

Village Update: Deir Ballut

27 September 2012

At the baladiya we were greeted by council member A., an English speaker, born in Libya and who had lived in UAE. She said that the mayor, RJ, initially found difficulty in being accepted as it was doubted that she would be effective in organising activities. But as A said 'a woman can do anything'. Unfortunately RJ is going to stand down at the coming elections this October as she has become overwhelmed with the workload - out of 11 members of the council only 3 were giving their time to dealing with the villagers' problems.

Village Facts

The population of Deir Ballut is about 4,000 and all of it is in Area C. The nearest settlement is Pedu'el and a large area of land next to the 'security fence' is a closed military zone. The loss of land to the village is 6,000 dunums and many olive trees. At the entrance to the village there is a large flat cultivated area where the villagers plant vegetables.

The adjacent village of Um al Hamam, situated right next to the 'security fence', has totally 'disappeared'.

Looking out towards Israel from Deir Ballut, a large military base and Tel Aviv are clearly visible.

Problems in the Village

Damage to crops due to the release of wild boars from the settlements. At least two people have been attacked by the boars including A's mother-in law.

A chemical that could be used to get rid of the boars is prohibited by the Israeli government.

Difficulty for villagers to get to their olive trees that are near the settlement. This causes anxiety around the olive harvest time. The army have caused damage to part of the village that lies nearest the 'no go area' before the 'security fence'.

Municipality Projects

R's acceptance as a mayor has been down to her organisational skills. Under her guidance the municipality have:



- Made a road and installed services for the vulnerable houses nearest to the 'no go area'; the army do not damage anything now.
- Planted trees in the cultivated area at the entrance to the village.
- Helped women with small projects - making clothes and traditional handicrafts, rearing chickens.
- Organised with a French partner the Cash for Work scheme where participants receive about £10.00 per day for a period of 2 months.

We walked round the old part of the village with A and were welcomed into the house of the Q family. We heard the stories from the 85 year old matriarch of the family who, in the past, had carried heavy loads on her head to the fields resulting in back problems now. Guided tours of the old house and gardens lead to tea, coffee, baby cradling and a sumptuous lunch in the son's house with his family. We learnt of his problems - loss of land and getting to his remaining olive trees. We left laden with home-made soap, mountain-grown sage and the village speciality *fakus* - similar to gherkins. Regrettably we could not stay for the wedding they kept inviting us to.

We felt we had forged a good relationship with the village, particularly with A. We asked her whether the village would accept help with their olive harvest from the Rabbis for Human Rightsher reply was 'We would be very happy. We respect anyone who helps us'.