
AdvocacyNet
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Peace Fellows Find that Palestinians Show Resilience and Courage in Their Darkest Hour

June 20, 2007: Ramallah and Washington, DC: Palestinian civil society has shown resilience, bravery and a deep commitment to human rights during the weeks of political chaos and violence in Gaza and on the West Bank.

This has emerged clearly and often dramatically in the blogs of four AP peace fellows, who are volunteering with civil society organizations, and with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, on the West Bank.

All four fellows witnessed the crisis at close quarters. Eliza Bates (Columbia University), who is volunteering with the Democracy and Workers Rights Center (DWRC), was in downtown Ramallah on Friday when Fatah gunmen began reacting to news of the Hamas take-over in Gaza:

“I stayed at home all day Friday in a state of confusion. We heard intermittent shooting but were unsure whether civil war had broken out or (whether) Palestinian kids were just setting off fireworks (I'll never understand how people in a conflict zone could be so fond of fireworks, but Palestinians love them).

“Other frazzled internationals filled our apartment and we sat together waiting for news. We watched the great American movie Zoolander, added each other to Facebook and Google chat (and) answered each other's cell phones to comfort worried parents.”

Many Palestinian NGOs have offices in Gaza and the West Bank, and were deeply traumatized at the Hamas take-over last Friday. Tatsiana Hulko (Georgetown University) described the mood at her host organization, the Women's Affairs Technical Committees (WATC), when the news came through from Gaza:

“I walked in the office in the middle of a story about one of the (WATC) employees' family, who was evicted out of their apartment in Gaza by Hamas militants last night. The mother with her teenage son were the only ones in the apartment on the 14th floor when Hamas men broke in by exploding both doors. The boy later told her sister on the phone that at least when Israelis break into Palestinian houses they give a 10-minute warning.”

But the fellows also noted that their hosts remained true to their mission during the crisis. WATC was conducting training when news came through on Sunday that two women ministers had been appointed by the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad. “The conference room immediately filled with joyful singing, dancing, and applauding,” reports Ms Hulko.

Even as the crisis began to build, Ms Bates had an “uplifting” meeting in Hebron and met with the Unemployed Worker Federation, which represents 25,000 unemployed workers formerly employed in Israel: “They are funded completely by member contributions and work together to find temporary employment and to help members in need of assistance.”

Amali Tower (Columbia University), who is volunteering with the Alternative Information Center in Beit Saheur, was also struck by the resilience of Palestinians during this latest crisis. The Palestinian center for Human Rights, in Gaza, reported that 67,000 students in Gaza attended their General Certificate of Education exam in the middle of the fighting, showing their deep commitment to education.

“...what many in America don't know is that not every Palestinian stands with Hamas,” reported Ms Tower in her blogs. “Many desire a peaceful solution. Many wish to not live under an illegal occupation. I have traveled to many far-flung places, and met many wonderful people. But, I have never met a more resilient and friendly people than the Palestinians.”

Erin Wroblewski (Georgetown University), who is volunteering with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in East Jerusalem, agreed: “The pictures in international media of masked and heavily armed men roaming the streets coupled with reports that donors are withdrawing aid give the impression that life here has stopped. It has not. With conflict comes resourcefulness and the Middle East is a glowing example.”

* For Tatsiana Hulko’s blog visit: <http://advocacynet.org/author/tatsiana/>

* For the Alternative Information Center’s coverage of the crisis visit: <http://www.alternativenews.org>

* For Erin Wroblewski’s blog visit: <http://advocacynet.org/author/erin/>

* For Eliza Bates’ blog visit: <http://advocacynet.org/author/eliza/>

* For an AP report on human rights in the OPT (February 2007) visit: <http://advocacynet.org/files/839.pdf>

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