



Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center

“⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

2 Corinthians 4: 8-10

It is becoming increasingly hard to hold hope, as these words in Corinthians quickly turn into prayer. How can we hold and hope for peace while we wonder about our abilities to survive?

Violence has continued to grow and fester in the silence and inaction of world governments, who have continued to fail to take meaningful action to address the rising tides of violence through oppressive and western-government supported and funded practices and policies. Our brothers and sisters in Gaza have continued to suffer merciless bombardment, starvation, and devastation as the genocide continues onto its 652nd day, while in the West Bank the reality of violence is ever-growing and realized. Illegal settlers, who for years have been above the law, and protected by the state, have grown more brazen and extreme in their violence against nature, trees, and livestock, the buildings and sites of Palestinian cultural and religious heritage, and against the Palestinian people at large. Our suffering is enormous, our pain deep, and our fears beyond the realms of horror.

Many families, like my own, continue to be deprived from family unification and are forced into choosing loss, both temporary and permanent, of community or family. Our agricultural traditions, with some of our indigenous knowledge, are lost in the continuing land theft, annexation, and settlement expansion. The economic situation is growingly unlivable with over 40% of Bethlehemites officially unemployed, with the real unemployment rates well over 60%. Food insecurity affects over 1/3 of our households, with another 1/3 food insecure. The violence against Gaza and its people, against Tulkarem and Jenin, against Hebron, and against Taybeh, against mosque and church, hospital and school, house and tent all serve to remind us of our deep vulnerability. None of us is safe until we all are. Our health is deteriorating, and our mental well-being and psychological state is worsening at an alarming rate. Palestinian Christians continue to face a silent genocide as dominant narratives intentionally erase us, and our churches and communities continue to be emptied as Palestinians continue to be displaced and are forced to leave by violent coercion and/or circumstance. What good are our old and holy stones to be in isolation, like a museum, without its living counterparts?

As the churches in Taybeh and Gaza continue to be attacked and as the people and our communities continue to be targeted, and the aggressor continues to be emboldened in their violence with full impunity, facing no actionable consequence, we continue to be reminded that our lives continue to be of no consequence to world-governments and their self-serving interests. In these times we also find ourselves asking whether we are next, and whether we are lambs waiting for slaughter. And in these thoughts, too many sever their physical roots, displacing their families and selves in communities whose governments neglect them and their suffering to ensure that their children survive. Our communities change, neighbors are no longer there, and more question whether we are foolish to stay in our ancestral homes. Our proud people turn to institutions and each other within the community to find month's end, as economic life is devastated, and unemployment on the rise. And when speaking to our families and young, we are forced to lie or are forced into alien dreams, as we tell them that better days will come, that hope will prevail, and that a just peace will one day be realized for us all.

Yet, we hold fast still and are held in God's light and believe we will be kept from annihilation. Our presence will not wither. We hold onto faith and hope-hope is our nonviolent struggle which keeps us sane and steadfast, and faith empowers us to continue and is held in God and God's people that they will work for justice, and liberation of all. It is these values which keep us travelling on this less-travelled road, and that will ensure that peace and justice prevails, and that we, the living stones will live on. Liberation is only held sustainably through global justice based in actionable universal human rights and shared collective responsibility.

On an organizational level, we have been deeply affected by the dwindling dollar and poor economic conditions. Inflation is on the rise and our ability to cover our operational costs and staff salaries is weakened, as our cash-out date looms eerily closer. If the situation does not change, we will likely not be able to fulfil all our existing programs. Yet, we are also hopeful, creative, and proactive; Understanding this reality, we now all receive 75% salary, in hopes that we can add one more month at a time to our end-date.

"Ask and you shall receive". And we are asking God and God's people for much these days, but still, we shall not be disappointed.

Thank you again for your work and empathy. We will continue to work for a positive peace, and for better days for us all.

With agape and love,

Zoughbi