



community peacemaker teams

# EU migration policies lead to a “Deadly End”



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# Letter from the editor

Borders are embodied in every space on both sides of the "line" we call borders, and migrants are the bodies that personify the rupturing dynamics that tear into the fabric of our humanity. For over seven decades, Palestinian bodies have been pounded by the powers that determine where the queue begins and where it ends. The siege on Gaza that started in October played out on live television the all-consuming power of borders. The Israeli government asked Gazans to head south and herded them in that direction by using bombs and killing over 11,000.

Palestinians have lived lifetimes of negotiating where to step and when, what queue to stand in, and which line causes death or keeps life, all while waiting for liberation. These negotiations are not individual choices but impositions of occupation.

According to Shahram Khosravi, these spaces of waiting separate "those who have the power to make other people wait and people who don't have that power." Just like for the Palestinians, migrants arriving on the US/Mexico border or those waiting in a camp on the island of Lesbos deal with the sovereign power of the state to force waiting and queues. Frequently, as illustrated in the Aegean Migrant Solidarity Team's report "Deadly End," waiting leads to death. To wait in Syria for the bombings to stop could lead to death; to wait for a dinghy to reach the shores of Lesbos could lead to death; and

waiting in a refugee camp with prison-like conditions could also lead to death. This form of controlling the body is deadly, and states know it. As Khosravi argues, this delay is an act to steal time and keep those waiting from ascending in hierarchy.

Migrants from all over the world arrive at the southern US border seeking entry to better their lives, even if they have to "endure racism, xenophobia, and countless other indignities and hardships." In this issue, Linda Knox writes about the enduring human spirit to resist death's powers. The jump in Mexican families applying for asylum in the US only indicates the enforced choices of crossing all kinds of borders, even though the options are precarious.

What gives me hope, though, in this world of enforced choices is the choice to resist. While queues produce "obedient behaviors," they also are sites of resistance. They are spaces where stories are told; they are files of bodies that can question borders. In Palestine, while resisters wait, they practice *sumud* or steadfast perseverance. During the Arab spring, people chanted "*Infitah*," which in Arabic means "opening," against the dictatorial regimes and also in Europe, against its borders.

I hope your reading of this issue will invite you to question the *borderous* spaces that divide, maim and kill and propel you to take solidarity action to dismantle these fortresses of class and state.



In kindness,  
Caldwell Manners  
Communications Coordinator

Cover photo: Elias Marcou

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# Apology for El Guayabo

CPT Colombia celebrates with the community of El Guayabo its recognition of victims of the conflict. On 2 November 2023, the Land Restitution Unit arrived in El Guayabo and its Regional Director Rafael Figueroa apologized for the systemic abandonment of the state and for the enormous injustice of the institutions who did not believe the community when they bore their testimonies as victims.

Since the beginning of their resistance on their land, the community of El Guayabo has denounced that they have been threatened and displaced from the land by paramilitary groups and Rodrigo López Henao since 2002. But none of the state institutions listened to the community nor did they receive appropriate protection. On the contrary, the community has continued to suffer threats, legal battles, stigmatization, and forced evictions from their

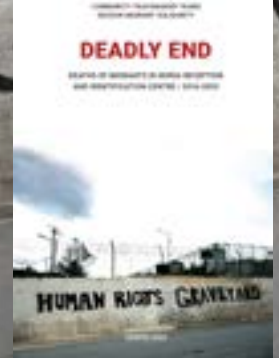
land by various institutions and armed groups, both legal and illegal.

A month ago, the community learned that the paramilitary commanders who committed these victimizing acts in 2002 confessed to their crimes in the Justice and Peace process. With these confessions, the work of the Land Restitution Unit can finally begin, and after 10 years, put into place the process of rectifying the damages that the community has suffered and thus achieving justice for the community of El Guayabo.

We have always believed in the community, we have walked together for more than 10 years to demand justice and we will continue walking together until their struggle sees the results of guarantees and peace, on land that they love deeply and for which they have sacrificed to protect. ■

# EU migration policies lead to a “Deadly End”

HUMAN RIGHTS GRAVEYARD



read the report

Photo: Elias Marcou

Our recently released report “Deadly End” addresses the migrant deaths that took place in the notorious Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Lesbos, Greece. By collecting information about the circumstances of those deaths, we intend to bring to light the conditions many people crossing borders must endure.

