



**RISE UP:  
Stories of  
Youth in  
Resistance**  
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## Editor's Note: Rise Up!

Dear CPT Community,

Thank you, as always, for being there with us as we walk alongside our partners. Thank you for being our companions on the path toward a just peace. 2019 has well and truly begun, and we have so much work to do!

For this newsletter, we want to bring you something new. Our articles and reflections this quarter will focus on a theme. We have asked our field teams to tell us about youth: the dedicated young people who are already planning the futures of our partner communities. We share stories of youth who participate in nonviolent resistance, who build communities for the most oppressed among them, who bring new hands to the slow work of justice and peace. We invite you to join us in celebrating the coming generations, who rise up to meet the challenges of the world!

*Peace,  
Caitlin Light, Communications Coordinator*



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*Members of the IPS team participate in a rally encouraging a Winnipeg member of Parliament to support Bill C-262, 2017.*

## **Announcement: IPS Full-Time Presence Comes to An End**

It is with great sadness that Christian Peacemaker Teams announces the closure of our full-time Indigenous Peoples Solidarity program working in Treaty 1 and Treaty 3 territories of Manitoba and northwestern Ontario.

This decision was made as part of a budget plan that ensures CPT is able to remain financially stable in a difficult funding climate. CPT considered every option with great care before concluding that the closure of a program was necessary to create a balanced budget. The decision comes alongside other budget reductions that ensure the financial health of CPT.

Although we are no longer able to maintain a full-time presence, CPT is committed to maintaining our Indigenous Peoples Solidarity work to the best of our ability, with the support of our full-time Canada Coordinator and the active Reservist community in Canada. CPT has also committed funds to develop an emergency accompaniment plan for our partners in Grassy Narrows, should our long-time partners need our presence in a time of crisis.

We will continue to commit resources to advocacy for Indigenous communities in Canada, as well as offering workshops on settler colonialism, undoing oppressions, and nonviolence to educate settler (non-Indigenous) communities, and we will aim to offer delegations to those who wish to engage directly with our partners in Treaty 1 and Treaty 3 areas.

CPT established a full-time Indigenous solidarity team after being invited by the Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows) First Nation in 2002, to accompany the community as they blockaded a logging road to defend their traditional land from clear cut logging. While accompaniment is ending, we deeply value our partnership with Indigenous communities and the importance of addressing settler-colonialism on Turtle Island (North America). We ask that all of the community of CPT and our supporters stand together in this important commitment, to ensure that the work continues.



*A group of CPTers and friends who harvested wild rice together in the summer of 2018. Second from the left is Andrew “Shoon” Keewatin, who acted as teacher and guide in the harvesting process.*

## **Harvesting Manoomin at “Shooniversity”: Reflection at the Close of the IPS Team**

*By Chuck Wright, CPT Indigenous Peoples Solidarity*

This last summer, my teammate, Kathy Moorhead Thiessen, and I traveled to Grassy Narrows with a former delegate and CPT supporter, Rizwan Shoukat, to learn about and experience the process of harvesting wild rice. Drenched after a two hour boat ride across the choppy waters of Grassy Narrows Lake, we pulled onto the beach to set up camp for harvesting wild rice with long-time friend of CPT, Andrew “Shoon” Keewatin.

Shoon explained to us that until late in the 1980s, this peninsula jutting into Shoe Lake was the location his family would travel to in order to harvest rice each year. About a dozen tents would be set up at this site for several days of harvest. The scattered stalks of wild rice along the shoreline recall the intergenerational encampments on the beach.

Using our hands and two short pieces of wood, we picked and batted the ripe grain heads into the bottom of our canoes. Shoon remembers how the older men would sing pow wow songs to the rice as they collected it into their canoes. When one of us asked why, Shoon responded simply, “To express gratitude.”

Some years ago, industrial harvesters began coming into the area and destroying the rice fields. Air boats with large scoopers would blaze through the fields, often harvesting the rice when the plants were too young. This practice ended when Elders in Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong declared that wild rice in their territories could only be harvested using



traditional methods.

