

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
October 18, 2012



[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

This week's Middle East Notes focuses on continuing settler violence; the filmed struggle of the West Bank Palestinian village of Bil'in; the pros and cons of the two state solution; Quaker divestment in U.S. companies that provide products to the Israeli military in its occupation of the West Bank; and the role of the international community regarding Israel's persistent occupation of Palestinian territories.

- **October 12 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin:** Olive harvesting by the Palestinians has been interrupted by settler violence; Mitt Romney clarifies his position on the two state solution; and Prime Minister Netanyahu calls for early Israeli elections.
- **The documentary that should make every decent Israeli ashamed:** Gordon Levy of Ha'aretz writes about "Five Broken Cameras," a probing documentary by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi which chronicles the struggle in the Palestinian village of Bil'in.
- **Demise of the racist two-state solution in Palestine:** Haidar Eid maintains in the Palestine Chronicle that the two-state solution under present conditions denies the possibility of real coexistence based on equality. This is because both the Geneva document and the Oslo accords accept the Zionist consensus and, for the first time in the history of the conflict, seek to legitimize Israel as a Jewish state in historic Palestine.
- **U.S. Quakers sell shares over Israel policy concerns:** Rachel Zoll of the Associated Press notes that a firm that manages assets for U.S. Quakers has sold its holdings in three companies after investors raised concerns about their dealings with Israel.
- **Demystifying one-state, acknowledging facts:** Dahlia Scheindlin, writing in +972, believes that the question facing the Israelis is no longer about whether one state should be considered, as there is now only one state which governs over two peoples. The question is which kind of state it will be: the left or the right-wing version.
- **Russell Tribunal on U.S., UN complicity:** Christopher Federici of the Palestine Chronicle reports on the October meeting of the Tribunal which focused on the role of the international community regarding Israel's persistent occupation of Palestinian territories. An articulation of the complicity of the U.S. government and the UN in ongoing violations of international law adds to the existing findings of previous tribunals.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin

October 14, 2012

Beginning of harvest season brings violence: Every autumn, Palestinian farmers harvest olives from the trees in their groves, many of which go back decades. In recent years, these farmers have faced settler violence and intimidation in order to pick their olives, a crop that [brought \\$100 million into the Palestinian economy](#) in 2010 and sustains many families in the West Bank.

According to [Rabbis for Human Rights](#), “Every year at this time Palestinian farmers from a number of villages across the West Bank receive threats to their safety, are denied access to their land or have their olives stolen, their trees poisoned, or even cut down altogether.” Last year, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that over 2,500 olive trees were destroyed in September 2011, and 7,500 throughout 2011.

There were several attacks believed to be carried out by settlers during this first week of the harvest. Human rights groups are monitoring olive groves near Israeli settlements and [documenting attacks by settlers](#). So far, according to B’Tselem: “Between October 7th and 10th, 2012, with the start of the West Bank’s annual olive harvest, B’Tselem has documented five cases of injury to Palestinian farmers and their olive trees in the Ramallah and Nablus regions. In two incidents, settlers attacked farmers picking olives and damaged their yields. In three other cases, olive trees were discovered damaged or with the olives stolen, apparently by settlers.”

In one incident B’Tselem documented, 220 trees were already harvested when farmers arrived to their grove and many of them were damaged. The perpetrators are unknown but B’Tselem points out that the owners of the land cannot reach it without prior coordination with the army because it is so close to an outpost. In al-Mughayir, northeast of Ramallah, a farmer discovered 100 of his trees were damaged; most were cut down at the trunk.

The groups are concerned about the inaction of security forces in the areas when these events occur. In B’Tselem’s roundup of the events, they note: “The direct attacks documented by B’Tselem occurred while members of the security forces were present. All the locations where damage to trees was discovered are familiar to the security forces as areas where Palestinians are subject to repeated harassment by settlers.”