As a result of our research, it became clear that the structure and operation of the detention centers implicitly foretold the migrant deaths that followed. In other words, according to testimonies, the distance between life and death becomes dangerously close inside the detention center. It’s precisely this liminal space that we try to describe.

From March 2016 until the end of Moria RIC in September 2020, there were 26 instances in which people living inside the camp lost their lives. In all cases, we draw some general patterns that led to the loss of life:

**Conditions:**

The official capacity of the Moria RIC was 2,757 people, but its actual population fluctuated in much higher numbers over the years, reaching its peak of a reported 21,000 residents in January 2020. Most of the people lived in an overflow area around the RIC with makeshift facilities and inhumane living conditions. Meanwhile, inside the official RIC,

people lived in overcrowded containers or tents.

In at least nine cases, the camp’s deplorable conditions contributed to—if not directly caused—death. Overcrowding, inadequate protection from extreme weather, dangerously insufficient infrastructure, and politically expedient abandonment were all aspects of the circumstances surrounding these deaths.

In the winter of 2016-17, people living inside the camp were forced to use makeshift heating solutions that caused three deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning. Two years later, in January 2019, another person died from a heart attack due to the cold.

Severe overcrowding strained the camp’s infrastructure during the summer of 2019, resulting in a fire due to a faulty electricity system, which claimed one woman’s life. Tragically, the lack of an evacuation plan led to two more deadly fires in the following months.

**Medical issues:**

Between 2016 and 2020, seven deaths at Moria RIC were the result of possible medical neglect, including cases related to denied/partial access to healthcare. In most instances, responsibility does not stem from individual actors but from institutional structures—therefore, the term “state medical neglect” is more appropriate. For example, only three

doctors were working in Moria RIC to cover the needs of 15,000 people in the autumn of 2019. Of course, living conditions in Moria camp were themselves aggravating for the health of every person staying there.

An indicative case involves a 5-year-old girl who had serious health issues that could only be treated in Athens, but due to geographical restrictions, she was unable to travel until it was too late. In another case, a 9-month-old infant died from dehydration because there were no doctors and interpreters available in the camp. Lastly, a man died from cardiac arrest in an ambulance, due to racially-motivated medical neglect on behalf of paramedical and medical staff.

#### **Suicides:**

Under circumstances of prolonged indefinite confinement, inhumane living conditions, inadequate facilities, overcrowding, daily exposure to violence, and constant insecurity, the thought of death became widespread. The mental health of the people living in the camp deteriorated increasingly over the years, as is evident by the large numbers of attempted suicides, self-harm and substance abuse reported among adults and children. This situation was exacerbated by systemic institutional abuse, continuous traumatic stress, and inadequate mental health services.

In March 2020, a person was found unconscious inside the camp, and his death was presumed to be suicide through overdose of sedative pills. Also, in January 2020, a man was found hanging in his cell in Moria's Pre-Removal Detention Center (PRO.KE.K.A.). Other detainees at the time spoke of detention practices that could have contributed to the death (he was held in isolation for two weeks, despite showing signs of mental distress, and having previously threatened to harm himself). Yet, he didn't receive any psychological support. This suicide was followed by numerous suicide attempts inside PRO.KE.K.A., frequently preceded and followed by police harassment and violence.

#### **Murders:**

Between 2016 and 2020, there were seven cases of death in and around Moria RIC that could be attributed to homicide with intent.

In cases such as murder, the perpetrator's intention is of enormous importance. Nevertheless, the conditions in which the RIC operated constituted an extremely violent environment in which human life was broadly devalued. This deprivation regime created competition for scarce tangible (money/food/clothing) and intangible (vulnerability status,

asylum, geographical restriction) goods, which became matters of survival.

Moreover, the phenomenon of gangs was long-lasting, but intensified during periods of intense overpopulation. Despite the permanent presence of police forces inside the RIC, protection of lives wasn't ensured, since in many cases police didn't intervene in clashes that resulted in injuries and deaths.