According to Shoon, few people in Grassy Narrows harvest wild rice anymore. While he grew up with the harvest, today's young people in Grassy Narrows have not. However, only a few days later, neighbouring Wabaseemoong First Nations held an annual wild rice camp in which the community had pooled its resources to teach and maintain this tradition. Shoon said that he would like to see the Grassy Narrows leadership initiate something similar.

While sitting around the campfire, one of us asked Shoon if he thought the government was now respecting harvesting, hunting, and fishing rights in Grassy Narrows traditional territory. Shoon pointed to a Supreme Court ruling he was part of (Grassy Narrows First Nation vs. Ontario 2014) and said, "Ever since the court case...they've been sure to cross their t's and dot their i's."

We remembered the role CPT played in this struggle for Grassy Narrows sovereignty. CPT's relationship with Grassy Narrows was forged just before their historic logging blockade began in December 2002. "CPT was really helpful, especially with those loggers," Shoon recalled. "As soon as [the loggers] saw someone else with a camera, you could see an immediate change in their face."

After a day of harvesting and couple days of roasting and "dancing" on the rice, we did not have a lot to show for it. However, it has caused us as a team to develop a new appreciation for this Anishinaabe cultural tradition, and to reflect on its richness and fragility, as well as the role solidarity can play in enabling traditional practices to continue in our colonial context.

As we grieve the end of an era with CPT, we express gratitude for the sacred relationship we have been invited to be part of, and we pray for CPT's ability to respond meaningfully to ongoing threats to the lifeways of Asubpeeschoseewagong Anishinabek. The struggle against colonial oppression and environmental violence will continue with or without us.

## **We Stand Side by Side: LGBTQ+ Youth in Iraqi Kurdistan**

*By Kasia Protz, CPT Iraqi Kurdistan*

Iraq, and the Iraqi Kurdistan region, is a hostile environment for the LGBTQ+ community. IraQueer, a registered human rights organization focusing on the LGBTQ+ community in Iraq and the Kurdistan region, estimates that over 220 members of the community were killed in 2017 alone.<sup>1</sup> "We are the most visible people in the room, but in our society we are the most invisible, unless someone wants to hurt us," a young gay man from Sulaimani told CPT.<sup>2</sup>

However, the LGBTQ+ community in Iraqi Kurdistan gains strength and a sense of hope through connecting to each other. CPT Iraqi Kurdistan spoke to a number of LGBTQ+ youths about the ways in which they work together against oppression.

"If any of us has a problem we stand side by side," said Sara, a lesbian woman from Duhok.

The LGBTQ+ community in Iraqi Kurdistan faces intense oppression. Often, people from their intimate circle are the ones who treat them the most harshly. "At a point of my life, I was threatened to be buried alive by some relatives," Ahmed, from a small town in Iraqi Kurdistan, told CPT. "This caused trauma for me. I felt unsafe in my own house."

<sup>1</sup> IraQueer. *Fighting for the Right to Live: The State of LGBTQ+ Human Rights in Iraq*. 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Names and locations have been withheld or changed, to protect the identities of those interviewed.



Here and to right: murals in Sulaimani, created with help from Rasan Organization, promote LGBTQ+ and women's rights. Photos courtesy of Rasan Organization.

Ahmed healed from what had happened to him by learning about his own community. "The way I patched this wound was by educating myself, about what all of this is about, being part of the LGBTQ+ community. Whatever those people think of me or do to me, if I understand and love myself I gain confidence in who I am ... Before educating myself, I thought that who I am was wrong."

"When I started using dating apps, I would see everyone on them," said Renas, another member of the LGBTQ+ community. "Religious leaders, doctors, university professors, teachers. Seeing them living their lives gives me motivation to accept myself."

Renas is a Muslim gay man, and through dating apps he found that he could connect to other Muslim members of the LGBTQ+ community, some of them leaders in their mosques. "There are many religious people in our community: Muslims, Yazidis, Christians," he said.

