



# Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

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## 300 and Counting

This edition of *Around Europe* is a bumper edition. It celebrates 300 editions over the last twenty-nine years, a record to be proud of. But it is a record which we share with all the people who have made QCEA what it is. We can't include all of them in this edition; but we have a selection of previous Representatives to write for this edition and five have responded to our call. In the next few pages you will read of the ongoing activities of Pat Stapleton; of the long-term view of criminal justice work which Nick McGeorge continues to be engaged in through QCEA, QUNO and through

other connections...  
libertarian...  
conscientious...  
Tim Brown;  
of the Lisbon Treaty.  
with the long-term work  
delighted to be able to bring  
these strands of QCEA work with our  
predecessors' voices.

*Pat was a CADFA volunteer in Abu Dis when she wrote this*

*Martina Weitsch and Liz Scurfield*

## Eyewitness Report from Palestine

I have never before lived where so many of the people I meet, as students, colleagues or friends, have been in prison themselves or have close relatives in prison.

During my first few days here I met a twenty-one year old recently released after four years in prison, the suffering she had experienced left her with a determination to complete her education and go on to university to study law. At the other end of the spectrum, one of the

university lecturers in her mid-50s explained to me that none of the members of her family could get permission to go to East Jerusalem because she and her brother had both been political activists in their youth - it was all on their records. She herself had been in prison five times but usually only for a few days, the longest period being a month. I am talking here about Muslim women, they might equally have been Christian, as both live and work together quite happily here in Palestine. My stereotype of oppressed Muslim women has been somewhat revised. Of course it is a male-dominated patriarchal society but a highly educated one and girls expect to continue to university like their brothers. Just over half the students at Al Quds University are women and about 10 per cent of these go bareheaded.

Not surprisingly the vast majority of prisoners are men and boys - they are the ones who throw

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stones at the Israeli soldiers.

It was pleasing to learn that as a gesture to Fatah and the President of the Palestinian Authority, 300 prisoners were released shortly after Annapolis. Careful study then shows that most of them were due to be released in the next few weeks, having completed their sentences, and a further 400 have been arrested recently. Night raids leading to the arrest of two or three youths are so common that no-one bothers to mention it. But these youngsters may be held in administrative detention, constantly renewed for months or even years, without access to a lawyer, before their case is finally judged by a military court which treats sixteen year olds as adults...

Abu Dis, where I am living, is really a suburb of East Jerusalem but it is now cut off by the wall which dominates our lives. The university which has 10,000 students coming from all over Palestine, has some impressive new buildings and lovely gardens, financed by rich oil states and the EU, but as you walk out through the splendid stone archway you are immediately confronted by these monstrous blocks of cement which snake across the countryside isolating people from both their land and their activities. Jerusalem which used to be seven minutes away by car - the place for worship, for hospitals, schools and all major services - was accessible on foot for schoolchildren. For a number of years people managed to evade the checkpoints, taking minor paths but today they are completely cut off. Now 80 per cent of the residents are unable to go without a permit that may take weeks or months to obtain if they have a good reason - a shopping trip or a visit to a family member or friend living there is out of the question.

The eighty year old mother of the family where I am staying has had several appointments at the eye hospital in Jerusalem and I accompanied her on a recent visit. First we drove to the check point on the edge of town; but her daughter, the driver, is not allowed to cross, so she drove home. I continued with the mother through the clanging iron turnstile, up to the heavily protected Israeli soldier who examined her permit and my passport minutely, and eventually out to the other side, where her grandson, who lives in Jerusalem, was waiting with his car, to drive us to the hospital; she was fortunate to have a valid permit. On this occasion there was not a long queue and we went through quite quickly but that is not always the case... Delays at checkpoints even within the occupied territory of the West Bank are a major source of stress

because you can never calculate the time for a journey - last week there was a three-hour delay at another entry and some people were abandoning their cars and trying to walk home. Another day, returning from a day out with a youth group we were kept sitting in our bus for almost two hours before being allowed to complete our journey. The purpose seems to be to steadily wear down the population and encourage them to leave.

My students laughed when I asked if there was anywhere they could go and swim - the Dead Sea used to be a regular place for a day out - now it is closed off to provide exclusive beaches for Israelis; Palestinians can only have access if they leave the country and go into Jordan.

Sitting in the Ramallah Friends Meeting House listening to Jean Zaru speak on the theme 'Confronting the structures of Domination', I recalled my previous visit in 1991 when we held meeting for worship in this same building, scarcely recognisable today. Then the windows were broken, the rain leaked in through the roof and the walls were filthy, covered in graffiti - this was during the first intifada - but in spite of everything we were filled with guarded optimism. Today the Meeting House, now also the Friends International Centre, is in immaculate condition, warm and welcoming, but the state of Palestine is infinitely depressing. Violence is news so rockets and killings make headlines for a few hours, structural violence is not observed and it continues on a daily basis. Here is a country with every promise, the highest literacy and general educational level in the Middle East, supported by myriads of NGOs from all over the world, promised vast sums of money only recently at the Paris conference, post-Annapolis - the one thing missing is what is needed beyond all else - a political solution.

People are divided and political leadership is lacking. The democratic choice of Hamas at the last election was not acceptable to the West and financial boycotts have increased the suffering.

As I write, the teachers are on strike because their modest salaries have only been partially paid. The Gaza blockade has once more put the Israel/Palestine conflict in the spotlight; the people of Gaza have broken down barriers and asserted their freedom. Could the destruction of the barrier into Egypt be the beginning of a new and more hopeful phase? Can the EU do more to influence the situation than just sending back its observers to the border?

*Pat Stapleton (Representative from 1979 to 1983 - with Brian Stapleton)*