#### **Ending notes:**

The highest number of deaths occurred from August 2019 to September 2020 (16 of 26 total deaths). This rise in fatalities correlates with the dramatic increase in population, which was not accompanied by further infrastructure, exacerbating the lack of access to healthcare or guaranteed security measures.

Moria RIC was a place whose conditions were certainly not designed to sustain life. At its peak, Moria camp constituted the second largest 'city' in Lesvos, made up exclusively of those considered "non-citizens"—for whom ambulance services refused to respond, police declined to offer protection, and whose dead were not even given the respect of being remembered. Additionally, while police forces were not available for migrants in the moment of need, they were always present in the aftermath. Police handled demonstrations against the loss of life with tactics used against 'insurgent' populations: by controlling and isolating them with heavy weaponry.

People's deaths inside Moria RIC were—to varying degrees—directly related to living conditions in the camp and, thus, to European migration policies. Yet, nobody was charged or held accountable for these deaths. In some cases, the courts have not even investigated their circumstances. On the contrary, we would argue that the Greek state acted in bad faith regarding migrant deaths in Moria RIC by actively spreading misinformation on many occasions that attempted to redirect blame onto those living in the camp.

Moreover, instead of shifting away from the detention centers policy, the Greek state and European Union reinforced and evolved it. For example, a new Closed Controlled Access Center (CCAC) is expected to open in Lesvos. The CCACs are opening a new deplorable chapter on migration management, as they will further deteriorate living conditions by functioning more restrictively (intensive controls, limited exit hours, constant monitoring by electronic surveillance systems) and will lead to severe, dangerous, and inhumane isolation of migrants. ■



# Migration at the US/Mexico border remains volatile: all options are precarious

By Linda Knox

Even as the immediate causes of migration from south to north across the US-Mexican border change, the root causes for why people migrate remain the same. Due to climate change or overworked land, people cannot grow food; and they are hungry. There are very few jobs in an economy run by drug cartels. People are threatened by government officials, soldiers, police, and criminal organizations—all of whom may be colluding with one another. In recent years, collapsing economies and the violence of armed actors have caused people from all over the world to make their way through Mexico to the southern US border. They come from Honduras and Haiti, from Venezuela and Cuba, and from India and Turkey. They arrive by plane or hike through the Darien Gap of Panama. They cross the Usumacinta River between Mexico and Guatemala and travel north by foot, bus, or train.

And now, the number of Mexican migrants to the United States border is again rapidly increasing. The US Office of Customs and Border Protection statistics indicate a rise from 4000 encounters with Mexican families at the border in July of 2020 to almost 22,000 in July of 2023.

Consider a typical Mexican family arriving at the northern border in the past year. In their home state of perhaps Guerrero or Chiapas in southern Mexico, family members are trapped between warring armed actors. In Guerrero alone, there are more than a dozen competing cartels. Ordinary people are pressured, threatened, intimidated, and assaulted. They are vulnerable to extortion, kidnapping, and even death. Finally, many decide to head north to the US because they can no longer survive where they are, and they fear for their lives. Ironically, they probably have to pay another cartel to get to the border.

Once the family has arrived in Juarez, Nogales, Laredo, or any other border city, they have two choices. One choice is to pay the cartel to help them cross the border and hope to avoid apprehension by the Border Patrol. This means either living without documents—alongside the more than 11 million undocumented people who are presently in the US, or requesting asylum when they are apprehended by US Border Patrol. The second choice is to stay in the border community in Mexico while they try to get an asylum appointment with customs officials by using the phone app, CBP One. At the ports that do not use CBP

One, a family can simply walk up to the gate, present their documents, and ask for asylum. However, either choice is filled with hazards and uncertainty.

The reality is that the US immigration system is simply overwhelmed with the increasing number of people seeking to enter the country, and because of polarized politics, the US government is unlikely to pass immigration reform that would accommodate the present situation. Currently, the Border Patrol may simply repatriate families to Mexico who entered without authorization, but more often families are released into the US with a notice for a court date that may be months or even years in the future. Their legal status is unclear, their economic resources are limited, and they are literally being dumped on the streets of towns especially in Arizona, California, and Texas. Communities in these towns have come together to provide temporary housing, food and other necessities for migrants, as well as transportation to larger cities such as Tucson or San Antonio. It is these migrant families whom the governors of Texas, Florida, and Arizona have sent by plane or bus to large cities in the northern US where resources to provide housing, health care, and schooling are now strained to the breaking point.

