

IWPS Incident Report: The IDF turns back olive harvest companions

9 November 2011

On Tuesday 8th November 2011 two IWPS volunteers accompanied a Deir Istiya family to their land bordering on the illegal Israeli settlement of Yakir, as a protective presence while they picked their olive trees close to the settlement. The family had prior permission from the army to pick. On our arrival the settlement security called the army. 3 IDF soldiers eventually arrived and confirmed that the family could indeed pick on their own land but only if they went alone without IWPS volunteers. The IDF indicated that if we could give documentary proof that we lived in Deir Istiya, we could also go. Since that was impossible to do, we tried to call the local office of the DCL (District Liaison Co-ordination – the Palestinian authorities) and the DCO (the Israeli Occupation authorities) to see if they could help to get us access but, it being a major holiday of Eid, we were unable to get replies from either. After consulting the Mayor of Deir Istiya by phone and also on the wishes of the family, the 2 volunteers left the site.

We were accompanying the family at their express request and were concerned for their safety when we were turned away. A phone call to the family at the end of the day ascertained that they had remained safe and had been allowed to pick in peace for the day.

(There has been one other incident of this kind directly involving the British group of olive pickers in the Madama/Burin area. Earlier in Oct. a group had to withdraw on army orders to enable the farmer to continue picking but 2 arrests were made.)

This incident, which was the first of its kind for anyone on the house team, threw up questions of principle for us. After much discussion among ourselves, and consultation with others and with IWPS policy, it was decided that, although it appears to be taken for granted here that certain families need and therefore seek army permission to go onto their own land, we will not go down that path. We can afford the luxury of acting on the principle that Palestinians and their visitors (us) are (or should be) free to move as they wish on their own land.

In practice, as we know, they are anything but free and sometimes even need army permission to step onto their private property at this time of the year. Most of the year some are denied even this, even when land is outside the settlement security zone. We could have asked our mayor for papers to prove we live here but, even at the risk of abandoning families, we felt that we should not seek such permission. Our policy states that we don't ask the army for anything.