

FOURTH LETTER FROM ROSEMARY IN PALESTINE 01/11/04

This is really going to be a VERY general letter as it covers 3 weeks. A few highlights – or maybe some lowlights!

1. Olive harvest

This is the big event in most villages right now. Olives are the main source of income for all the villages and indeed for the West Bank, either as themselves or processed as olive oil. Two things have added to the usual hard work the harvest involves – it is very labour intensive – the fact that it is Ramadhan, and the fact that in many places Israeli Settlers threaten and physically abuse the olive farmers. The first means that in spite of the heat and the dust – no rain had fallen for over 6 months at the start of the harvesting period – the workers are fasting from both food and drink throughout the hours of daylight. The second has led to the Israeli authorities promising to protect the pickers on certain days. In most places this means trying to get the complete harvest in 3 days rather than the 10 or 12 it usually takes.

Well that is the background. My team – 4 of us – went to help one village for 2 days a couple of weeks ago. We feared the worst – confrontations with settlers, having to call the police etc. The villagers were very nervous and the night we were there soldiers came in and one boy of 16 was shot twice in the leg. In the event the worst we had to contend with was heat and thirst. We were not expert olive pickers even at the end of the day but the families we assisted entertained us to a feast to thank us. Sadly we heard that the day after we left settlers did come and attack some of the villagers, disrupting the harvest and scaring many of them - so much of the crop is still unharvested.

And in other areas the situation is far worse, but I don't have room for that here.

2. Another visit to Asira

I wrote before about the village surrounded by checkpoints. We visited again in order to speak to some of the people most affected and to take photos. We stayed 2 nights and are hoping to produce a longer report so you will be able to read more if you like. Just one point for now – Sammy whose sister lives in Derby - is a student at An Najah University in Nablus and lives in Asira. He was trying to finish his project that week. While we were there he travelled over the mountain, the illicit route, to save money and time he hoped. He was arrested on the way and held for 10 hours and then sent back to Asira. As a result his project was not finished on time. (Students in England think about it!) We hope to see the finished product soon – he is studying architectural engineering. We travelled the "correct" way and it took us nearly 2 hours and the process was tedious and insulting.

3. We have also been on "Retreat". This meant having some time off, staying in a beautiful convent and hearing and experiencing the "other side". We visited a kibbutz and were guests at a Sabbath meal in family homes. I enjoyed the meal and company at it very much. I also swam in the Mediterranean for the first – only(?) - time in my life!

Now back in Nablus trying to give English lessons and to learn a bit of Arabic.

Rosemary Read

01/12/2004

I am currently working as an Ecumenical accompanier serving on the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI). The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the WCC. If you would like to use, publish or disseminate the information further, please first contact the EAPPI Communications Officer (eappi-co@jrol.com) for permission. Thank you.