



Combatants for Peace: Quarterly Review, April 2010

The first quarter of 2010 finds leaders of Israel and the The Palestinian National Authority encountering difficulty on the international scene. While Netanyahu clashes with Obama, Abbas has challenged Assad at the Arab Leaders conference. In the meantime, development plans in East Jerusalem and the region have been gaining momentum at the expense of local residents. The fight for [Sheikh Jarrah](#) is escalating and gaining awareness, but the struggle on other fronts still doesn't occupy much public concern. Therefore, this newsletter will focus on our activities in the Jerusalem area, but will also cover Nablus; update on the investigation into the death of Abir Aramin; the 'Combatants for Peace' international lecture tour; and the joint memorial service to be held on April 18. We invite you to continue reading about our activities on [our website](#), [Hebrew blog](#) and on [Facebook](#).

Wallaje: A Village in Danger (Again)

On January 8, 2010, members of 'Combatants for Peace' together with 'The Israeli Committee against House Demolitions' and 'Rabbis for Human Rights' set out to support the residents of Wallaje who are in danger of losing their homes. The reason: a new settlement named 'Givat Yael' is to be built on their land, linking the Gilo neighborhood with Mt. Gilo. If the settlement is erected, it would be the second time that residents of the village are ousted from their homes, after losing their original village due to the war in 1948. [Idan Barir](#), a member of C4P, recounts a joint Israeli-Palestinian march, comprised of people who will not give up the prospect for peace:

"I don't understand why you are helping them. Understand, it's us or them", said the imposing security guard posted at the roadblock in front of the Wallaje village. We were waiting for the busses to pick us up after the rally. The guard, who is employed by a private security company whose soldiers/employees man many roadblocks in the West Bank, probably didn't bother to look out from his post up to the hill where we held the demonstration at the intended site of the "Givat Yael" settlement. Had he done so, he would've realized just how erroneous his zero-sum game hypothesis is, and seen the tremendous power in our unity: it's not us or them, but us and them, living together in the same reality and demonstrating side by side, proving that things can be different.



We gathered on the outskirts of Wallaje, on a hill overlooking Jerusalem's southern neighborhoods, the zoo, "Teddy Stadium" and the Malcha Mall. The former vice-chairman of the village's council,

Adnan Al-Atrash, described the relationship that residents of the village have with the municipality of Jerusalem, which controls about half of their territory. They do not pay taxes; there are no schools and the only health services available are in Bethlehem, if you can reach it. The only sign of the municipality of Jerusalem is the tractors that come to level homes that are illegally built. These homes were not built in accordance with the municipal code; however, no such code was ever prepared for the village. In other words, they are homes that the municipality of Jerusalem sees as interfering with the "natural growth" of the settler population, an element which is conspicuously absent from the discussion of Palestinian residents.

We marched together until we reached Ein Yael, at the bottom of the hill, where the intended settlement will seal the noose tied around the Wallaje village, creating a continuous line between Gilo and Mt. Gilo. Uncharacteristically, this settlement will be built at the site of the village itself, in houses presently belonging to the village. If allowed, this act will be the second time that residents of Wallaje will experience an uprooting, the first being after the war in 1948, when they were forced to leave their original village inside the green line and relocate about a kilometer south-east to an area under Jordanian rule. Some of the ruins from the original village still stand on the hill in front of us, where the Jerusalem Zoo now resides. After the Six-Day War, the new village found itself under Israeli rule, which has lasted to this day. The "Givat Yael" settlement would force residents of the village out of their homes once again. This certainly is not the path towards reconciliation.

Yet there was a sense of reconciliation during the demonstration. We marched together in a non-violent and quiet manner, hundreds of us, trying to overcome the barriers of language and get to know each other. We carried signs bearing simple yet effective messages and most of all, we were, still are, the alternative. It's something that the security guard doesn't want to see- we are the real possibility of another way to live together on the promised land.

Excerpt from a post on the 'Combatants for Peace' [Israeli Blog](#). Read an article published in [The Guardian](#) about the demonstration.

Abir's Death to be Reinvestigated

On March 28, 2010, the Israeli prosecution informed the Supreme Court that the investigation of death of Abir Aramin will be reopened. The 10 year-old was the daughter of the Palestinian coordinator for 'Combatants for Peace', Bassam Aramin. This decision comes after the family's longtime struggle, which was widely supported both within the movement and outside of it, as well as a result of a petition filed by attorney Michael Sfarad with the Supreme Court on behalf of the family. We hope that those responsible for the senseless killing of the little girl will finally be brought to justice.



