

My name is Omar Mansour. I was born at Al-Fara'a Refugee Camp near Jenin. I live at al-Fara'a Refugee Camp. My family were forced to leave their village Um Al-Zeenat near Haifa in 1948. I have been working at the Palestinian Medical Relief Society since 1990. This is a Palestinian civil corporation which was established in 1979 to take care of health, development and building a civil Palestinian community. It makes attempts to consolidate steadfastness of the people and to create a health reality that suites human dignity.

#### - Historical Background of the Palestinian Question

The catastrophe of the Palestinian people began in 1948 when the State of Israel was established and most of the Palestinian people were forced to leave their homeland to become refugees in various parts throughout the world. The second stage of the tragedy started in 1967 when Israel occupied the rest of Palestine including the West Bank and Gaza Strip in addition to the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt.

In 1964, it was realized that the Palestinian people had to resist the occupation by all the necessary means guaranteed by the international laws and regulations. Consequently, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established and the organized Palestinian work started. The PLO was able to gain recognition of most countries of the world and to become a member at the United Nations Organization.

The PLO and its various factions concentrated work outside Palestine. After leaving Lebanon in 1982, the PLO realized that the most effective arena of work was inside the occupied territories.

The Palestinian people used to believe that its Arab surrounding and Arab governments would try to remove the occupation. However, it was found out after many long years that the Palestinian people should gain the initiative. In 1987, the first popular uprising (Intifada) broke out. It was an example of the people non-violent struggle as all the sectors of the Palestinians took part in the struggle against the occupation through peaceful demonstrations, processions, strikes, and boycotting of the occupation's establishments.

This Intifada created a unique case of magnificent international solidarity with the Palestinians and their just cause.

In 1993, the Oslo Agreement was signed between the PLO and the Israeli government. This Agreement did not discuss the roots of the problem. Neither did it discuss the core basic issues of the conflict such as the borders, Jerusalem, colonization, and return of the refugees. Consequently, the conflict broke out again in which we have been living since the year 2000. In the year 2002, Israel started building the racial separation wall to destroy any possibility of establishing an independent Palestinian state that may enjoy supremacy. This wall will confiscate 46 % of the West Bank lands and will separate 16 % of the population. Upon completion, the wall will be 700 kilometers long that will siege the West Bank and isolate Jerusalem. In the residential areas, it will be 8 meters high. In the agricultural and mountainous areas, it consists of a complicated structure of barbed lines with separation areas of 30 - 100 meters on both sides, in addition to control towers every 400 meters, electrified wires, control cameras, and special military passes and tunnels. In order to make links among the ghettos of the West Bank, the occupation forces are constructing 48 tunnels that are fully-controlled by the occupation forces that possess the ability to close them at any time they wish.

In spite of all the decisions of the international legitimacy that state the right of return of the Palestinian refugees to their lands which they were forced to leave in 1948, and the Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 including Jerusalem, and in spite of the verdicts of the Supreme Justice Court in La Hague concerning the racial separation wall, Israel violated all such verdicts and decisions. Israel is still occupying the Palestinian territories, practicing the most hideous measures of suppression and humiliation against the Palestinians.

As for the case of the so-called withdrawal from Gaza Strip, it should be emphasized that it is a huge fallacy. Instead of direct occupation of the land, Israel has replaced that by electronic occupation that enables the occupation forces to control the borders, the crossing points, the air, and the sea. Consequently, Israel is now able to prevent anyone from entering Gaza Strip at any time she wishes and to control the movement of people so that the Gaza Strip has become the largest prison in the whole world.

The Palestinian people is one of the few peoples in the world that are still under occupation and live under the longest sufferings in the modern ages, and under massive dysfunction of power

balances. The Palestinian people is facing a unique racial occupation supported by the hugest power of the world. Therefore, the Palestinian people realizes that without the influence of the international public opinion and the creation of solidarity that would create pressures on the occupation government at all levels, they will not be able to achieve independence. Solidarity with the Palestinians took several forms. During the 1960s till the early 1990s, there had been support of the Palestinian Question by the socialist states. During that period, support used to take official and governmental support which came as a necessity of the cold war. There have been till now several political parties in Europe and the rest of the world that support the right of the Palestinian people to establish its independent state. However, these parties have not been able to influence the official policies of their governments.