If a family chooses to enter the US through a port, it takes months to obtain an appointment with CBP One, and the family has to survive in the meantime. If a family tries to enter at a port that does not use the app, their chances of entry are even more uncertain. Many families who enter the US using the app are released on parole. That means they can stay in the country for two years and can get a

work permit in about six weeks. However, parole does not offer a foolproof way to legal residency or citizenship. These people must apply for asylum within the first year of their parole, and there is no guarantee that their application will be granted. In fact, only about 4% of Mexicans who applied in the last year were granted asylum (US Executive Office for Immigration Review).

Here is the plight of these Mexican families: they fled for their lives from their homes and they risked danger again as they travelled to the north where they lived in uncertainty at the border as they prepared to cross into the US. For those who get into the US, it is not the end of the story. Now they must survive in the US and navigate the immigration courts to present their claim. These parents and their children may now be at the mercy of people in the US—unethical employers, immigration lawyers, housing authorities, and law enforcement officials.

So why do they come? Are these families now any better off in the US than they were in Mexico? In some ways, it is hard to know the difference. Originally these people left their homes in Mexico because they could not protect and provide for their families; the danger was just too great. And in order to keep their families safe from harm, they are willing to endure racism, xenophobia, and countless other indignities and hardships. They are willing to enter another country where they might not be welcome and they might not be able to stay. There are no guarantees, but they come anyway. It seems that the human spirit is strong and the need for self-preservation endures all obstacles. ■



# An invitation to dialogue in discomfort

When I was in my early 20s I preached at my home church. I invited the Mennonite Church to put into question our pacifism—the very pillar of the Mennonite identity—and to ask ourselves why and how we practice peace.

I didn't realize what I was getting myself into. There were quite a few strong reactions from people who were concerned that by questioning our values we were distancing ourselves from and delegitimizing our faith. I don't blame them, it is not a comfortable place to sit in. Holding yourself and your values up to a mirror is a terrifying exercise because you might have to admit you were wrong, and apologizing may well be one of the hardest things for us humans to do. But by being willing to participate, you might also come out of the exercise with a better understanding and commitment to that very same core value.

We at CPT are unequivocally nonviolent, this is a guiding principle of our work. We advocate alongside and support our partners in nonviolent resistance, and we are not neutral, we stand with the oppressed. But conflict is messy, propaganda is rampant, and power structures influence the course of violence. So, in our commitment to undoing oppressions, it is imperative that we also hold our position of nonviolence up to the mirror. What defines nonviolence, how do we work nonviolently, and where does the power lie in our nonviolence?

Violence and nonviolence are not absolutes, there are many shades in between as we come from vastly different experiences and understandings on this journey. I have come to learn from my colleagues and CPT partners living under oppression that nonviolence sometimes comes from a place of privilege. My personal experience of nonviolence comes from growing up in a Mennonite, settler community in Canada. In the last decades it has been easy for this community, myself included, to preach nonviolence—while expecting oppressed groups to follow suit, even when it is not our own community that faces the consequences. Therefore, in times of horrific violence, our position on nonviolence needs to be deconstructed, especially as an organization born from white colonial and imperialist nations. As peacemaking

practitioners, we cannot feed the dominant narrative that further justifies violence against the oppressed.

The violence this week has been absolutely devastating and we are experiencing profound grief in the appalling loss of life of Palestinians and Israelis. Our lament is rooted in recognizing our privilege, and in a situation of vast inequality, it would be wrong to draw the false equivalence that the occupied and the occupier are the same. Violence is wrong; and we acknowledge the threads of racism within these responses to violence, responses that deny Palestinians agency and uphold the global structures of white supremacy.

