MAJOR DONOR TO THE GALILEE SOCIETY'S NAQAB PROGRAM, SENDS DELEGATION FROM MADRID

On September 14th, 2005, the Galilee Society had a meeting with ACSUR, its major donor for the Naqab program. Attending were the Director of ACSUR, José Moisés Martín Carretero, together with Asier Rodríguez Villa, Project Manager, and Magali Thill, Country Representative for Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel. The meeting took place in the Galilee Society's Naqab office in Beer ElSabe', and included a tour of some of the unrecognized villages and Ramat Hovav, the highly polluted petro-chemical and dumping site for toxic waste. The site is located less than 2km away from the unrecognized village Wadi el Na'am, where Bedouin families suffer major adverse health and environmental effects of the pollution.

ACSUR, a Spanish NGO, and its funder, the Spanish Corporation, is supporting a 3-year Galilee Society program in the Naqab, focusing on early childhood education and mother and child health. Although ACSUR visits the program on a monthly basis, this was the first high-level visit for some time. Having almost completed the first year of the program, the Galilee Society gave the ACSUR delegation a comprehensive update on achievements and progress. They, in turn, expressed their satisfaction with and appreciation of the Galilee Society's work with the Bedouins of the unrecognized villages.

DONATE

Help achieve equitable health, environmental, and socio-economic conditions and development opportunities for Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel by supporting the Galilee Society's work.

How To Donate to the Galilee Society

Tax-Exempt Donations

In order to facilitate giving, the Galilee Society is in the process of gaining tax-exempt status in the United States, via its American Friends of the Galilee Society Association. Until the status is granted, tax-exempt donations can be made from the USA, Canada and the UK via the New Israel Fund (NIF). To donate via the NIF, please mark contributions as donor-advised to the Galilee Society and send to:

New Israel Fund
1101 14th Street NW, Sixth Floor
Washington DC 20005-5639
USA
T: 202-842-0900

New Israel Fund of Canada
801 Eglinton Ave. West
Suite 401
Toronto, Ontario M5N 1E3
Canada
T: 416-781-4322
F: 416-781-7443

New Israel Fund of G.B.
25-26 Enford Street
London W1H 1DW
Great Britain
T: 020-7724-2266
F: 020-7724-2299

Direct Donations

To donate to the Galilee Society directly, please send checks (in any currency) payable to the Galilee Society at:
PO Box 330
Shefa-Amr, 20200
Israel

Alternatively, bank transfers (in any currency) can be made directly to the Galilee Society's bank account. Account Name: The Galilee Society: The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services; Account no. 9800; Bank name and address: Bank Hapoalim, Branch no. 731, Jabour Street, Shefa-Amr 20200, Israel; SWIFT code: POALILIT. Please inform us of your donation at fnassar@gal-soc.org

The Galilee Society - The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services is a leading community-based Arab NGO. The overriding goal of the Galilee Society is the achievement of equitable health and socio-economic conditions for the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

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