Not only are the attacks not stopped but the criminal investigations rarely find the perpetrator. Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights group focusing on legal action looked at the cases of tree vandalism over the past seven years and [only found one instance of an indictment](#) out of 162 cases. In the report they conclude: “The police’s failure to enforce the law encourages such acts of vandalism, since the perpetrators are not punished.”

Israeli police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said there is an [increased police presence](#) in the West Bank and they are using more technology to stop these crimes.

Further reading:

- Violence [flared up between Israeli forces and Gaza militants](#) as they exchanged fire. Israeli forces conducted strikes against two men they say are responsible for attacks, killing one and later targeted two mosques and a factory that injured five. Israeli military spokeswoman said the buildings were “ Hamas posts ” but did not elaborate. Hamas joined the Islamic Jihad to launch 30 rockets towards Israel that caused property damage but no casualties. Hamas’ inclusion is noteworthy and [Y’net explains why they joined in](#).
- Israeli Ambassador to the UN Ron Prosor sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the president of the Security Council regarding [their failure to condemn the](#)

[rocket fire](#) from Gaza. He cited a double standard after the Security Council condemned Syria hours after a Syrian missile exploded in Turkey last week.

- Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier held captive in the Gaza Strip for over five years, has given his [most detailed interview since his release](#) one year ago in a prisoner exchange.
- Human Rights Watch is [calling on Hamas to make widespread reforms](#) after releasing a report accusing Hamas of arbitrary arrests and executing people over confessions extracted under torture in Gaza.
- Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney gave a [foreign policy speech](#) at the Virginia Military Institute on Monday, October 8 where he [clarified his position](#) on a two-state solution. He said, “Finally, I’ll recommit America to the goal of a democratic, prosperous Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with the Jewish state of Israel.”
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [called for elections as “early as possible,”](#) which analyst said meant they would be held in January, nine months before Netanyahu’s term would be up. He is forecasted to win easily and have a renewed mandate that may help in the face of U.S. pressure to negotiate in a new term or administration. The call for early elections was [not a surprise](#) and widely expected. Read [CMEP’s recap](#) of the Israeli political process from the last time Netanyahu called for early elections before calling them off days later following the formation of a [new coalition](#). The new coalition [only lasted 70 days](#).

2) The documentary that should make every decent Israeli ashamed Gideon Levy, Ha’aretz, October 5, 2012

The soldiers arrive in the dead of night. They kick, they smash, they destroy. They break in, rudely awakening an entire house and its inhabitants, including children and babies. One officer pulls out a detailed document and declares: “This house is declared a ‘closed military zone.’” He reads the order – in Hebrew and in a loud voice – to the sleep-dazed, pajama-clad family.

This young man successfully completed his officers’ training course. Perhaps he even believes, deep down, that someone has to do this dirty work. And he reads out the order solely to justify why the father of the household, Emad Burnat, is forbidden to film the event on his own video camera.

There are no moments of respite or reprieve in the probing documentary by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, “5 Broken Cameras,” which was screened, among other places, at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque last weekend after collecting a number of international prizes and having been shown on Channel 8.

This documentary should make every decent Israeli ashamed of being an Israeli. It should be shown in civics classes and heritage classes. The Israelis should know, at long last, what is being done in their name every day and every night in this ostensible time of no terror. Even in a West Bank village like Bil’in, which has made nonviolence its motto.

The soldiers - the friends of our sons and the sons of our friends - break into homes in order to abduct small children, who may be suspected of throwing stones. There is no other way to

describe this. They also arrest dozens of the organizers of the popular weekly protest at Bil'in. And this happens every night.

I have often been to this village, to its protests and to its funerals. Once or twice I joined the Friday demonstrations against the separation fence that was built on its land to enable Modi'in Ilit and Kiryat Sefer to rise on its olive groves. I have breathed the tear gas and the stinking "skunk" gas. I have seen the rubber bullets that wound and sometimes kill, and the violent behavior of the soldiers and the police toward the demonstrating inhabitants.