Stop the Demolition in Silwan

Residents of the East-Jerusalem neighborhood Silwan have great cause for concern. As part of the plan to convert vast areas of Silwan into a national park, 88 houses have been targeted for demolition. This means that anytime- even tomorrow- the bulldozers could arrive to begin leveling the houses. Families are given a mere two-hour notice before the destruction begins. **Aya Ben-David** explains how the Jerusalem Municipality is reenacting the events of Sheikh Jarrah, only this time in Silwan.

Friday, February 19, I got a call from Muhammad.

"Listen, there is bad news", he said. "Last night The Internal General Security Service and the police arrested people from the village and summoned others. They made it clear that they will not allow a rally here. I don't think that you should come. We plan on holding the rally in any case and things could get messy".

"I'm so sorry", I said. I remembered about the pride in his voice when he talked about the rally: the people, the tour for the visitors, how dignified it will be, and my heart ached.

The rally was scheduled on the one-year anniversary of the struggle. The people of Silwan know that at present, the task at hand is to bring attention to their plight. They need to get their story heard but despite their efforts, there is little media attention given to the matter. I am always astounded at the contrast between the imminent threat to the neighborhood, which is one of the worst in the Jerusalem region, and just how little information people on the outside have about what is happening.



right: The area intended for demolition inside Silwan- within the red border, left: Beit Yonatan in the heart of the neighborhood

Silwan is a neighborhood on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Built on almost impossible terrain, from afar Silwan looks almost like a quaint Italian town, but up close you can see the effects of long-term neglect and poverty.

I told Muhammad that I would speak to Elyakim and that we might arrive anyway. "Whatever you decide", he said. "I had to let you know. It's in your hands now".

Elyakim, the Israeli coordinator for the Jerusalem-Elkutz-Ramallah group answered my phone call, and listened as I explained all of the events. His response: "I don't work for the Internal General Security Service. We are going". My significant other was also of the same opinion. We have an agreement that one of us goes to rallies while the other stays home with the kids.

We gathered underneath a dilapidated protest tent; its torn tarp was held up with some old boards and its floor made of concrete used in the construction of a house that will never be completed. The tent is decorated with faded posters, depicting a struggle that has gained little recognition. But this is the fight that will ignite Jerusalem, and rightly so, because the story of Silwan depicts the essence of Israeli thoughtless cruelty, something that will come at a heavy price.

Silwan is a complex neighborhood, ask anyone who is familiar with the place and knows the local East-Jerusalem dialect. "Silwanians" have come to be known as tough survivors, rough around the edges. The neighborhood is very much part of city life in Jerusalem; its residents work within the city, most of them speak fluent Hebrew and if you wouldn't have seen the narrow poverty-stricken streets, you could imagine them returning home to a place much like your own. In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth.

There hasn't been a single building permit approved for a Silwan resident in over 40 years.

The municipality of Jerusalem claims that in lieu of a detailed city plan, they cannot approve any building permits. For four years and at great expense, "The Israel Committee against House Demolitions" helped prepare a plan, which was given to the Ministry of Interior for approval. Unsurprisingly, the plan was almost unanimously rejected. Residents of Silwan smile bitterly as they recount these events, but they really believed that they had a chance. There was some hope but the state of Israel trampled it.

Without a municipal plan, any house within the neighborhood is illegal and can be demolished. This is the case for Silwan, and it is also true for all East-Jerusalem. What makes Silwan different is that there are people holding positions of power in Israel who want to make a large part of Silwan a national park- part of the city of David. The fact that 88 houses stand there, does not seem to hinder their plan. 88 demolition notices have been given to residents of Silwan and that means that they can be ousted from their homes at a moment's (or two hours) notice. Mahmud told us that the tractors come in the morning, when the children are in school and there are less people around.

After they level the ground, they will plant trees, plants, erect fences and post guards at the entrance, selling tickets. There will be no trace of the families which will be left homeless. In the tent, Murad, a Silwan resident, told us that some of the children put their toys in their backpacks when they leave for school so that they will not be lost if their home is demolished. It sounded almost too much, almost like fiction, until we reached the site of one of the ruined houses, demolished a year ago. Between the rubble, we could make out a mattress, a carpet, and a pink backpack belonging to a little girl. The family had two hours to pack - they didn't have a chance to get everything.