When the second Uprising broke out in the year 2000, it was marked with peaceful forms such as demonstrations and processions. However, the massive scale of the Israeli violence created a case of counter-violence. Here, it should be noted that the role of the huge Zionist mass media machine in the world was able to turn black into white by showing as if the Palestinians possess armies and fatal weapons.

The attacks of September, 11<sup>th</sup>. in the United States of America were exploited by Israel which succeeded by the unlimited American support in classifying the Palestinians in the category of the anti-human evil axel.

Solidarity with the Palestinians has started to take various forms of popular support as large groups of solidarity people began to visit occupied Palestine to witness the sufferings of the Palestinians and to participate with them in their resistance against the occupation in non-violent ways.

The international solidarity movement with the Palestinians play a very important struggle, humanitarian and mass media role. These groups come to Palestine from all parts of the globe to eyewitness the daily sufferings of the Palestinians and to uncover the false Israeli point of view which pictures the Israelis as victims of Arab terrorism.

Work has begun with these struggle groups since the outbreak of the second uprising. Scores of solidarity delegations and scores of

humanitarian and struggle activities were carried out especially in the Jenin area which has always suffered a great deal because of the Israeli occupation measures including daily killings, blockade, curfew, land confiscation, and destruction of houses.

It should be noted here that members of international solidarity groups accompany us in our humanitarian and health visits by the ambulances and mobile clinic to the villages which are isolated from the whole world due to the Israeli check points. During such visits, the occupation soldiers try to show false humanitarian appearance in front of the accompanying solidarity members and to facilitate our mission "a matter which we want in fact". Nevertheless, those solidarity members faced huge harassments on several occasions by the occupation soldiers. As soon as those solidarity members would leave the scene, we as Palestinians would face various types of suppression and humiliation.

In addition to facilitating our humanitarian missions, we were able, with the presence of those friends from all over the world, to penetrate the curfew and siege and to reach people at their homes and to deliver drinking water, medications, and children milk to them. More important than anything else, we were able to create a feeling for those besieged people that they were not alone in the world. On the contrary, there were others who supported them.

I still remember that for ten successive days the occupation forces prevented the mass media and the first aid crews from entering the Jenin Refugee Camp which was suffering from a huge humanitarian catastrophe while its inhabitants were under massive operations of killings, and deportations, and its houses were demolished. With the help of our solidarity friends, we were able to enter the narrow alleys of the Camp to provide them with some drinking water and to evacuate some of the casualties. For the inhabitants of the Camp, that action was a great achievement. As workers in the health sector, we could feel some security at our work centers and the places where we would go when there were international solidarity members with us.

Furthermore, the international solidarity members were able in many occasions to protect some houses and facilities from the Israeli destruction. Here, I still remember how more than twenty solidarity members stayed at the Salah Khalaf Youth Center at Al-Fara'a Refugee Camp to protect it from the Israeli aggressions,

and how the residents of the Camp felt some security during the presence of those friends on those hard days.

I have accompanied scores of solidarity delegations and civil corporations from all over the world to the areas of racial separation wall, the Israeli check points, the mourning families, and the demolished facilities to eyewitness the massive volume of sufferings. One day of May 2002, I accompanied an Israeli journalist called Gedon Getay holding the Finnish nationality and an American journalist to an Israeli checkpoint that surrounded the city of Jenin. At one checkpoint that closed Jenin from the western area, we were stopped by the checkpoint soldiers for more than an hour for inspection. After those friends had left Jenin across the Jalameh checkpoint to Israel, I wanted to return home by the ambulance. As we had to cross the same checkpoint, the soldiers realized that we were alone without our guests. There, we faced a long chapter of sufferings, torture, beatings, and humiliation for more than four hours.