Formal education is another way some LGBTQ+ members fight against oppression. "Living in Iraqi Kurdistan is like a tunnel with a light at the end of it," Sara told CPT. "We as the LGBTQ+ community are just at the beginning of this tunnel. If we get education we can at least get to the middle of it. So when you think of ending your education, the tunnel closes, the light is gone."

Sara said that one of her main messages to other members of the LGBTQ+ community in Iraqi Kurdistan is to finish their education, if they are able to.

LGBTQ+ community members work passionately to bring awareness to the issues they face. "I am acting on an individual level to help others," said Ahmed. "I talk in reports. I want people from my community to feel they are not alone. ... We have gatherings where we can express ourselves freely. There is no judgment between us.

"We also support other people to understand our position. We try to educate people. People here are not educated about LGBTQ+ issues. This is the best thing we can do for now."

Ahmed also pointed to the work of Rasan Organization, a local organisation that focuses on raising



awareness about the LGBTQ+ community in Iraqi Kurdistan.

“We as the LGBTQ+ community stand up for each other,” said Rami, a gay man from one of Iraqi Kurdistan’s biggest cities. “We try to make any LGBTQ+ member feel like they belong. We try to encourage other members of our society to get educated and be brave enough to accept themselves. In my daily life, my closest friends are also from the LGBTQ+ community. ... We often share with each other how we need to be supported in this community. I feel safe, comfortable and supported while I am with them.”

Rami offered an example: “Recently a sister of a friend of mine checked her brother’s phone. She found a photo of me wearing something that pointed to me being gay. I was wearing it because I am a gay man and I am proud of this. The sister shared a photo with other family members of my friend. They were shocked and disgusted ... They asked my friend, ‘How can you hang out with him?’ My friend stood up for me to his family. I didn’t focus on what the family said about me or what they think of me, because I don’t care about people’s judgments. What I focused on was what my friend said to them. That he stood up to them for me and the LGBTQ+ community.”

Despite the oppression in their daily lives, the LGBTQ+ youth that spoke to CPT state that they are proud to be part of this community. “I feel proud to be a part of a group that is active and fights this oppression,” Renas told CPT. “LGBTQ+ people who are in the region, hear me: you are not alone. There are so many people like you where you live. I am a voice of thousands of people in Kurdistan, in mosques, churches, universities, organisations, and you are not alone.”

Although the reality of being LGBTQ+ in Iraqi Kurdistan is harsh and often dangerous, the LGBTQ+ community stands together and is not giving up hope for a brighter future.

Sara asked, “What would happen if we all accepted each other and have equal rights? This is going to change the country. If you don’t accept each other, that’s how you damage your country. I feel like the LGBTQ+ community will win, sooner or later.”

CPT is proud to stand with the LGBTQ+ community of Iraqi Kurdistan as they work to create this better future. We look forward to the day that the light at the end of the tunnel comes.





## Presence and Change

*“Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but around in awareness.”*

- James Thurber

At the close of 2018, **we at CPT have been challenged with change.** We reflect on the fact that change can be uncomfortable, but also that it is crucial for growth. In the face of repeated entry denials by Israel, we explored new, flexible approaches to maintaining our presence in Palestine. We also initiated a difficult but necessary evaluation of our finances that helps us ensure a sustainable future for CPT.

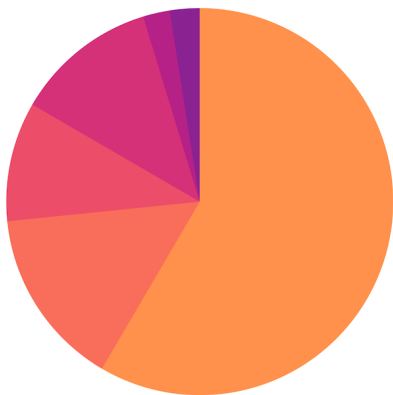
**But as circumstances change, our commitment to a just peace does not.** Our teams stand steadfast alongside our partners, who work as ever to defend their rights. The **Iraqi Kurdistan** team grieved with the families of young people killed by Turkish cross-border bombings, and amplified their voices to the world, so that their losses would be remembered. In **Palestine**, our team persisted despite denials of entry at the border, and continued to accompany the Palestinian schoolchildren who must pass military checkpoints every day.