With this analysis, Palestinian author and human rights attorney Noura Erakat writes, “Fixating on Palestinians as imperfect victims is the absolution of, and complicity with, Israel's colonial domination.” She goes on to explain the decades of Palestinian nonviolent resistance through the BDS movement, civilian flotillas, legal challenges in national and international courts, and the March of Return. All of these efforts have been silenced, demonized, and smeared. “The message to Palestinians is not that they must resist more peacefully but that they cannot resist Israeli occupation and aggression at all,” she concludes.

These are not comfortable conversations to have. They gnaw at the basis of our beliefs. We will struggle to come to terms with our privileges and unlearn our innate biases. But this is precisely why I want to invite you here, to sit in the discomfort together. So tell us, what are you struggling to come to terms with as we speak to the events of this week? What is your response to these horrendous acts of violence—intellectually, emotionally, and physically? How do you hold space for deep grief while reconciling the clashing of narratives and denouncing the imbalances of power?

May we continue to reflect, challenge, and dialogue together on this journey. ■

*This is CPT's second statement concerning the siege of Gaza. Read the first statement at [cpt.org](http://cpt.org), published on October 9, 2023.*



# Conflicted feelings in Palestine

*CPT hosted a delegation of visitors from the United States, who are now waiting in Jerusalem for safe passage home.*

By Amy Yoder McGloughlin

On 7 October 2023, towards the end of a delegation I was leading with Community Peacemaker Teams – Palestine, I woke up in the West Bank city of Hebron to news that Hamas had launched the “Al Aqsa Flood” against Israel, on land, sea and air. The CPT team, made up of local Palestinians, told me to get my delegation ready to leave the city immediately, before the Israeli Occupying Forces closed the city.

The delegation packed swiftly, while I made plans for our next steps. We would try to get through West Bank checkpoints towards Jerusalem so we could be closer to the airport.

The team of Palestinians escorted our small group of Americans through the old city, arguing with soldiers to let our group move through empty streets. They brought us to the city square, arranged transport for us to Bethlehem, and with worry on their faces, they released us on our journey.

Each CPT team member reached out to me repeatedly on our journey, asking, “Where are you? and, “Are you safe?”

We arrived in Bethlehem two hours later, and learned that the checkpoints had been closed. So, we went to the hostel where our delegations usually stay, and asked if there was room for us. We were warmly welcomed, and offered tea and expressions of gratitude that we were safe.

We stayed in Bethlehem for two days, all while calling the embassy, rebooking flights, watching the news and listening to Israeli jets flying overhead towards Gaza.

On Monday, our hostel hosts told us, “You have to get out of the West Bank. And we have a plan.” They tried to attach us to a Christian tourist group to get us, with military coordination, out of the area. But, the bus driver didn’t want more tourists than he had told the military were on the bus.

So our Palestinian hosts devised another plan. They heard that checkpoints were open to foreigners, so they started bringing us to the

area crossings, to see if we could get through. At checkpoint 300, the major crossing for Palestinians in Bethlehem, the gates and turnstiles were shut tight. So our host drove us to another crossing, while arranging for a taxi on the other side.

We arrived at the second crossing, and saw soldiers’ guns poking over the piles of dirt and concrete that had been piled there, creating a makeshift barrier. With another delegate, she and I walked toward the soldiers, holding up our coveted blue passports, and demanded to be let out of the West Bank.

The disinterested soldiers only asked a few obligatory questions. They didn’t even inspect our passports closely. They let us pass.

All the way to Jerusalem, I felt waves of conflicted feelings. I was happy to be out of the West Bank, and just a little bit closer to the airport, even though I had no idea how long it would take to get a flight home. I was amazed by the network of Palestinian friends and strangers that devoted themselves to getting us out of the West Bank, who were concerned for our welfare, who were willing to help us, even though my home nation was throwing more resources into killing their people. And I was also so sad to leave my friends behind. Because I carry a US passport, I can climb over rubble and demand to be let out of the West Bank. But my friends would be shot if they tried the same thing.

The delegation is sheltering in the Old City of Jerusalem. A few shops are open today, but it’s eerily quiet. Border control is tight at the entrance to the Damascus Gate, and young Palestinian men are not allowed to enter the city.

