

FARINGDON PEACE GROUP NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2004

www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk

I hope you have all put July 3rd in your diaries and will be able to join us at the GRAND PEACE FETE! Please look at the list on page 3 to see what you can do to help before, during or after the event. It's sure to be another wonderful afternoon of friendship and fun. Don't miss it!

There's one A4 colour poster included with this newsletter. If you go to the Faringdon Peace Group website then you can print out more; both in A5 size and also A4. PLEASE do print out as many as you can find good stick-up places for!

March meeting: "The Discrimination of Palestinian Citizens of Israel" Speaker: Georgina Reeves

Georgina Reeves, who has lived in Israel for many years and is married to a Palestinian, gave us an insight into life as a Palestinian citizen of Israel in her talk at our March meeting.

She described how, well before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jewish people settled in Palestine claiming that it was an empty and barren area and ignoring the rights of the 950,000 Palestinians who lived there. Ever since, land has been a fundamental area of discrimination which precludes Palestinians from enjoying equal or similar rights to those of Jewish citizens. The State has confiscated land from Palestinians through a complex combination of legal and administrative methods, until it owns 93% of it, which it leases almost exclusively to Jewish citizens.

The 750,000 Palestinians who fled their homes in the hostilities following independence and whose land was appropriated by the State have no right of return. This includes the 250,000 who remained within the State of Israel. Many villages were destroyed and others, which are home to 100,000 Palestinians and Bedouin, are not recognised by the State and are therefore denied even the most basic services such as water and sewerage.

Georgina explained how the Israeli legal system is institutionally biased and prevents Palestinians from enjoying their full civil, political, social and cultural rights. Although there are laws to protect the rights of women, the disabled etc. there are none to protect the Palestinian minority from discrimination.

The Government uses military service as a requirement for various benefits such as mortgages and loans, preferences in public employment and financial aid for university study. As the vast majority of Palestinians do not serve in the Israeli military, they are denied these benefits.

While Jewish immigrants and their families are granted automatic citizenship, Palestinian refugees are unable to return and citizens of the West Bank and Gaza are not able to live with their Israeli spouses in Israel or to apply for Israeli citizenship.



Election to the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, requires political parties to accept the notion of Israel as a Jewish state so any party which calls for full and complete equality of the Palestinian community in Israel is disqualified.

The stated objectives of the State Education Law (1953) are to advance Jewish culture and Zionist ideology thus subjecting Palestinian students to an educational system which ignores their own religion and culture. In education as in all areas of social provision, government budget and resource allowances are consistently greater for Jewish citizens than for Palestinians. Educational resources and funding are lacking in Arab schools and there are no Government funded pre-schools. This results in a vastly inferior education for Arab students to that provided for Jewish students, and a higher drop-out rate; in 16-17 year olds it is 40% for Arabs and 9% for Jews.

Israel claims to be an ethnic democratic state but its constitutional bill of rights states that the purpose of the law is "to protect human dignity and liberty, in order to establish... the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state." As long as the interests of Jewish citizens are placed above all others, Georgina believes that the system of legal and social discrimination against Palestinian citizens will continue.

April Meeting

This was a business meeting to discuss finances, donations and future activities including our 25th birthday next year! Possibly a big meeting with a big name (Bruce Kent?) in October, and/or an exhibition such as Wallingford had last year. Any more ideas welcome. We also watched the new 14 minute educational and campaigning video from the Movement for the Abolition of War: "WAR NO MORE" It's message is that wars are not inevitable and that we can take steps to resolve conflict in other ways. With contributions from Martin Bell, Joseph Rotblat, Jon Snow, Desmond Tutu, Bruce Kent and others we found it very well reasoned and useful. The Peace Group has bought a copy and the idea is that we, as individuals, take it to any other groups that we are involved with (schools, churches, W.I, U3A etc) to spread the message. There are very useful discussion sheets which accompany the video. Phone Jennie if you would like to borrow it 710308.

May Meeting: "Campaigning for migrants and refugees" Speaker: Gill Baden

Gill Baden is a founder member of the "Close Campsfield Campaign" and is also active both in "Bail for Immigration Refugees" (BID) which prepares bail hearings for refugees and "Asylum Welcome", which provides visitors for refugees in detention and support for those in the community, including 200 minors. Gill explained that most people migrate not to get what others have but because they cannot stay where they are. More people than ever are on the move due to wars, famine and trade restrictions and food subsidies which destroy the livelihoods of farmers and industries in the developing world. Africa holds 27.5% of the world's refugees, Europe 17% and Britain 3% of that. Campsfield is the closest detention centre to us. It is 10 years old, run by Group 4 and, despite a government announcement that it would close, it is due to expand to take in 290 male detainees. Many are political refugees, fleeing danger torture and even death. They are held without charge, without time limit, without proper reasons given and without proper access to legal representation. Amnesty International reports that these are breaches of internationally recognised human rights. Others are "overstayers" whose visitors' visas ran out up to ten years ago and who have established their lives here with jobs and families. According to a recent inspection, more than two thirds of detainees felt unsafe most of the time. Complaints about assaults by detainees or guards are poorly dealt with and once someone is deported all complaints are dropped. There is movement of detainees between detention centres with no reasons given, which makes it difficult to settle and to get continuity of help with, for example, bail hearings. Applications for asylum in the UK fell by 41% in the year 2002-2003. Under the present immigration Act all support is withdrawn from asylum seekers if they do not apply within 24 hours, leaving many destitute. An even more repressive new Act "Asylum and Immigration – Treatment of Claimants etc." is expected later this month. It will remove legal safeguards from applicants, who will not be able to challenge the legality of Home Office decisions; a change opposed by the legal fraternity. It will make it a criminal offence to arrive in this country without the proper papers. It will be possible to send applicants back to "safe" countries which they have passed through, even if they did not set foot in them. BID's work will be of even greater value when legal aid entitlement is cut to 5 hours per applicant, when solicitors say they need 15 hours even for a simple case. Very few solicitors are committed enough to this work to take it on effectively, others take on cases but do very little.

