

Rafah Lives:

A Journal of Resistance in Daily Life

An occasional publication of the **International Solidarity Movement**

Rafah, GAZA

November

2003

Punctuated Depression

It was supposed to have started raining by now. The season changed just before Ramadan began almost a month ago. The air became cooler, the clouds rolled in and have for many nights out of the month covered the city in a dense murky fog. Save for two small occasions lasting maybe ten minutes each, the rains have still not come. It bears repeating as many times as possible that this land, Gaza, is running out of water. What clean water has not been stolen or given away quietly in private negotiations during the Oslo process will last for another five to ten years -- if no .more gets stolen

It is a big "if," but that word seems to have been forgotten a long time ago. To an extent, all of life here here in Gaza could be punctuated by that word, if. The harvest will be good this year, if our fields don't get razed by the military. Ramadan will be generous, if our community is not destroyed in the next incursion. Though all these "ifs" may be understood, people rarely bother to mention them. Too much time would be taken up planning for eventualities that no one can control, planning for things that can't be planned. Last night there was military movement down at the border. Tanks are gathering at the Mabar Cross Point between Egypt and Rafah. There is little doubt in people's mind as to what the military is planning. Last year there was an invasion exactly at the end of Ramadan into Al-Barazil refugee camp. Seven people were killed, about 13 homes demolished. The year before, they invaded Ybna, and six people were killed. This year the days of Eid (the four-day celebration right after Ramadan) will be filled with joy, our local coordinator told us in our morning planning meeting; then with a brush of his hand he added, if they .don't invade, which they probably will

But this year's Ramadan has been full of violent punctuation. It is expected the same way that rain is expected during this season, but in a cynical way, this year's violence has been even more likely

than rain. Families don't talk about the happiness of Ramadan, about parties and family gatherings, or about revelations they've had during prayer. They don't complain about the fasting, many are too sick from recent losses to feel like eating at all. Just before Ramadan, neighborhoods in Rafah were destroyed during the largest



Arabic Tear Drop Script spelling the word "Ramadon."
By Laura Gordon

invasion in years. Everyone was affected, close to 150 homes were destroyed, more than 1,200 people were made homeless. There are stories of entire families forced to stay in a single room of their house while it was being shelled for two days straight. For some, that single room was their bathroom -- the safest place in the house. The families only left when forced by the military at gunpoint, out into the streets where they ran for their lives from tank shells and and helicopter bullets, no time to collect their belongings and documents marking their lives and their family's history, the memories of joyful punctuations of births and marriages. That invasion ended, supposedly, but throughout the past month the military has been taking care of unfinished business it did not get to complete in the remaining neighborhoods. Most recently in Block O, a tiny section of Rafah about one square kilometer was invaded for two

days. It was severed from the rest of the city and surrounded by tanks. A week before in this area, a young child, 13 years old, was shot in the stomach on his way home from school. He bled to death over two days, while doctors frantically tried to keep his blood transfusions from spilling out through his stomach. But there is no pause in the disaster of this occupation. His family's home was then demolished a week later in the Block O incursion. No one knows why, no ones really asks why anymore. But it doesn't get easier to see a mom turn into a lake of tears talking about her martyred son, about how he earned his own money catching birds since the family was so poor, about how when buying anything for himself he bought one of the same for his brother, about all the dear little joys, the little punctuations her son brought to her life, otherwise depressed from so long under .occupation

That depressed boredom is not to be taken lightly. It is one of the biggest challenges that people face on a daily basis. Unemployment is at 85% since the beginning of the intifada, but one can't take time off from the occupation. Gaza is described by many as the largest maximum security prison on earth. Thousands of acres of trees and farmland have been destroyed. As the farmland is plowed under by Israeli bulldozers, people are forced to leave their rural lives to join the swelling ranks of the destitute and unemployed urban population. Many are too poor to be able to have the customary delicacies usually marking Ramadan. Instead they break fast with cold prepackaged hummos made in Israel -- there are only a few things left that one can buy that are actually Palestinian-made. To counter this depression breaks are looked for wherever they can be found. Ramadan is one of those occasions looked forward to, an entire month of holiday. But the violence also breaks the monotony, the routine boredom of isolation of total closure. It is something to talk about; the fear, the pain, or the sadness, is something, at least, to feel. -- *Noah is 24 years old and a student of aquatic biology. He likes to cook, and*

loudspeaker, in broken Arabic, Irjao. Go back before we make you a headline on the latest news. The shebab started dancing and singing. The APC sounded its siren and the shebab yelled with the siren, up down up down. A few shebab threw stones. The APC shot next to them on the ground and above their heads.