A few days ago the mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Bareket got approval to demolish two floors of [Beit Yonatan](#), instead of sealing it. You can see this house from every point in Silwan as it towers overhead with an Israeli flag. We are told that Bareket has already said that when they come to demolish the two top floors, the bulldozers and tractors will also level 30 homes in the village. Muhammad tried to crack a joke, saying that the machinery will already be here, so it's all in a day's work, but we couldn't smile back at him. Somebody said that it's just eye for an eye, what Bareket is doing: the law in Israel is ruining his place, so he's doing the same thing to the Palestinians.

We discussed possible actions that the Jerusalem group could take in Silwan and raised several suggestions. We need to act on all fronts: public awareness has to be raised and we also need concrete solutions for specific issues such as the children, who wander the streets because they have no adequate place to play. Silwan could very well turn out be another Sheikh Jarrah, but there is a difference- we still have a chance to stop the plan to make Silwan a national park. We have got to wake up.

Excerpt from a post on the 'Combatants for Peace' [Israeli Blog](#).

C4P in the International Public Arena

During the last few months C4P has been very active in the international public arena. Since the beginning of this year members of the movement have presented our views in the European Parliament (top picture); in a congress of social organizations in Barcelona (bottom, left); in lecture/meeting tours in Italy, Austria, England and Spain; and also here in the Israeli Knesset (bottom, right) and soon in the Palestinian Parliament.



The exposure to the broader audience worldwide is demanding at times. Israeli activists who feel like a pursued lefty minority back home suddenly find themselves in a different minority position – as the representatives of an occupying people. Palestinians activists, on the other hand, have to defend themselves against the claim that they are cooperating with the Israelis, the enemies...

As a unique bi-national organization that works on the ground, in direct contact with the people and communities, C4P can present policy makers with messages and insights that are not available to other organizations in the same manner. Moreover, these lecture tours do not only help us with spreading our messages to others but also help us refine them for ourselves. We are not acting for the sake others, but for our own benefit; each person for his own people – Israeli or Palestinian. Because only through joint non-violent struggle can we achieve a proper solution to the conflict and put an end to the occupation and the vicious cycle of violence.

Asira el-Kabalia: An Attempt to Sow Hope

“Planting together is a symbol for our struggle towards a better life for both nations in this land. The settlers uproot trees and the forces of peace plant them”. With these words by Israeli MP Dov Khenin, the joint Palestinian-Israeli tree-planting day organized by CFP’s Tel-Aviv-Nablus group begin in the village of Asira el-Kabalia (Asira). Asira is suffering frequent and severe harassments from the hands of settlers coming from the neighboring Jewish settlement of Yitzhar. Some of the Palestinian youth present that day at Asira opted not to take part in CFP activities and not to heed the instructions of CFP organizers as had been coordinated with Asira’s Village Council. A few of these youths saw the tree-planting day as an opportunity to vent their pent up rage and ran ahead of the main body of tree planters in an attempt to dismantle a makeshift Israel army outpost located on the fringe of the designated tree planting area. The reaction did not take to long to come and included firing of tear gas and numerous rubber bullets by the soldiers and live rounds by several settlers primarily towards those involved in planting trees. Due to CFP’s belief in non-violent protest, we decided to leave the area quickly. Although our planting activities were halted, we managed to leave without major injury and our presence in Asira is an important achievement.

Friday, February 26, 2010, we set out towards Asira in stormy and rainy weather in order to plant trees on plots of agricultural land which belong to the villagers of Asira but are inaccessible to them due to unceasing harassments by Jewish settlers from Yitzhar. Upon arriving in Asira we were pleased to see that a large crowd of approximately 200 villagers had come out to greet us and to take part in the first activity of this kind organized by the Tel-Aviv Nablus group.

We gathered under the columns of one of the houses most frequently attacked by the settlers. Windows shattered and pockmarked by bullet holes, the inhabitants reduced to sleeping in the guest room- the only room safe as it does not face Mt Salmon el-Parsi, the direction from which the rioting settlers arrive. We heard a village representative explain the daily difficulties and dangers experienced by villagers because “someone decided that some of Asira’s land is part of the myriad of settlement outposts compromising Yitzhak”.