CPTers in **Lesvos** advocated for our partner organization, Lesvos Solidarity, as their open refugee camp, Pikpa camp, was threatened with closure. The **Indigenous Peoples Solidarity** team celebrated the opening of Freedom Road, which will finally give the Shoal Lake 40 community access to the mainland, and continued to advocate for the bill that will implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. And in **Colombia**, our team supported the El Guayabo community as they recovered from another violent displacement on their land, and resumed the nonviolent struggle for their rights.

You have been with us, through all these challenges, and through all the work that we have done. **Your support means that you are with us** as we stand with our partners, lend them our protective presence, amplify their voices, and celebrate their successes. **You sustain us through this time of change. Thank you.**



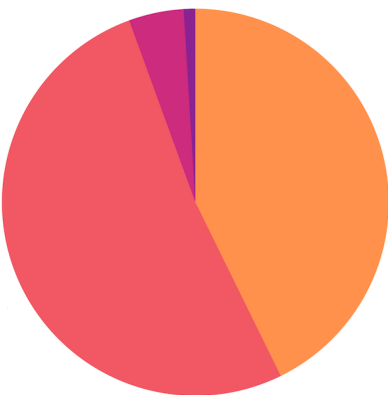
# Fiscal Year Ending 10/31/2018



## ORDINARY INCOME

### SOURCE

Individuals	562,000 / 58%
Congregations	144,000 / 15%
Grants	96,000 / 10%
Delegations	114,700 / 12%
Major gifts	21,500 / 2%
Other	24,000 / 3%



## ORDINARY EXPENSES

### SOURCE

Program	490,200 / 43%
Peacemaker Corps	593,300 / 51%
Admin/Fundraising	52,700 / 5%
Other	11,100 / 1%

## SERENDIPITY FUND

Special funds for new and innovative activities in CPT.

Program expenses	55,644
Investment returns, net losses	14,568
Total	70,212

## ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	381,100
Serendipity Fund - investments in publicly-held securities or funds	679,800
Prepays, receivables, deposits	92,400
Fixed assets, net	21,100
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>1,174,400</b>

## LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Liabilities	
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	24,701
Net Assets	
Net Assets - Unrestricted	1,149,699
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>1,174,400</b>



Photos by Knut Bry/Tinagent.

## Children of Pikpa

By Rûnbîr Serkepkanî,  
CPT Lesvos

*The following are two reflections by CPTer Rûnbîr Serkepkanî, based on children he has met at Pikpa Solidarity Camp, an open refugee camp run by CPT partners, Lesvos Solidarity. They are part of a compilation of Rûnbîr's stories titled "The Arc of Voices."*

### The "Lonely Genius" Rules the World

He paints in orange. He does this while shouting, as if he wants the colours to obey him, so that the images in his mind can be manifested in the right nuances. I enter his artistic atmosphere and he is so into his orange painting that he barely notices me. "What are you painting today?" I ask the lonely genius. "I am painting a TRUCK," he shouts right into my face, as if my little intrusion in his artistic world of colours has angered him.

The TRUCK that I see in the painting has fantastic proportions. How the cab is connected with the tires, how the tires are connected with the drivetrain, and how the drivetrain is connected with the cab, and what is the lonely genius putting into it, between which distant and impossible destinations is the orange truck rolling and in which landscapes.

He lost his mother in a faraway country, killed by some militias. His brother died when he was crossing a border in the snow-capped mountains of Kurdistan. His biggest inspiration is his elder sister. They are using the same studio. While he is painting his orange truck, she shows me the calm night, the white shining moon about to be covered by a black cloud and two swans swimming in the deep-dark and becalmed sea, one of them big and the other one small. What does the moon, the black cloud, the two swans represent, I wonder. But I do not find it appropriate to articulate my question and disturb the creative processes in her artistic imagination.

