

## *Voices for Peace in Israel and Palestine*

### ■ **Working to Break the Silence**

- Gila Svirsky, Israel
- June 6, 2004

Friends,

Last week probably set a record for demonstrations in Israel against the occupation—a result not only of the 37th "anniversary" of the occupation, which we mark in June, but also of the ongoing violence in Gaza: Some 30-40 more Rafah homes were destroyed this week, while many Palestinians were arrested and some killed. Comparatively speaking, the army is now showing restraint compared with the original onslaught, thanks to the outcry from people all over the world. If you ever lose faith that your faxes and phone calls make a difference, remind yourself that hundreds of homes, maybe even thousands, were saved as a result of your efforts in this campaign. Keep them coming.

The streets of Tel Aviv had "walking exhibitions" this week, as protesters donned "sandwich boards" showing photographs of Gaza and the so-called "security wall". On Wednesday, shoppers downtown and university students got to see these graphic scenes and, on Friday, a big beach day in Tel Aviv, the exhibitors snaked through beach chairs and blankets, bringing some reality into the sunbathing. More reality was brought to Tel Aviv's cultural set on Saturday night, as women brought the photos of Rafah's destroyed homes to the lines of people waiting to get into the Philharmonic, Habima Theater, and a movie theater. "How can you watch movies when homes are being destroyed in Gaza?" chanted the women. Just in case people in cars missed the sights, the women also blocked the streets, and a car accompanying them projected slides onto the shutters of buildings along the road.

A remarkable photo and video exhibit opened on Tuesday in Tel Aviv, showing not art, but the abuse of Palestinians committed by Israeli soldiers in Hebron. And who were the photographers? 30 soldiers who themselves had served there. Through their stories and photos, this exhibit tells terrible tales of violence, physical abuse, and property vandalism during their tours of duty. Yehuda Shaul, a 21-year old, organized this exhibit after completing his service in Hebron as an officer of a high level combat unit. (After his release from the army, Yehuda stood with us several times on the Jerusalem vigil of Women in Black.) When asked if the photos showed isolated incidents, Yehuda replied, "Breaking silence about this subject is exceptional, not the acts themselves."

At Thursday's gay pride parade in Jerusalem, Kveesa Shchora ("black laundry"), the anti-occupation movement of lesbians and gay men, marched separately carrying their own signs. The ultra-Orthodox Jerusalemites turned out to insult and curse them, with a prominent Kabbalist rabbi declaring that homosexuals were "subhuman" and would be "reincarnated" as rabbits. "Be careful what you wish for," said a lesbian friend, thinking

perhaps of the procreation patterns of these sweet animal friends.

On Friday morning, we held a bus tour for women attending the Feminist Conference in the north of Israel, bringing participants to see the "Security Wall", which most had never seen before. This was followed by a large Friday vigil of Women in Black, in which many conference participants took part.

Saturday morning saw a joint Palestinian-Jerusalem demonstration at Aram, just north of Jerusalem, where the government has just begun work on the Wall. Fortunately, this demonstration went smoothly, with no violence from the border police, which was another exception to the rule, unfortunately.

Saturday night, Peace Now held a demonstration in Jerusalem, where several thousand people showed up to demand that the government leave the territories. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, former army Chief of Staff, called upon everyone to go see the photo exhibition of the Hebron-based soldiers (good for you, Amnon!). Less nice was the part where Peace Now told the police to shut down the video screening of "Women Resist the Occupation" that we were showing on a side street—in no way interfering with the main body of the demonstration, which we supported. If you would like to order a copy of this amazing film, see the end of this e-mail.

Finally, beautiful purple posters bloomed like flowers all over Israel this week, calling out "Dai Lakibush, Yad I'Piyus", meaning "End the Occupation, Seek Reconciliation", and having the women's symbol on it. We simply can't imagine who would have illegally pasted posters in 3 cities, covering the walls, traffic signs, garbage cans, billboards, bus stops, & fences . . .

I end with a translation of the flyer we handed out all over Israel this week:

**Shhhhhhhh, security!**

They tell us not to speak of unemployment, because the security situation is so bad.

They tell us not to talk about the municipal workers who haven't received their salaries, or sexual violence, or hungry children, not right now, because we're at war and there's no one to talk to.

And not about the corruption of politicians, because we'll soon be leaving Gaza.

And not about selling the country to the World Bank at end-of-season prices,

because who knows anything about that bank and anyway we're in the midst of war.

And not about foreign workers, racism,

clean air and water,  
selling women into bondage,  
road accidents,  
or breast cancer.

**WE ARE FURIOUS  
ABOUT THE OCCUPATION  
and about**

The capitalists who create this war,  
The generals who continue to sleep well at night,  
And the governments of occupation that bring us more and more  
destruction, killing, and hate,  
37 YEARS OF OCCUPATION AND OPPRESSION ARE  
37 YEARS TOO MANY!

The women's actions this week were all organized and carried out jointly by the various member organizations of the Coalition of Women for Peace. They are listed below. In addition, we worked in alliance with our friends in many other wonderful organizations. It's not easy to bring reality into Israel, especially when the local media do not do their part, and we need all the friends and cooperation we can get.

Shalom from Jerusalem.

### **Documentary: "Women Resist the Occupation"**

This 20-min. video documents some of the bold and creative actions of the Coalition of Women for Peace, sometimes in cooperation with Palestinian women, in efforts to resist occupation and achieve a just peace. Produced by experienced Israeli filmmaker Claudia (Cala) Levin and a team of 4 women from Israel's Indymedia. Available in US or European formats (NTSC or PAL). To order, write to [gsvirsky@netvision.net.il](mailto:gsvirsky@netvision.net.il) and we'll mail it out at once. Then send cash or a check for \$25 (or 20 Euro), less if this is too much for you, more if you can, to support our work. If you send a check make it out to Bat Shalom, and mail it to:

Coalition of Women for Peace  
P.O. Box 10252  
Jerusalem, Israel 91102

### **Members of the Coalition of Women for Peace:**

Bat Shalom; The Fifth Mother; Neled—Women for Coexistence; New Profile; Noga Feminist Journal; TANDI—Movement of Democratic Women for Israel; WILPF—Israel chapter; and Women in Black.

### **Our principles:**

- \* An end to the occupation.
- \* The full involvement of women in negotiations for peace.
- \* Establishment of the state of Palestine side by side with the state of Israel based on the 1967 borders.
- \* Recognition of Jerusalem as the shared capital of two states.
- \* Israel must recognize its responsibility for the results of the 1948 war, and find a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

- \* Equality, inclusion and justice for Palestinian citizens of Israel.
- \* Opposition to the militarism that permeates Israeli society.
- \* Equal rights for women and for all residents of Israel.
- \* Social and economic justice for Israel's citizens, and integration in the region.

**2 ways to make a donation—we need your support!**

(1) For a US-tax deduction, make out a check to "US/Israel Women-to-Women", write on the memo line (or separately) that it is "For the Coalition of Women for Peace", and mail it to US/Israel Women-to-Women, 45 West 36th Street, NY, NY 10018.

(2) If a US-tax deduction is not relevant, make out a check to "Bat Shalom" and mail it to the Coalition of Women for Peace, P.O. Box 10252, Jerusalem, Israel 91102. Any currency is welcome!

Gila Svirsky is an Israeli peace and human rights activist.