

Kifl Hares

15 May (2012?)

On Sunday, May 15th, the IWPS House Team made a visit to the village of Kifl Haris. This village is situated on one of the main roads that connect the Ariel settlement block to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. This road (505) sectioned off a portion of Kifl Haris' agricultural area from the village, and villagers have a difficult time gaining access to their olive trees now. A total of 3000 dunums of their land was confiscated, 1000 of which 505 was built upon, and the other 2000 for the settlement of Ariel. One of our contacts in the village said he had not been able to tend to his trees or pick their olives for several years now. The village is also a focal point of egregious settler activity.

Every couple months, the Israeli Occupation Forces places the village under curfew and escorts thousands of illegal settlers into the tiny village because the settlers believe it is the burial place of one of their prophets.



Photo: Zionists believe this is the tomb of the prophet Joshua.

The village is very old, perhaps as old as 3,000 years. The old city, as yet not restored and much of it lies in ruins, attests to its age. Some of the ancient village center lies in ruins due to its age and lack of maintenance, but some of the most important architecture was deliberately destroyed in the Israeli Occupation Forces. A villager showed us a gaping hole in the old city, where he said, once stood an ancient olive press. On a number of occasions, the IOF came into the village and made the inhabitants leave. They then used dynamite to destroy some of the most ancient structures, presumably to wipe out the Palestinian claim to their roots and longevity in the village. The ancient Olive Press was one such structure that was eliminated.

After being given an informative tour of the village by a local Palestinian, we were invited to his home to share dinner with his wife and sister. A Palestinian traditional meal of Makluba was already prepared, as the family had cooked for another village family who were in mourning over the death of one of their cousins. We shared the meal with them, delighted that the women had a good command of English to we were able to effectively communicate with them. We left them to meet with a representative from the municipality, with a hope to return and learn how to make the sumptuous zatar served after we were stuffed with makluba!

The village rep met with us in the Baladiya. Asking how he was, his response was a smile and "just OK." The village faces much financial hardship, and this was recently exacerbated when Palestine asked for recognition in the UN. Sixty families of the village are refugees and they received assistance from the UN- basic food staple and 400 shekels a month. However, this aid has now been cut off through pressure from the United States.



Photo: The remains of a destroyed olive press.

He said the village's biggest problem in the settler incursions. Apparently, settlers come into the village outside the times they are escorted in by the IOF. He described belligerent people who come into the village, harming villagers and destroying property. They come under the pretext of praying at tomb (they believe it is the tomb of the biblical figure Joshua.)

However, the havoc they wreak is not in accordance with prayer. According to our contact, these frequent incursions have caused a lot of suffering and mental health issues throughout the village. Further said he, there is a strong stigma attached to seeking mental health issues so it is difficult to get people to come forward for the help they need. Some of the common indicators of mental health strain is bed wetting and peer violence in children and strained relationships within village organizations.

He has initiated a program where mental health counselors come to the village, but they are too few and funding is a problem. As well, villagers are loathing to express mental healthy strain, as they do not differentiate between mental stress and "craziness." To this end he is seeking to educate the people of Kifl Haris on this issue.

However, so long as the soldiers and illegal settlers continue to come into the village, mental health issues will continue to be a problem.

