

Palestinian refugees in Syria

Background:

In April 2009 I stayed in and visited a number of Palestinian refugee camps across Syria as part of a Northern TUC delegation. The delegation forged links with a number of groups which were working to promote the rights of Palestinians and Palestinian refugees, particularly in many cases Palestinian women and young people.

Since returning home we have continued to work with these groups and under the umbrella of the Northern TUC we have provided practical solidarity work and strengthened our links and friendships with a number of civil society groups and individuals.

Current situation:

Syria is now effectively in the midst of a civil war, and this has spilled over into the Palestinian refugee camps. The contact that we have been able to maintain has been haphazard, but the information we have received is very distressing, and the support we can offer at this point is very limited. We cannot send funds as bank accounts have been frozen due to EU sanctions – although this may not help at the moment anyway.

Briefly:

- Hospitals are not able to function as they have run out many essential medicines, are frequently subject to power failures and in some cases have suffered shelling,
- Residential areas are also frequently subjected to shelling, in some places tanks have moved in,
- In the last month more than 50 Palestinians killed, many of them women and children totally unconnected in the broader Syrian conflict,
- An update at the start of August said that people within the camps have not eaten for 3 days and it has not been possible to move dead bodies from the streets.

Going forward:

Visiting the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria changed my life and the situation that has been described to me over the past few months is the most horrific and distressing that I can imagine.

Jafra, the organisation we have worked most closely with for the past 3 years are committed to providing us with regular reports on their situation and are keen to build further on our solidarity links when the situation in Syria has stabilised, they are planning to focus their work on Relief and Development, and will most likely be leading the 'clean-up' of the refugee camps after the massacres.

I would propose that the branch reaffirms their commitment to provide long term practical support to Jafra wherever possible, including a financial donation when appropriate (amount to be agreed by Branch Committee), but also including other actions where needed.

**Josie Bird, Branch Chairperson
September 2012**