

Village Visit: Deir Ballut

June 2012

It has been a goal of the IWPS house team (Spring 2012) to make solidarity visits to as many of the villages in the Salfit region as we are able. We wish to express our continued support to them, as well as to update our village profiles and record what their most pressing problems are in relation to the occupation.

To that end we made an appointment to visit the municipality of Deir Ballut, who has the first and only female Mayor in the West Bank! The women of Deir Ballut have taken a very active role in resistance to the occupation; IWPS has worked with them since 2002. M. took time away from her mayoral duties, which on this day included a party for students graduating from primary school, to visit with team mates.

The construction of the Apartheid Wall confiscated about six thousand Dunums of village land. Much of this was wheat, used by the villagers to make their bread. Now, as is in so many of the villages of Palestine, wheat must be purchased from sources outside the West Bank. This is a double edged sword. Purchasing wheat is an added financial burden on the families of Deir Ballut, and it also means that money is going outside of the West Bank, which adds to the region's financial hardship and makes them even more dependent on outside aide.

M also said the in the past year the village has lost 200 trees to settler vandalism. This also is a problem that is not unique to the village of Deir Ballut, but prevalent in most of the villages of the West Bank. Settlers often uproot olive trees or burn them to the ground, and these vandals are never held accountable for their actions.

During our meeting with M, her 14 year old daughter came into the office. She, like her mother, is steadfast against the occupation. She has a gift for writing and the recitation of poetry. We were treated to hearing one of her favorite poems, which was heart rending and at the same time, quite inspiring. However, Israel has punished her for her theatric form of resistance.

School children are given a special permission once during their school years to visit somewhere in Israel, a "privilege" to Palestinians who are only allowed into their ancestral lands west of the Apartheid Wall if they are able to obtain special permission. This can be difficult, and often impossible. Often Palestinians can only see the al aqsa mosque once in their lifetime, on their school trip. M;s fourteen year old daughter was denied permission by Israel to go on her school's field trip. She, a child, was deemed a security risk because she shares her dream of Palestine through poetry. Indeed, Israel has a reason to be afraid. Expression of free thought is one of the greatest dangers to this Apartheid state.