Yet nevertheless, what I saw in this film shocked me more than all those hasty visits. The apartment buildings of Modi'in Ilit are swallowing up the village, just like the wall that was built here on their land. The inhabitants decided to embark on a struggle for their property and their existence. With a mixture of naiveté, determination and courage - and, now and then, some exaggerated theatricality - the residents undertake various gimmicks, with the help of a handful of Israeli and international volunteers.

This struggle has even won a partial victory: Only in its wake did the High Court of Justice order the dismantling of the wall and its relocation to a different place. Even the High Court, which usually automatically accepts the positions of the security establishment, understood that a crime was being committed here. Together with Bil'in and, to a large extent, inspired by it, more villages began to conduct a determined popular struggle every Friday - which continues to this day - against the wall, half an hour's drive from our homes.

This documentary proves that, for the locals, the reality of the occupation is that there is no such thing as nonviolent struggle. For the information of those who preach nonviolence (from the Palestinians): The Israel Defense Forces soldiers and the Border Police will ensure that it becomes violent. Just one thrown stone, despite the pleas of the demonstration organizers, will suffice; just one verbal altercation will also suffice to open the most advanced weapons arsenal in the world - to pull the pin, to release the gas, the rubber bullet and the skunk gas, and sometimes the live fire, and to cut off the impossible dream of a nonviolent struggle.

Anyone who watches this film understands that it is very difficult to face the wall, the settlement project and the soldiers - all of which scream "violence" - and remain nonviolent. Nearly impossible.

Five times Burnat's cameras were destroyed. Three times by the soldiers, once in a traffic accident opposite the separation wall, and once by the ultra-Orthodox and violent settlers - the "hilltop youth," who break into homes even when the court prohibits this. "You are not allowed to be here," says an ultra-Orthodox settler to a villager trying to get to his stolen land.

The truth is that Burnat's cameras were damaged many more times; the film depicts only those incidents in which the equipment was rendered totally unusable. The cameras' ruined parts are displayed as evidence.

[Read the entire review on Ha'aretz's website.](#)

3) Demise of the racist two-state solution in Palestine

Haidar Eid, Palestine Chronicle, September 24, 2012

Racism is the belief that a particular race (or religious group) is superior or inferior to another, that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. Racial separatism is the belief, most of the time based on racism, that different races (or religious groups) should remain segregated and apart from one another.

Much has been said and written about the Oslo Accords and the Geneva initiative. The signatories claim that these much debated documents in principle opened up new possibilities for 'cooperation' between what has for so long seemed to be irreconcilable positions. Yasser Abed Rabo and Youssi Beilin, the signatories of the Geneva Initiative, for example, believe that 'the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the establishment of two-states.' And, in what sounds like a warning, the latter adds that the window for a two-state solution will not be available indefinitely and Israel will be forced to deal with the "demographic threat" imposed on it by the Palestinians in historic Palestine.

This article, on the contrary, maintains that the two-state solution under present conditions denies the possibility of real coexistence based on equality. This is because both the Geneva document and the Oslo accords accept the Zionist consensus and, for the first time in the history of the conflict, seek to legitimize Israel as a Jewish state in historic Palestine. In both of these documents, therefore, Israel would appear to have been confirmed as the "state of all the Jews" and never "the state of all of its citizens." The logic of separation implicit in these documents implies some fundamental contradictions and begs certain serious questions.

The Accord and the Initiative have legitimated apartheid. Both documents include a language that is, euphemistically, reminiscent of the series of laws known collectively as the Group Areas Act (GAA) which forced the relocation of millions of non-white South Africans into racially-specific ghettos. It was created to split racial groups up into different residential areas. Like in Apartheid South Africa, where the most developed areas were reserved for the white people, and 84 percent of the available land was granted to the same racial group, who made up only 15 percent of the total population, in Palestine even the 22 percent of the historic land on which an "independent state" is supposed to be declared is, according to the Oslo accords, "disputed." In the South African case, the 16 percent remaining land was then occupied by 80 percent of the population. But contrary to the Palestinian case, that was never given legitimacy by the leadership of the indigenous population!

