

MESSAGE FROM SOULI:

My first update is that I have been involved in actions coordinated by Combatants for Peace and other groups against settler violence in the South Hebron Hills, the Jordan Valley, and elsewhere in Area C. We support Palestinian shepherds and sheep who are being targeted, as well as Palestinian farmers during the olive harvest. I have been especially active in the olive harvest season in areas where Palestinian farmers face a lot of violence from settlers, including a solidarity olive harvest the other day near Nablus together with Palestinian farmers facing challenges with the army and with settlers.

My family was also affected during the olive harvest: they can't take care of their olive trees during the year due to the separation wall around Jerusalem, which has separated my village from our family's land and olive groves on the other side of the wall. My family was only able to access their olive groves for the two or three days that the army decided they could be there. Unfortunately the days they permitted my family to go to their groves were school days when the teens in my family had exams, so it was really a mess.

I have also been active in launching a water campaign together with Combatants for Peace and others, to allow access to water for Palestinians living in Area C - places like the South Hebron Hills. We demonstrate on behalf of the residents' right to their water resources, and we bring water to Palestinians who are in need of water due to the many restrictions and settler violence in those areas.

My second update is that I participated in the first Palestinian-Arab camp at Midburn, the Israeli version of Burning Man. I believe a lot of people who go to Burning Man or to Midburn feel good about themselves but usually they don't touch the reality, they don't talk about the occupation and the political system, rather they talk about the environment, community building, vegan food, all of that nice stuff, without touching the real issues. So we, a Palestinian and Israeli group of around thirty people from different backgrounds, came together and created that camp for the first time ever. This was my first time at Midburn, and it was due to that camp - otherwise I would not join honestly.

For the first time the Palestinian flag was there. We created a kind of checkpoint, with a tower, to show Israelis in the camp how Palestinians live. We did a return march in recognition and solidarity with the Palestinian refugees, and so many people in the camp watched us marching silently with big baggage, like refugees leaving their homeland. Also, when you enter Palestinian cities there is a red sign put up by Israel that says Israelis are not allowed to enter, it's dangerous - so we created a similar sign with kind-of funny, artistic, sarcastic words. A lot of Israelis came to our camp from neighboring camps within Midburn, to have Arab hospitality, dance, coffee, and to sit with us and hear about life under occupation and what this camp is about.

This camp and this event gave me a lot of hope. I know it seems like "la-la land," but as they say, "one leg in reality, one leg in the dream" - and this was about creating a new reality. It was a powerful experience of one week being together, eating together, supporting each other, watching the sunrise and sunset together -- really magical beautiful days and nights of dreamers, which gave me so much hope.

I hope next year it will be much bigger and it will be legitimate to bring the Palestinian-Israeli conflict into this huge Midburn festival.