Then the soldiers let them pass through the checkpoint on foot, leaving their cabs behind, and a sea of people walked from military to military tower while shooting in the air, until at last the army let the cars drive through, and passengers piled in fifteen to a car.

Rasha was laughing like whispering wind chimes in the quiet of this morning, as she told me how the cab driver bought pita bread, dried dates, and apple soda, and they broke their fast there at the checkpoint amidst a massive ocean of people trying to get home. "You know how we knew to break the fast? When the military tower started shooting in the air.

Kan helowa khallas. "It was beautiful. Everyone who had food was sharing with everyone who didn't have. You could barely turn without being offered food. People like this," she locks her forefingers together, to signify people so crowded they can't move. "Beautiful, period!" Her eyes danced in the morning sun.

Laura has been in Rafah since the end of March 2003 and is adored by the many friends and families who have "adopted" her. She is currently writing a book, and you can find some of her writing on the Electronic Intifada.

Ramadan Means...

Ramadan means alot to me:

It's the month of worship and the month of victories and dignity and honor
The month that humans can be clean from inside and outside

It's the filter of errors and bad habits

It's the cleaner of hate and bad thoughts

And everything wrong betwen all people

Ramadan is the month of good and beauty

People are happy, Joy is everywhere

Because the doors of paradise are open and those of hell are closed

It's the month of mercy for me

I prefer this month so much more than any thing else

Because I feel that I am close to Allah more and more

And I feel comfortable too in this month becoming closer to all more and more

And every one is in a hurry to obey Allah and get his mercy and acceptance

This is Ramadan and however much I say I will not express its full meaning

Hosam, is 17-years old, and a high school student in Rafah. He is also a prolific poet

Ramadan Recipes

FOTRA (means break-fast in Arabic)

Ramadan Squash (Gara) at Feryal's

In a blender, pulverize one half chili pepper and one clove garlic. Add 2 cups yellow squash, baked and cubed. Add juice of half a lemon, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 cup tahini.

Orzo Soup at Feryal's

Saute one cup orzo in oil until it begins to brown. Add six cups water and boullion cubes. When almost ready to serve, mince 1/2 cup parsely and add to soup.

Who We Are

The International Solidarity Movement is composed of Palestinian and international volunteers who work in Palestine and abroad in struggle against the illegal Israeli Occupation of Palestine. We act on the belief that the root cause of the violence in both Palestine and Israeli is the Occupation, that ending the violence begins with ending the Occupation. We monitor human rights violations, report Israeli war crimes, and partner with NGOs to oppose the Israeli Occupation of Palestine with nonviolence



Simple Math

Since September 28th 2000
Rafah has experienced:

258 martyrs, of which 46 children, 20 of these martyrs' cases were in October.

2472 injuries, 110 perminant disabilities. 122 of these are from October.

1246 demolished homes, 303 of these are from October.

557 more houses have been partially destroyed, 129 partial demolitions happened in October.

1606 families, totaling 9159 individuals, have become homeless.

3503 homes under daily Israeli shoting and shelling along the Palestinian-Egyptian border.

214 destroyed stores and workshops.

3343 bulldozed and/or confiscated dunums of agricultural land (dunum:acre = 4:1)

85% of Rafah's population is unemployed.

Source: Rafah Governorate, Monthly Statistics October 2003.



his favorite food is Eggplant with tahini. He came to the Gaza Strip five months ago

No Appetite to Eat Anyway

In part of a broader interview series, several people shared their experiences and reflections on the month of Ramadan. What follows is a sense of Ramadan this year in Rafah

A woman living on the border in Brazil told us, "We do not feel that it is Ramadan this year. In the past it was better, happier. There was no shooting or killing. We lived in peace before the intifada. In the same area, a woman whose house has been partially demolished and whose husband was arrested without any known charges had this to add: "We have no taste for Ramadan this year. What is the point of Ramadan if we cannot see each other? It is only fasting now." Ramadan is a time to spend with family, to be in prayer, and to rest while fasting. All are integral to the holiday, and without the happiness of family the fasting becomes very difficult. Others, especially in Ybneh refugee camp where the most recent invasion was complain that, "no one visits us here because it is a dangerous area. We miss all of our family and friends." Mahmood al-Qaed was a 13-year-old boy beaten and mangled before being shot dead by Israeli soldiers while he was catching birds to try to support his family in the middle of Ramadan. His mother told us about his life, and when asked about Ramadan this year she told us, "we don't feel like it's Ramadan. We are fasting but we don't have the appetite to eat or drink anything anyway. Ali, Mahmood's brother, refuses to sleep in his bed because he used to sleep with Mahmood in that bed. The day before he died, Mahmood helped me to prepare the break-fast meal. Now, every time I prepare the evening break-fast meal or the morning pre-fast meal, I think of Mahmood and I lose my appetite