The delegation and I are watching our flights, hoping to get home soon. I am watching the news, checking in on friends that saw our safe passage to Jerusalem, and feeling very unsettled by my own passport privilege in this place. ■

# A global movement of spiritual connection



By Wendsler Nosie Sr.

Photo: Steve Pavey, Apache Stronghold

Mother Earth is filled with spaces that God has chosen that are places of deep healing, connection, and communion with all who have come before and for all who will come after. Oak Flat is one of these places. When we come to these sacred places, we are reminded that we – along with all of our Earthly kin – are all connected, an intricate web of relationships. For far too long, so many have existed disconnected from Mother Earth, from the spirituality that comes with connection to the land.

Fighting for Oak Flat is a fight for us all—whatever the result will impact us all. The San Carlos Apache have been fighting this fight for a long time, not unlike other Native peoples around the world, against the evils of greed—colonization, capitalism, and destruction. But many people don't realize that this is not just Indigenous peoples' fight; this has far-reaching impacts that will continue to affect all of our connections. Whatever the United States government decides on the case for Oak Flat will set a precedent on cases of land, spirituality, and connection.

We fight for the land because we know that we are all dependent on Mother Earth. We fight for our sacred connection to Oak Flat

because it is through this connection that we live holistically, and we know that the loss of this land means the continued loss of our spirituality for both us and our future generations.

We are grateful that this movement, which started small within the Apache Stronghold, has become a global one. We are grateful for attorneys and advocates who acknowledge the dangers of colonialism and greed and actively help our efforts of mobilization and action. May our gratefulness continue to multiply into action for the sake of Mother Earth and for all our web of connections.

On the November 4th day of prayer, we are asking people to join the Apache Stronghold either physically or in spirit in organized and committed prayer for Oak Flat and our Earth Mother. We are asking communities to contact their local officials, telling those who represent the people living on this land that we want to protect our sacred land, our spirituality, and our connection. We are asking people to pray for repentance for the sin of greed and infinite expansionism and to be reminded that we are inextricably connected to the health of Mother Earth as well as those who call her their home. ■

# The human face of Turkey's bombardments



Sharmin Assad Ishmael was born in 1993 in the Kurdish mountain village of Khawakurk, right in the corner of the three-way border between Iran, Iraq and Turkey. The Kurdish people have for over a century been divided between these three borders, and Khawakurk is sadly symbolic— Sharmin's relatives are spread across the three different countries. At one time, they could cross each frontier freely to visit those close relatives, but today, there is no one there to visit.

The conflicts involving these three hostile nations, particularly Turkey's military bombardments and incursions into Iraq in recent decades, have made it extremely dangerous to live in the region.

In 2004, a few days after a heavy bombardment in a small village near Khawakurk, three children of Sharmin's uncle, Mam Ali, were killed. The children, all under ten, found an unexploded bomb and picked it up, thinking it was a toy. It detonated in their hands. After this tragedy, everyone left the village. No media reported the deaths of these children in the remote village, and no government official offered help.

Sharmin, Mam Ali, and their whole family decided to move to the bigger town of

Sidakan, where they thought they would be safe from further tragic events. In October 2022, Sharmin travelled to visit relatives in the mountains, bringing her four-year-old daughter Shonem and nine-year-old son Mohamed. Her relatives are nomadic herders who roam with their flocks of animals as Kurdish people have done in this border region for centuries, moving up to the mountains in summer and down to the plains for winter.

Sharmin decided to stay overnight. In the morning, she helped with the milking and was washing herself to get ready for morning prayers. Suddenly, she heard a loud sound and felt a sharp, intense pain like being stabbed in the back. She saw the blood on her hand and fainted.

When Sharmin regained consciousness, her daughter Shonem was at her side, saying, "Mommy, please don't die." Her arm, side, and leg were all injured in the blast. She still has a piece of shrapnel the size of a finger in her leg. The doctor said they cannot remove it because it is close to a nerve.

