

## A Solidarity Tour of Israel-Palestine, 16-26 February 2024

In February, Bruno, K and I (Gordon) were privileged to be able to join a tour of Israel-Palestine which was organised by the German Mennonite Peace Committee (DMFK). We were among a total of eight participants: four Mennonites, two Quakers, a Catholic, and a Muslim. And we came together from Germany, France, Belgium, and the USA.



Two or three of us had met at the Church and Peace conference in Baarlo in October last year. And K and Bruno were encouraged to join the tour by, a member of the board of Church and Peace. This goes to show how valuable Church and Peace is as a European ecumenical peace church network.

Hardly any of us knew each other until most of us met at the Mennonite church in Frankfurt-am-Main before flying to Tel Aviv the following day. But this diverse group of people was united in our faith in the one God (Yahweh/Allah), our desire for a just peace in Palestine-Israel, and our goal: to demonstrate our solidarity with people who are working nonviolently for peace and justice. We were setting out to give people “moral” support, primarily by listening to their stories. And we wanted to learn as much as we could to share with people back home.

During the ten-day tour we visited more than twenty groups and initiatives in Nazareth, Bethlehem (including the nearby “Tent of Nations”), and Jerusalem. I stayed on for an extra three days in order to join my fellow Quaker in visiting the Quaker school in Ramallah and then to take up an invitation to lunch with Jewish friends in a settlement near Bethlehem.

On the way back from Ramallah to Jerusalem Dale and I had a small taste of what Palestinians have to put up with in terms of life being made difficult for them. If you take the main road to Jerusalem and go through the checkpoint at Qalandiya, the distance is only about 17 kilometres. But you may



have to spend hours queueing to get through the checkpoint – not a pleasant prospect at the best of times. So we – in our taxi with an Israeli number-plate – made a detour south in order to drive through a different checkpoint where we didn’t even have to show our passports, let alone get out of the taxi. Traffic slowed us almost to a standstill for much of the journey, however, so it took us two hours to get to Jerusalem. We were thoroughly bored, as you might imagine. But it was really only a minor inconvenience.

If you're a Palestinian living in the West Bank, you probably wouldn't be allowed to travel into Israel at all. Before 7 October you might have had a job in Israel and been allowed to enter Israel to work. But in October the West Bank was virtually sealed off for most of the month, which meant that you would have lost your job. So you now have no job and no income. And no chance of getting a job in the tourist industry, which used to employ large numbers of workers both in Palestine and in Israel. Now there are virtually no tourists, so people working in hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, and souvenir shops, all have no income.

Add to that frequent harassment by armed Israeli settlers, if you're living in Area C, which is under Israeli military control, and frequent incursions of the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) into towns and cities such as Nablus, Jenin, Ramallah, and Hebron, with the purpose of arresting people. If you put up any resistance, you are likely to be shot. Around 400 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since 7 October 2023. It is no wonder that many Palestinians are queueing to join Hamas.

It is a lonely existence being a peacemaker in Palestine or Israel these days. If you live in Israel and speak out against the war in Gaza, you risk losing your job, especially if you work in public service. A member of the Israeli Committee

Against House Demolitions (ICAHN) took us through East Jerusalem, where Palestinian communities are being split up by Israeli settlements. Here was a Jew devoting her life to defending the human rights of Palestinians. Largely ostracised by Israeli society, she told us that she feels lonely. But she clearly wasn't about to give up the struggle. She and others like her deserve all the support and solidarity that we can give.



For many of the people we visited, we were only the second or third group from outside Israel-Palestine to visit since 7 October. Wherever we went, we received a very warm welcome. For a comprehensive illustrated account of our trip, entitled "Growing up like an Olive Tree", go to: <https://israelpalestinesolidarity2024.wordpress.com/>

Our guide, David, is planning to lead further tours in the coming months: 23 May - 3 June; 4-14 June; and 31 October - 11 November. Go to the DMFK website for details: <https://www.dmfk.de/israel-palaestina-reisen-2024/>