

To: BritTzedek-General@yahoogroups.com From: listserv@btvshalom.org Date: Mon, 25 Nov 2002 14:52:19 -0500 Subject: [BritTzedek-General] Action Alert

ACTION ALERT

Dear Members and Supporters,

We will be sending our membership regular action alerts to encourage immediate action on specific issues.

In the action alert that follows, we add our voices to those of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (the American Reform Movement) to urge the Israeli government to provide protection for the Palestinian population of the West Bank, whose ability to harvest their olive crop is being threatened by weapon-bearing Jewish settlers. For the Palestinian communities, the olive groves comprise an economic mainstay. In the midst of the harvest season, olive laborers are in urgent need of protection.

A brief description of the problem follows below, together with suggested actions that we urge you to take.

Thank you for your attention and please contact me if you have questions.

L'Shalom,

Diane Balsler National Chair, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom Advocacy/Public Policy Committee

Note: The following is taken from an alert issued by the American Reform Movement.

URGE THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO PROTECT PALESTINIAN OLIVE GROVES

TAKE ACTION: Please send emails to both the Israeli Minister of Defense and the Israeli Minister of Internal Security urging them to ensure that security forces uphold the law for all by protecting Palestinians and their olive trees during the harvest season. We need to communicate that we support the preservation of Palestinian human rights and the peaceful efforts of the volunteers who are helping the Palestinians safely harvest their olives.

Shaul Mofaz , Israeli Minister of Defense 972-3-697-7053 (facsimile) sar@mod.gov.il (email)

Uzi Landau, Israeli Minister of Internal Security 972-3-581-1832 (facsimile) sar@mops.gov.il (e-mail)

Please send a bcc to advocacy@btvshalom.org so that we can keep track of your response to this action alert.

BACKGROUND

by Professor Naomi Chazan Deputy Speaker of the Knesset and member of the Israeli Advisory Council of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom

The olive tree and life in this land have traditionally gone together. Since the days of Noah, the olive branch has embodied the dual notions of productivity and peace. The olive groves that dot the landscape are vibrant proof of the historical attachment to, and continuity in, this area. Today, Jewish zealots threaten to desecrate the symbolic and material meaning of the olive. If they succeed, they will not only wreak untold havoc on the Palestinians, they will also debase their own heritage.

Autumn marks the brief olive-picking season. During October and November olive growers harvest their crop, which provides the main source of their income for the rest of the year. The lives of thousands of families literally depend on these few weeks. This is especially true of Palestinian producers in the West Bank, where unemployment levels are well over fifty percent, and per capita income has been cut by half during the past two years.

Since the beginning of this month, Palestinian efforts to gather their olive produce have been systematically, viciously, and maliciously thwarted by a handful of fanatic Jewish settlers. The first complaints (documented extensively by human rights organizations most notably the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and LAW) focused on theft and harassment. An eyewitness at Kfar Yasuf reported that for three solid days, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. settlers from nearby Tapuach were seen picking the villagers' crop. When asked to desist from this outright robbery, they fired bullets at the harvesters. The olive-picking process has been disrupted at Yasuf for nearly three weeks. Similar reports have been filed from Beit Furik, Kfar Kalil, Deir al-Hatab, and Salem, to mention but a few.

On October 6, 2002 the attack on olive-pickers escalated. Settlers from Itamar and Gideon killed Hani Bani Murra of Aqraba village, and wounded Adel Bani Jabber. This same group may have been responsible for the death of Farid Nasasrah on October 17, 2002. Violent clashes have occurred in other places as well, most recently last weekend in several villages near Ramallah.

When efforts to stop the harvest have failed, the settlers have targeted the crop. In the village of Albueib (south of Hebron) the residents of Bat Hefer physically accosted the Almahadna family as it was gathering its crop, destroyed the bags of olives it had filled, and threatened to return and do the same if the harvest continued. On Saturday, October 12, 2002, settlers set fire to 2000 olive trees in Silwad and al-Mizra'a al-Sharqiyya east of Ramallah. The residents of Hirbat Yanoun were so intimidated that they actually fled their homes. Hardly an olive-picking outing has proceeded without blatant interference.

The motives of those who have carried out these despicable and deeply disturbing acts are truly villainous. One aim, no doubt, is to further impoverish an already miserable Palestinian population. Another is to vent hatred and arouse anger. Fuelled by a misguided mutation of patriotism, those responsible for assaulting olive-pickers seek to uproot them not only from their livelihood but also from their land.

The campaign against the olive harvest is mean, reprehensible, and profoundly inhuman. Besides being morally untenable, it is also patently illegal. As long as Israel controls the West Bank and the Gaza Strip it is obliged, in accordance with international humanitarian law, to protect the civilian population, its well-being, and its land. Condoning the actions of a handful of firebrands defies the most fundamental codes of global behavior.

Unfortunately, the official Israeli reaction to the disruption of the olive harvest has only exacerbated the situation. Specific complaints filed with the police in Hebron and Ariel, (for example), were simply ignored. In other instances soldiers ostensibly guarding the harvesters actually sided with the rampaging pillagers. Not one settler was arrested until 22 October 2002, as if these egregious violations were insignificant and their perpetrators above the law. A special permit to allow 3,000 Palestinian olive-pickers to help with the harvest in Israel was withdrawn. On Tuesday of this week the harvest was halted entirely for twenty-four hours.

The public outcry, coupled with widespread media coverage, may have finally compelled a change in policy. The Chief of Staff, Moshe Ya'alon, has ordered the IDF to protect the olive harvest in the West Bank. Some settlers have been apprehended. Hopefully, what is left of the crop can be picked and safeguarded.

The current disruption of the olive harvest may be a direct byproduct of a trend of olive grove destruction (or in military terminology "shaving") for purportedly defensive purposes. All too often, these activities have been carried out without sufficient consideration of their symbolic, as well as economic, repercussions. The targeting of the groves, and by extension the affinity to the land, resonates far beyond the simple act of razing the trees.

The violation of the harvest and groves has also, refreshingly, mobilized many Israelis who are still sensitive to the olive and what it represents. Israelis who have not succumbed to normative numbness are joining, on a daily basis, the agonies of this year's picking season. They have brought the outrageous conduct of the assailants to public attention. By helping to salvage the crop, they are consciously opting for the olive branch and the human dignity it depicts.

Olives are food and - here - much more. The ravaging of this year's crop cannot continue with impunity. For, indeed, tampering with the olive is akin to questioning the attachments and values it has come to signify. One can only hope that, as in the past, the olive and all it entails will survive its defilers. (source: MeretzUSA's website: <http://www.meretzusa.org/olives.shtml>)

SAMPLE LETTER

As an American Jew committed to the peace and security of Israel, I believe that Israel must balance immediate security measures with 1) the preservation of dignity and human rights for all, including the Palestinians, and 2) the longer-term concerns of peace and democracy. For this reason I am concerned by the ongoing threat to Palestinian lives and livelihoods, as evidenced in the targeted raids by Jewish settlers against the Palestinians who own or labor in Palestinian olive groves.

I agree with the recent statement of Deputy Knesset Speaker Naomi Chazan that "the campaign against the olive harvest is mean, reprehensible, and profoundly inhuman. Besides being morally untenable, it is also patently illegal. As long as Israel controls the West Bank and the Gaza Strip it is obliged, in accordance with international humanitarian law, to protect the civilian population, its well-being, and its land."

I therefore urge you to work with Israeli security forces to defend the rights of the Palestinians by protecting their right to harvest their olive trees.

Sincerely,

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