For months afterwards, Sharmin could not sleep. She was bedridden for five months, during which time her husband and relatives

*cont'd on page 14*

# Palestinian Lives Matter: they are not numbers

By Shahd Al Junaidi

For many years, we have been hearing in news bulletins or reading in newspapers about the numbers of martyrs caused by the occupation due to its aggression and attacks on Palestinians. We compare these numbers and tally them with previous years to gauge the intensity of the violence practiced by the occupation against the Palestinian people. For example, in 2021, the Israeli occupation killed approximately 265 Palestinians in Gaza and 84 in the West Bank, and in 2022, 33 and 154 respectively, according to UN OCHA's statistics and reports.

As of now, there have been at least 2329 martyrs in Gaza and 55 martyrs in the West

Bank during the week of the Israeli aggression on Gaza. These numbers do not include the martyrs since the beginning of 2023 in various parts of Palestine. The statistics for the martyr numbers and the reports show the increasing violence and killings against Palestinians year after year.

But what happens after these statistics and reports are published? Is there condemnation and denouncement? What comes next? What happens to the martyrs after that?

Very few people will remember the martyr after their passing. The martyr is simply added to the list, buried along with their life, dreams, ambitions, past, and future. Their memories

fade away, and their existence becomes just another number. No one thinks about the life of the martyr—who their friends were, who was dearest to them, what their work was like, how they related to their colleagues, how they connected with their family. Were they the eldest or the youngest among their siblings? What secrets did they keep? What was their favourite meal? What were the goals they aspired to achieve in their life? All these questions are wiped away and forgotten, as if they never were, reducing them to mere statistics.

This feeling serves as a poignant reminder of the dehumanization that can occur due to occupation, where each martyr becomes nothing more than a statistic, overshadowing the richness of their lives and the profound impact they left on those who knew and loved them. This is precisely what the Israeli occupation desires, to erase their humanity and reduce them to mere numbers.

The lives of Palestinian martyrs are not just numbers; they had a life before their martyrdom. They strived and fought for a better future. Some were doctors, nurses, or paramedics, dedicated to saving people's lives. Some were teachers, imparting knowledge to entire generations. Some were parents, the backbone of their families, and siblings supporting one another. They were fighters for their homeland, for their land. They were resilient resistance fighters on their own soil, resisting for a better life.

What happens to those who loved them after their loss? Every martyr has loved ones whose hearts are broken and their spirits crushed. Their lives are deeply impacted in the aftermath. Yasmin Jaber, the sister of the martyr Momen Jaber, who was martyred on 9 August 2022 in the clashes that took place in Bab al-Zawiya in Hebron, said this while remembering him, "My brother, my heart aches, and my tears have dried up. All that's left after you is tears, frustration, and sadness. Life has become unbearable."

Momen, at the age of 17, was known for the smile that never left his face. He had a gift for bringing smiles to the faces of his friends, excelled in his school, and held deep respect and love for his teachers. During school vacations, he worked to help support his family. On the day of his martyrdom, he was supposed to pay the household electricity bill with his salary, and he was a very strong supporter of his sister's projects.

Momen was a kind-hearted person who cherished life. He chose not to remain silent

in the face of the injustice and oppression the people endured under the occupation. His participation in the demonstration was a response to the tragic events in Nablus that day when the old city was invaded, and three individuals were killed after widespread destruction and house bombings.

Momen was martyred by the occupation's gunfire, which pierced his heart. His body and heart were not strong enough to bear the brutality of those bullets that penetrated his core. He left behind his family, his work, and his life.

Now, during the recent aggression on Gaza, the Palestinian resistance chose to fight in an attempt to combat the blockade that has been imposed on Gaza for 16 years. They resist the occupation, which has been killing and displacing Palestinians since 1948.

This resistance, a natural response to the occupation's crimes against Palestinians, has been met with condemnation by many, while the occupiers are given the right to defend themselves. The Palestinian resistance is often unjustly labeled as terrorism, even though they are merely defending their land and within their rights of international law and UN General Assembly Resolution 2649 of 1970, which affirms the legitimacy of the struggle for self-determination. It states, "The General Assembly reaffirms the legitimacy of the peoples' struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle." The global prevalence of racism has made it difficult to recognize Palestinian existence, as if Palestinians are born only to face death, simply because they are Palestinian and under occupation.