If anyone would like to join the campaign, there are meetings on the first Tuesday of the month in Oxford Town Hall at 7.00pm. and demonstrations at the main gates at Campsfield on the last Saturday of the month between 12 and 2. See also website: www.closecampsfield.org.uk

ALDERMASTON 2004

In 1958 people marched to Aldermaston because of the fear of nuclear war. That fear is still with us and people marched this Easter to put pressure on the government to stop the new developments at Aldermaston which would allow it to

research and test the next generation of nuclear weapons in contravention of the nuclear Non-Proliferation-Treaty. Dave Watson, our man-with-a-van represented the FPG and provided valuable support to the marchers.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

I find it impossible to keep up with events in Iraq and Palestine and to give any sort of summary in these pages. For those of you with a particular interest who feel you don't get a full enough picture from the media, I suggest you visit or join Voices in the Wilderness (Iraq) or Palestine Solidarity Campaign, both of which produce excellent up to date information.

Voices in the Wilderness, 5, Caledonian Rd. London N1 9DX

0845-458-2564, voices@voicesuk.org, www.voicesuk.org

Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Box BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX, 020-7700-6192

Info@palestinecampaign.org, www.palestinecampaign.org

BOYCOTT ISRAELI GOODS

The PSC are calling for a continuing boycott of Israeli goods until the occupation is ended. Products to look out for are:

- JAFFA (citrus fruit), TIVALI (health foods), OSEM (snacks soups nuts), DELTA GILL CLOTHING, YARDEN (wine), ELITE (halva, sweets, coffee), AHAVA (Dead Sea beauty products), CARMEL (avocados, dates, salad, herbs, wine).

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- SAT. 15TH MAY: Levellers Day, Burford
- SAT. 15TH MAY: Kyoto March – Rally at Imperial War Museum, 3.30, Dinosaur Party, US Embassy, 5.30.
- SUN. 16TH MAY: World Debt Day
- WEDS. 2ND JUNE: FPG Speaker meeting, Peter Foot, Lecturer at RMCS, Shrivenham, "Changes in Military Education"
- TUES. 15TH JUNE: Fete planning meeting, 8.00pm. Denny's, Clock House
- SAT. 26TH JUNE: Shellingford Fete. Help needed, see Jennie
- SAT. 3RD JULY: GRAND PEACE FETE!!! 2.00 Clock House Coleshill. Lots of help needed – see following page in this newsletter.
- WEDS. 7TH JULY: FPG Meeting
- MON. 12TH JULY: Post-Fete-Feedback-Party, Bring food and drink to share, 7.00pm. Clock House. Thanks to Denny.

All FPG Meetings 8.00pm, Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Road, unless otherwise stated
Faringdon Amnesty Group meets second Wednesday of month, also 8.00pm, Friends Meeting, House.

Any dates, articles for newsletter, or for more information, please contact me, Karen Vogt:
7, Leamington Drive, Faringdon, Oxon. SN7 7JZ, 01367-241707, karen_vogt@lineone.net

Faringdon Peace Group

GRAND PEACE FETE 2004

Saturday 3rd July – 2pm-5pm

Clock House, Coleshill: on the Faringdon to Highworth B4019 road

Can you help?? We need **you** – but we also need **LOTS OF GOODIES** for all the stalls:

CAKES	For Produce Stall as well as for TEAS...
PLANTS	Indoor, outdoor, ornamental, vegetable, flowering, fruiting, unusual...
PRODUCE	jam, marmalade, pickles, quiches, pizzas, cakes
BOOKS	hardback, paperback
JUMBLE, WHITE ELEPHANT & BRIC-A-BRAC	Clean & in reasonable condition
RAFFLE	Chocolates, gifts, ALCOHOL, hampers, vouchers...
TOMBOLA GIFTS	New or good 2 nd hand; bottles of anything from shampoo to salad cream, alcoholic especially welcome! Tins & packets of food; ornaments, wine, chocolates.... 'Prizes' from mail order firms or special offers from petrol companies are VERY useful!

We are again hoping to have a **separate tombola for children**, so any good second hand /new small toys or ornaments would be very welcome! For the past two years, the children's tombola has been very popular!

So – **PLEASE START COLLECTING NOW!** Hopefully, you WILL be able to come to the Fete – in which case simply bring all your collected items with you on the day. However, for TOMBOLA gifts it's very useful to receive them beforehand so that they can have tickets put on them. Get them to Jennie Chesterton (01367-710308) in plenty of time if at all possible.

And anything for the Fete CAN also be dropped off beforehand at Karen/Sjoerd's – 7 Leamington Drive, Faringdon. (phone 241707 first to check that we're in) - OR – if you prefer we can come & collect.

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO TO HELP WOULD BE MUCH APPRECIATED! PLEASE PHONE OR EMAIL ASAP IF YOU CAN COME AND BE A HELPER ON THE DAY!
MANY THANKS!