How can you call for the implementation of Security Council resolutions asserting the right of return of the 4.5 million Palestinian refugees to their lands in Israel, and at the same time maintain the exclusively Jewish nature of the state? To be fair, this contradiction also appears in the literature of the Palestinian Resistance Movement. Both Hamas and the PLO also fail to answer this question. Moreover, how does this solution solve the problem of racism and cultural oppression of the marginalized Palestinian citizens of Israel?

[*Read the entire piece on the Palestine Chronicle website.*](#)

4) U.S. Quakers sell shares over Israel policy concerns

Rachel Zoll, Associated Press, October 3, 2012

Friends Fiduciary Corp., a Philadelphia nonprofit, sold its shares in Caterpillar Inc., Hewlett-Packard Co. and Veolia Environment after a review was requested by the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting. The Michigan Quaker group wanted to avoid investments in companies that provided products to the Israeli military.

Jeffery Perkins, the Friends Fiduciary executive director, said the nonprofit does not comment on its investment decisions. However, he confirmed the contents of a letter he wrote to Ann Arbor Friends last month stating the fund could not determine whether the products Caterpillar and Hewlett-Packard sold to Israel would be considered “weapons components” according to criteria Friends Fiduciary uses for responsible investing.

“In the absence of that information, we chose to sell our holdings based on the peace testimony,” Perkins wrote, citing the core Quaker teaching against the use of weapons. The fund dropped Veolia because of “environmental and social concerns,” Perkins wrote in the letter. Activists protesting Israeli policy in the territories say Veolia holds contracts to transfer trash from Jewish housing settlements in disputed areas. A North American spokesman for Veolia could not be reached for comment.

Caterpillar equipment gained notoriety in March 2003 when an armored bulldozer crushed an American activist, Rachel Corrie, in the southern Gaza Strip while she tried to prevent it from toppling a home. A subsequent military investigation ruled Corrie’s death an accident. Caterpillar spokesman Jim Dugan said in a statement that the company does not equip tractors with armor or sell directly to the Israeli military. Instead, he explained that bulldozers such as the D9 tractor are first traded to the U.S. government and then resold to Israel, among other countries, which can then outfit the bulldozers for their own use.

“As a values-based company, Caterpillar has deep respect and compassion for all persons affected by the political strife in the Middle East and supports a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” Dugan said. “However, we believe it is appropriate for such a resolution to be reached via political and diplomatic channels.”

Friends Fiduciary said it had reviewed Hewlett-Packard’s information technology consulting with the Israeli Navy. A Hewlett-Packard spokeswoman declined to comment Wednesday. Perkins did not release a dollar value for its investments in the three companies. Friends Fiduciary says it manages about \$200 million for nearly 300 Quaker groups.

5) Demystifying one-state, acknowledging facts

Dahlia Scheindlin, +972, October 9, 2012

... In the lead-up to September 2011, the Palestinian state appeared poised to advance towards greater general legitimacy.

Internationally, the political *zeitgeist* was there. The UN has [long acknowledged](#) the Palestinians’ right to self-determination, and Palestine has more formal recognitions of its independence

(declared by the PLO in 1988) than any other un- or under-recognized entity. Like in Kosovo, protracted bilateral negotiations have failed, and unilateral statehood seemed to be the only remaining, if second-best, answer.

And if formal UN support fell short, I believed that even Israel's hard-line, nationalist leaders would increasingly accept that a Palestinian state was in their rational interest – to avoid annexation and integration of millions of Palestinian citizens. Every leader since Rabin, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, has publicly acknowledged the preference for two states. While denying statehood officially and rhetorically, I believed Israel would quietly [cultivate a reality of two separate states](#) – economically, bureaucratically, through increased *de facto* Palestinian control and by boosting the PA.

The PA would then have been motivated to show democratic reforms, redress corruption and generally demonstrate state-worthiness, [like some of the other state-hopeful cases](#). Instead, the opposite has happened. Over the last year, Israel has wielded military, [political and legal](#) power to continue its land grabs in the West Bank. It has entrenched the legal and physical infrastructure of control over area C, ensuring separation of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, and discrimination against latter, who live under military government. Even PA control in area A remains circumscribed by Israeli military law.