Scores of non-violent struggle activities were organized against the racial separation wall in the villages of the Jenin area which are besieged by the wall that confiscates its lands such as Zabouba, Aneen, Taybeh, Toura, Barta'a, and many others. Our solidarity friends were at the front of those activities and they formed human shields for the Palestinians with their naked chests.

One of the most prominent campaigns of solidarity with the Palestinians against the racial separation wall was the Freedom Summer Campaign in the year 2004. The Campaign started with a procession from Zabouba village in the Jenin area along the wall till Jerusalem. Scores of international solidarity members participated in the Campaign which lasted for two weeks. In addition, there was the campaign of the Peace Cycle that started from Britain across Europe till Palestine, which caused a huge media echo.

Several international solidarity members were wounded and many were arrested and deported from Palestine. Here we must remember solemnly the late Rachell Core and Tom Hurndall who fell in defense of peace and justice in Palestine. I will never forget the face of that Israeli soldier who was furious at the demonstration at Aneen village and shouted in my face barking, "But for those who are with you, we would have shot all of you."

Here we must remember with dignity the role of the Israeli movement from Israel itself who oppose the occupation. During many of the activities, they have always been with us at both sides of the wall. Despite their modest size and limited influence on the Israeli community, they have always been against the occupation measures, disclosing and uncovering the occupation measures by all available mass media and legal means. We must remember here those movements such as Doctors' League of Human Rights, Co-existence Movement, Women in Black, Women against Checkpoints, and many others.

Here in Palestine, we believe that the solidarity movement with the Palestinian people is, in fact, self-solidarity against the savage globalization which is led by a group of fanatic politicians especially in the United States of America.

The struggle of the Palestinian people is essentially an extension of the struggle of all those who believe in peace and justice. It is the same battle against racism and discrimination, against exploitation and suppression wherever they exist. I hereby carry a message of gratitude and recognition from my people to all the friends who are in solidarity with the Question of the Palestinian people wherever they are in every part of the world.

Through my activities with the solidarity groups, I would like to record a few notes:

- It is necessary to improve the coordination mechanisms with the local activist groups and to select the addresses in a better way. Sometimes, coordination was carried out with persons or groups who were not qualified enough to reflect a true image of the struggle and reality of the Palestinian people.

- It is extremely necessary to carry out non-violent activities against the occupation. We should not come into the range of suspicion whether by the occupation or certain groups.

- We should not be drawn by political points of view at the Palestinian arena. On the contrary, we should conserve neutrality when dealing with various factions.

- It is necessary to have a clear program and a limited time period that should be known to any solidarity member who would visit the occupied territories.

- It is necessary to continue communications with activists and people after the departure of solidarity members so as to create a state of continuity and so that the Palestinians would feel that there is some work at some place to support their just question.

Our Palestinian people looks with utmost care at the role of the international solidarity movement to support the struggle of our Palestinian people. Palestinians believe that the most important mission of our friends lies in their countries in order to create a state of public opinion that would support the just question of the Palestinian people so as to influence the policies of their governments.

In our opinion, this vital role is still very weak despite the efforts made in this direction.

Mass media activities are extremely important. Unfortunately, the Palestinian mass media are still very weak in transferring an image of the Palestinian question due to the modest capabilities and to the huge size of the world mass media that support Israel.

We believe that we could compensate this shortcoming through international solidarity and not submitting to the Zionist blackmail.

We are completely confident that collective struggle can make the group or the people the sole hero even if they withdraw or achieve an individual victory. Their struggle will be accumulated and they will establish for a popular will that should achieve victory in the long run.

We believe that non-violence is not only related to balance of forces or to the material weakness of the party that resorts to it but also with a close relationship with internal construction. Non-violence is a means of struggle available to the vast majority of people. The Palestinian people is in urgent need of your solidarity since the world has now become a small village that affects and is affected. The absence of justice and peace in Palestine leads to dysfunction in the whole world.