Breaking Fast in the Shadow of Occupation

A tank stopped at the door of Abu Ahmed's home on Ramadan's first afternoon. It turned on its loudspeaker. "Ya'hajj!" Abu Ahmed was peering at the tank from his doorway. "Ya'hajj, are you fasting?"

"With God's help I fast. And you?" Abu Ahmed replied.

"With God's help, we are fasting," The accent was Bedouin Arabic, from inside Israel.

"Come break your fast with us," the Bedouins laughed. It was almost margheb. The sky was overcast.

"Where, in the tank?" Come eat with us in our home. Don't be afraid, there's no danger here. Abu Ahmed age 64? 65? – he isn't sure himself, as he leans on his cane, his third leg – offering safety to armed soldiers in the midst of their adolescence.

Sally, his daughter, hides behind the door and Om Ahmed and her sons stand in the doorway watching. The soldier opens the small window and waves. Then he opens the door of the tank and stands up slowly, until the upper half of his body is exposed. He is looking around him, frightened of everything outside the safety of his bulletproof tank.

Abu Ahmed invites him to a meal again and the soldier looks like he wishes he could leave his job right then, flee from the fear of the tank and the army and live through Ramadan, simply.

He doesn't leave his tank, but leaves with Abu Ahmed one packet of strawberry milk for Sally. The tank then drives to the border and begins shooting into the area.

Down in Salah el-Deen, Naela's family is sitting under the shade of their porch, a cool spot in the stagnant explosion of the

afternoon sky, sun everywhere, on the edge of descent. The military is there in the tower one-hundred meters away, bottled up in concrete and metal. Everyone heard and anyone in the area can tell you that ten minutes before Allah hu Akbar, the hazzan's announcement that fast is over, the tower announced to the town from the safety of its loudspeaker, an easy fast to all and a Ramadan karim, a Ramadan of bounty and generosity. Also in a Bedouin accent. Then the tower shot into the air all night and nobody near there slept.

Every day the army cuts out the power just before maghreb time, right as families are getting ready to eat, and comes back just before asha prayer. People tell me that last year they used to close Abu Holy checkpoint every day at this time, keeping people in line at the checkpoint when they were supposed to be breaking their fast.

Yesterday Abu Holy was closed from 1pm to 8pm, and Rahsa and Adwan broke their fasts waiting for the checkpoint to open so they could return to their families in Rafah after university classes in Gaza.

Adwan was in a bus packed with university students coming home to the south. "We waited for the bus for a half an hour, thinking it might open any minute. But it didn't. So we left the bus."

He spent the hours at the checkpoint grumbling with other male students until his friend Aziz, fed up with spending the hours of his young life waiting at checkpoints, said, "That's it. I'm going home. Even if they shoot me I'm gonna cross the checkpoint."

And they didn't shoot him, exactly. They shot in the air and on the ground next to him until he remembered himself and went back to wait with his friends. That was the beginning. Fifty or more shebab (youth) advanced slowly towards the military tower, which shot above their heads and near their feet. Then they got to the traffic light – stop at red or the tower shoots at you; go at green or the tower shoots you – and broke it with stones.

An APC drove towards them and stopped in the middle of the road. It announced over the



Sally and her dad, Abu Ahmed, outside their front door



Abu Holy, Rafah's only access point to all of Gaza, is often under closure for many hours a day

The Legal Defence

The UN has made clear the legal rights and duties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a series of key widely supported resolutions, including the following: (Source- Richard Falk, "Beyond Oslo")

UNGA Resolution 181 (II) concerning the Future Government of Palestine (November 29, 1947) establishes the parity of the two peoples with respect to their respective rights to establish states on the former mandated territory of Palestine, and the duty of both states to respect both minorities and the special juridical status of Jerusalem