It is as if people think Palestinians embrace death, as if their lives don't matter. In truth, Palestinians hold life dear. The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish beautifully captured this love for life in his poems. One of the most profound examples of this is seen in Gaza, a city that faces annual aerial bombardments by the Israeli occupation. Yet, Gazans refuse to surrender. They stand tall, rebuild their homes after every bombing, and create new paths for life. They chose hope and resilience on this land, where every life lost in this aggression had dreams of living in a future filled with justice, equality, freedom, and a world free from discrimination.

These martyrs, who have lost their lives, each one of them was a whole world to someone. This is something that the world should deeply understand. It's about supporting

the oppressed, not the occupiers who have been causing suffering and displacement for 75 years. We should stand in solidarity with the oppressed people who are striving for their rights and freedom using the means available to them. We must share the stories of the souls that were lost in the pursuit of freedom in this land. The lives of Palestinians matter; they are a people who long for peace and justice, unlike what the occupiers try to portray and distort in the media.

I understand that you stand against violence but don't let your stance against violence create a space of denial for the right to resist.

CPT's work of non-violence is rooted in justice and equality, just like the Palestinian struggle to resist oppression on a daily basis. Peace should come to this land, and it can only come by freedom from oppression and occupation. Palestine and its people are part of this world, and every individual life has an impact. I hope that God grants us insight, and that we never forget to pray for Palestine to attain freedom and peace. I conclude with the words of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish in his poem, "Peace be upon the land created for peace, which has never seen a day of peace." ■

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*cont'd from page 11*

looked after her and her children. The bombing was a life-changing event for the whole family. Whenever Sharmin's daughter, Shonem, hears a loud noise like a slamming door, she goes into a state of panic. Sharmin can't afford the medication she was prescribed and is still unable to function like she could before the bombing. "I feel like half a human being," she says.

Although it has not been officially confirmed, the artillery shell that hit Sharmin almost certainly came from the Turkish military, who have launched several bombardments in this region before.

Sharmin's family left the area and say they will never go back. Their story resonates with the experiences of many Kurdish people: full of tragedy and displacement, ordinary people

trapped amongst the borders and bombings of regional powers. It is also a story of heroic resilience, and love and care shown by family members that can help endure even the most horrific events.

Sitting down to drink tea with this beautiful family who have lived through so much, it was impossible not to be deeply moved. If only the Turkish generals and politicians who authorised these bombings and the soldiers who carry them out could sit down for tea with these families. Maybe they would humbled and realise the human cost of their incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan. Instead, they dehumanise Kurdish civilians, seeing them only as impediments to their political goals. It makes it all the more critical for us at CPT to hear and retell the tales of heart-wrenching pain and inspiring resilience of families like Sharmin and Mam Ali. ■

## JOIN THE SEEDS. LEAVE A LEGACY GIFT.

The Seeds is a community of givers who are making peace and justice part of their lasting legacy. Planning a future gift to CPT is one of the most powerful actions you can take to build communities of justice who embody solidarity and collective liberation. A legacy commitment is an investment in work that will create a more just, peaceful and dignified world for generations to come.

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July 8 – 17, 2024 (English)

*Iraqi Kurdistan:* May 1 – 14, 2024

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*Palestine:* February 20 – 28, 2024  
May 10 – 18, 2024  
October 22 – November 1, 2024

*Additional dates and locations to be announced soon.*

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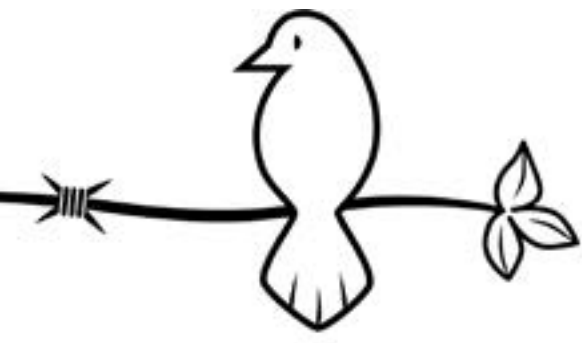
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Above: CPTers during an accompaniment trip to El Guayabo, Colombia.  
Photo: Caldwell Manners



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