After listening to the words of Israeli MP Dov Khenin we continued on towards the fringe of Asira and began our protest march towards the place where the tree planting was to take place-Asira’s agricultural plots adjacent to Yitzhar. We started to gather the saplings for planting and apart from the incessant rain, everything seemed perfect.

Then, however, things began to look problematic: while we were unloading the saplings from the truck, we noticed a small group of youths waving “Peoples Party” flags and Palestinians flags (acts which we had previously agreed were not to be part of the activities) began to surge forward past the planting plots and uphill towards a makeshift Israel army lookout post. At first, due to our inability to understand what was going on, we did not place too much importance on this movement uphill and kept our attention focused on the planting activity. However, after a minute or two, the youths were at the top of the hill, had reached the makeshift outpost and were starting to dismantle it.

Within three minutes of the “commando operation” by the youths, the Israeli Army arrived at the hillside. Hardly a tree had been planted and the situation was deteriorating rapidly. The soldiers began to fire rubber bullets indiscriminately at those of us close to them and tear gas at those further away. Many suffered burns and shortness of breath due to the gas and several Palestinians and Israelis were injured by rubber bullets.

At this stage most of the participants, whose only goal had been to plant trees quietly, dispersed far from the hill and agricultural plots towards the village. In the meantime the group of youths involved in the outpost dismantling attempt tried to outflank the soldiers who immediately started to pursue

aided by several settlers coming from the direction of Yitzhar who were as the cliché goes- “armed and dangerous”. These settlers continued downhill into Asira and opened live fire on the village’s houses, damaging windows and rooftop water containers- this travesty laying havoc to the village’s continuous running water supply.



Starting to plant



Palestinian villagers join in with party flags

Aside from understanding that the situation had gotten way out of hand, we started to get the feeling that our activities were being used as a cover for a show of force by the “People’s Party” -later on we realized that there was much truth to our feelings. This in spite of the fact that only two weeks prior we had specifically and clearly agreed with village representatives that there are to be no flags except CFP flags waved and to the extent possible-the elders will prevent the youths of the village from creating provocations.

In retrospect it turns out that someone from the “People Party”, which is trying to wrest the hegemony in the village from the “Democratic Front” thought that the presence of Israelis in Asira makes for a great opportunity to call out the village youth in a show of force before the Army and settlers. That is how a second protest was born that day in Asira-a protest in which the participants are not committed to those principals we hold fundamental to all activities-non-violence and cooperation.

After the dismal end of the day’s activities, we were contacted by Asira’s representatives, including the head of the village council and representatives from all parties and factions, in order to voice their apologies for what had occurred. We were promised that the youths would be put in place in order to prevent us from not returning to Asira or excluding it from our future activities.

In summation, in spite of the strange vibe from what had transpired and the many apologies we received (who is apologizing to the villagers for the fact that they cannot till their land and that law-breaking bullies from Yitzhar are making life miserable for them?), we returned home feeling that the tree planting event which took place in itself was important as the first of its kind. In addition, we found that in Asira there exists a genuine need for dialogue with Israelis to stand in contrast to the years of harassment and violence from Yitzhar’s bullies. Properly effectuated, we may be able to assist the villagers to utilize their energies into non-violent and more productive avenues. In this way we shall prove to ourselves, to the various hilltop thugs and to the citizens of Israel that we do not despair even in the face of the hopelessness and lack of trust which have developed like stubborn rust on both sides as a result of 42 years of occupation.

Tours and Workshops in Israel and the West Bank

C4P continues to hold tours to witness firsthand what life is like under the occupation in the west bank. Details about these tours can be found on our website and Facebook. **We invite you to keep up to date with our activities and if you are interested in a specific tour please contact this [email address](#).** In addition, we hold in-house workshops and lectures on a regular basis. **If you would like to host a lecture please [contact us](#).**



Joint Memorial Ceremony for Victims of the Conflict

On April 18th, eve of the official Israeli Memorial Day honoring those who have fallen in Israel's struggles, Combatants for Peace will hold its annual and independent memorial ceremony honoring victims of the conflict from both nations- Palestinian and Israeli. The ceremony will take place at the Tmuna Theater in Tel-Aviv and begin at 21:00. Artists, public figures and spokespeople from bereaved families from both nations will participate. The ceremony is open to the general public. It is recommended to arrive a half-hour prior to commencement in order to ensure your seats.

