June 2, 2002

Starhawk is with a group of seventeen people who are acting as peace witnesses (through the International Solidarity Movement) at the Balata refugee camp next to the town of Nablus, now occupied by the Israeli army. The scene has been intense, with wide-scale home demolitions, gunfire, and explosions. The ISM witnesses, dedicated to nonviolence, have been attempting to provide a peaceful presence, escorting frightened refugees to clinics, visiting many homes, and documenting demolitions by the army. ISM witnesses are talking directly and personally to the soldiers about what the soldiers are doing. ISM volunteer Linda Sartor reports that there seems to be a shift in how the army is treating peace witnesses -- where a few months ago witnesses were beaten and arrested, there now seems to be at least some respect for their persons. Linda says the Israeli soldiers are also much more careful of the civilian population in the presence of the observers.

Communications are difficult. Starhawk and other ISM volunteers continue to call colleagues and give radio interviews via cellphone. As of this writing (Sunday midday, California time), seven of the ISM witnesses at Balata have been arrested, including three American women: Annie, Darlene, and Valerie (last names not available), all in their 40's and 50's. Also arrested were peace witnesses from Iceland, Japan, Denmark, and England (names not available). Those arrested are being detained, and will likely be deported. Three ISM volunteers have decided to leave on their own. Seven, including Starhawk and Linda, are still there.

According to the Israeli paper "Haaretz Daily," Nablus has become a major focus of the army's current offensive, deploying dozens of armored vehicles. This weekend Nablus and Balata camp were searched by the Israeli army looking for suspected combatants and explosives. Much of the search was facilitated by smashing large holes through the interconnected walls of row-houses, from one house into the next. Walls were also broken through from the outside. By cellphone, Starhawk reports that the house she is staying in has had all its rooms ruined except the single room that she, four other ISM peace witnesses, and the women and children of that family share. That one room may have been left undisturbed because of their presence. Later Israeli soldiers entered to search and further wreck the house; Linda believes this was a show of force to the international observers themselves. The ISM volunteers spoke with them, and the soldiers eventually left.

KPFA free speech radio (94.1 FM in Bay Area, and archived on their web site) is one of the few media outlets carrying coverage of these events. Tonight's evening broadcast
(6-2-02) may very well have a cellphone interview with Starhawk and/or Linda.

-- compiled by Mer

To help support the ISM peace witnesses:

○ Email or call your local Israeli embassy; politely and firmly ask that ISM peace witnesses be respected and allowed to remain in occupied Palestine as a positive presence that protects civilians and promotes peace.

○ Email or call the embassies of Iceland, Japan, Denmark, England, and US (or US State Dept., if you are in the US now). Encourage them to support their citizens in their efforts as private peace witnesses.

○ Talk and write to your friends to help spread accurate information about the situation and create "consumer demand" for accurate and balanced media coverage.

○ Communicate with your favorite media to let them know of your interest in the story of ISM peace witnesses campaign and request continuing coverage.

○ Contact human rights groups to ask for their support for ISM peace witnesses.

As we know from Starhawk and her friend Lisa's recent political detention in Canada, media attention and large numbers of calls, emails, letters can make a huge difference.

For detailed background on the situation and contact information for international and US peace groups working on the Israel/Palestine issue, check out the International Solidarity Movement's web site: www.freepalestinecampaign.org.

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