These actions have increasingly undermined the PA. In July 2011, Palestinian pollster [Khalil Shikaki told me](#) that for Palestinian people, the UN bid was the PA's last chance. Indeed, one year later, that leadership is insecure and faltering, governing only part of the Palestinian areas, and has hardly made new efforts at democratization. Elections are heard of, but not seen. Anger at corruption and economic hardship sparked the rioting, threatening the PA's relevance altogether.

At present, one sovereign alone actually holds power over the territory from the river to the sea: Israel.

The two populations living under Israeli sovereignty (whether civilian or military sovereignty) have unequal rights, unequal resources, unequal opportunities and unequal realities.

Unable to ignore this situation, many Israeli [analysts](#) and political figures, including committed "two-staters," have increasingly called to acknowledge a one-state reality. They come from both the far and middle left and the right, [including Avraham Burg, and Speaker of the Knesset and Likud stalwart Reuven Rivlin](#). As a very broad characterization, the right-leaning version will curtail Palestinian rights or representation somewhere so that even if Palestinians become a majority, the Jewish state remains and Palestinians will be second class on some level; the left-leaning version will strive for full and equal rights, including political representation and probably in national character and symbols too. Symbolic and political representation, and demographics, is why many (not just right-wingers) worry about the "end of the Jewish state." To put it bluntly: the question is no longer about whether one state should be considered, because if we're counting "states" who control people, it is already a reality. The question is which kind of state it will be: the left or the right wing version.

[Read the entire piece on the +972 website.](#)

6) [Russell Tribunal on Palestine in New York: On U.S., UN complicity](#)

Christopher Federici, Palestine Chronicle, October 10, 2012

On a clear autumn morning in lower Manhattan the 4th Session of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine began amid a surprisingly calm atmosphere, despite lengthy lines weaving across the square in front of Cooper Union's Great Hall.

The timing of this session is critical, as international attention has been focused on Iran's nuclear program for months. If nothing else, this Tribunal serves as a reminder to an American audience of the harsh realities of the Palestinian condition.

Draped in a judicial veneer, successive Tribunals on Palestine have focused on the role of the international community regarding Israel's persistent occupation of Palestinian territories. The New York session's articulation of the complicity of the United States government and the United Nations in ongoing violations of international law adds to the existing findings of Tribunals in Barcelona, London and Cape Town regarding European Union and corporate complicity, as well as the crime of apartheid.

Before a sold-out auditorium, Tribunal coordinator Pierre Galand reaffirmed the formality of the non-binding proceedings with his introductory remarks admonishing the audience to refrain from outbursts or applause. Galand stressed the importance of preventing the "crime of silence" and he noted the "very effectively independent" status of the Russell Tribunal, which relies on a variety of financial donors, including municipalities, individuals and NGOs.

Galand revealed that Leila Shahid, the EU Ambassador from Palestine, had been denied visa entry by the U.S. Embassy in Brussels. I later confirmed that Raji Sourani, founder of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, was also denied a visa by the US authorities in Cairo, adding to the marginalization of Palestinian voices at the Tribunal. Huwaida Arraf, co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement, cancelled due to illness.

However, with the judicial flare of a courtroom environment established, the long anticipated Tribunal was finally in session.

Impassioned Geneva Mayor Remy Pagani applauded members of the jury who have "risked their lives" in opposing fascism, racial inequalities and oppression.

We heard Stéphane Hessel, an energetic survivor of the Buchenwald concentration camp, contributor to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and author of *Indignez-Vous!*, speak eloquently of the privilege of living in a world supposedly governed by liberty and international law. His proclamation that Palestinian society has been "abused, abused and over-abused" for 60 years without representation was a testament to the vital need for sustained citizen mobilization.

[Read the entire report at the Palestine Chronicle website.](#)