UNGA Resolution 194 (III) (December 11, 1948) affirms the right of Palestinians to return to their original homes and lands, and to receive compensation for any losses incurred, as well as the right of resettlement for those Palestinian refugees choosing not to return, and compensation for their losses. The UN established the UN Conciliation Commission to uphold the rights of Palestinian refugees

UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 (November 22, 1967 and October 22, 1973) require Israeli withdrawal from territory occupied during the 1967 and 1973 wars, and call for a just settlement of the refugee problem

UNGA Resolution 34/70 (December 6, 1979) asserts the need for any solution of the conflict to be in accordance with the right of self-determination, regardless of what the parties might negotiate

UNGA Resolution 43/177 (December 15, 1988) acknowledges the 1988 Palestinian proclamation of a Palestinian state as consistent with UNGA Resolution 181

UNSC Resolutions 476, 480 and 1322 (June 30, 1980, November 12, 1980 and October 7, 2000) reaffirm the basic principle of international and UN law that it is inadmissible to acquire territory by force or conquest, as well as the unconditional applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the civilian population of occupied territory

Intellectual Self-Defence

www.imemc.org is a news site reporting on both the local and global issues concerning Palestine and Israel

www.rafaah.vze.com contains many personal stories produced from eye witness interviews. It is a great site to learn how it feels to live in the Gaza Strip

www.pchrgaza.org is the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, a Gaza based legal organization. Its site contains weekly reports about the ongoing problems in Gaza Strip, as well as press releases, and great statistics

www.btselem.org is the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. It is a great site, with comprehensive reports on a range of subjects and various maps

www.palsolidarity.org is the website of the International Solidarity Movement. It contains information pertaining to activist work in Palestinian and abroad, as well as field reports generated from on the ground

www.electronicintifada.org is another great news site for ongoing news and updates about Palestine and the Intifada

RAFAH, CASTLE OF THE PATIENT SOUTH

Rafah area is about 60 sq.Km and represents 16.3% of the total area of the Gaza Strip. Rafah is 75 meters above sea level to the east and 30 meters to the west, and the maximum altitude is about 100 meters. Rafah is situated at the extreme south of the Gaza Strip, about 30 Km from Gaza City and 10 Km from Khan Younis. It is bordered by the Gush Katif settlement to the North, an Israeli military checkpoint barring passage to the Mediterranean Sea on the West, Israel's 67 borders to the East, and the Egyptian border to the South. This geography effectively isolates Rafah from the rest of Palestine and the world. Rafah has a semi-desert climate between June and October, when the temperature decreases to 10c during this time. The average rainfall is about 250cm annually. In 1922 the population of Rafah was 599 original inhabitants, and in 1945 their number increased to 1700, but by 1967 the population has grown to 10,800 original inhabitants plus 39,000 refugees. 2002 statistics showed Rafah's population is to be 150,735

Rafah After September, 2000. The second Intifada began due to continuous Israeli violations of the Oslo Peace Plan, and the postponement of the promised Palestinian State. It was ignited by the visit that Ariel Sharon, who is responsible for the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, made to the Al Aqsa Mosque in late September. The Al-Aqsa Intifada thus got its name. Rafah has had very hard times during this Intifada. For three years, hundreds of the Palestinians, both armed and unarmed, were killed by armored watchtowers and military jeeps containing well-armed Israeli soldiers along the borders and the settlements which are the hot points around Rafah. Then the Israeli army tried to vanish this Intifada using the tanks and Apache helicopter gunships to kill the dream of the Palestinian children of living in peace, to cover the light of their hope of living as the rest of the world's children without the darknesses of fear and violence. Finally a Palestinian kid's voice came out to say to the world "The oppression's knife is still slitting the throat of my childhood and killing my innocence, but my dream in freedom will survive in spite of the pain". Mohammed is 23 years old and has completed his degree in Electrical Engineering. He has been actively organizing non violent resistance against the occupation since graduation



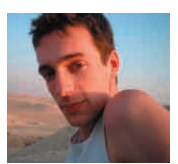
Mock child martyr at a children's demonstration against the occupation

In Memory of Rachel and Tom



Rachel Corrie
1979-2003

We join with the families and friends of Rachel Corrie and Tomas Hurndall in mourning their tragic murders while celebrating their individual contributions to humanity. They worked with love to elevate a people's dignity. This zine is dedicated to their inspiring memories



Tom Hurndall
1981-2003

Anti-Copyright. The Rafah branch of ISM is responsible for the content of this Zine, and we encourage the prolific reproduction and distribution of it