After a while the lonely genius tires of painting. "Now I want to rule the world," he commands and stretches forth his hand to the round globe on the table. He condescends for me to sit with him on the ground. "Where do you come from?" he shouts with an aggressive face. I turn the globe a little bit and point out the place where I was born. "I want to see Sweden," he shouts. I show him Sweden.

He soon gets bored of setting the world in turmoil with his angry little hands. "You will become a great artist when you grow up," I tell him with a respectful voice. "I am already a great artist," he shouts imperiously.

After a while we exit the tent of the refugee camp at Pikpa, which functions as the kindergarten for the kids of his age, but as an studio for him and his sister.

When I go home that day, I close my eyes and see them swimming, the sister-genius and the brother-genius, in the calm, deep darkness of the sea. The moon shines strongly, having laid aside her dusky veil of cloud.





*Photos by Knut Bry/Tinagent.*

## Cabrón

The Spaniards come every third day of the week. Mumin and Javid leave whatever creative games they are playing and run towards the orange car of the Spaniards. “Cabrón,” they shout. And the Spaniards laugh. “Cabrón,” they shout back. Their swimming suits of black and blue cover their firefighter bodies and they lift the tender frames of the kids in the refugee camp and throw them in the air like small apples and catch them, laughing and shouting.

Then we all go to the sea. The blue Aegean. We pass sun-bathing tourists. They throw nets of strange looks over us. But none of their nets can catch us, armed as we are by so much laughter and love.

I have seen many of the children enter the water for the first time. I have seen them screaming for fear and trepidation. But the Spaniards have hard hands and soft hearts. They hold them with their arms at the surface. On the horizon we can see Ayvalik, the Aegean and Mytilini. Over there they started the journey from one continent to another. From one exile to another. This sea where they saw their parents, friends, uncles, grandmas and co-travellers drowning, shouting out in desperation. Out there is where their petrol ran out and they were driven randomly by the waves, subject to a liquid exile.

After a while, the children understand that the sea is bigger than death, bigger than borders and coast guards. Slowly they start unstiffening in the blueness of the Aegean sea, liberating themselves slowly from their fears, playing and swimming, climbing onto our shoulders and jumping into the froth.

We enjoy a normal day at the sea. Sometimes I wait in the shallow parts of the beach and care for the small children with my comrades. And sometimes I swim far away, pursuing Ahmad and Fatane and some other adventurous older children who have already learned how to swim. Sometimes I get anxious because they swim too far and sometimes I call to them: “Do not swim to Turkey.” They laugh and reply: “No, we are swimming to Athens.”

When the swimming is done, we dry the small ones with their towels and help them put clothing on their slight, skinny bodies. Sometimes they shiver, so we have to cover them with a blanket and hold them in our arms. Sometimes they fall asleep and in their dreams one can almost hear all the bombs still falling on the homes they left behind. After we are done we start walking back to the refugee camp.

I am carrying Mumin on my shoulders and my comrade Hanna is walking beside me. Javid comes to me and tells me that I should carry him instead. “Hanna can carry you”, I say. “No, you have to carry me,” he pleads. “But I am already carrying Mumin, Javid. You have to be mindful of that. Let Hanna carry you.”

Javid starts crying. Mumin starts crying too. “Put me down”, says Mumin, crying. “Please put me down.” I put him down. And he goes to Hanna. “Now you carry Javid, Ammo,” he tells me. Hanna lifts Mumin onto her shoulders and I lift Javid onto mine. “Come closer, Ammo,” says Mumin. I walk closer to Hanna.

Mumin stretches out his hand and takes Javid’s hand. Hanna and I are walking, while Mumin and Javid are holding each others hands on our shoulders. One of the Spaniards is carrying another child. When they pass by us, in a pretend child-on-my-shoulder-race, the Andalucian laughs an evil laugh.

“Cabrón”, shout Mumin and Javid together.



*“We don’t want to live in fear.” María Fernanda is one of the next generation’s leaders for justice in Colombia. Photo: Caldwell Manners/ECAP.*

## **Proud Campesina**

*By Marcos Knoblauch, CPT Colombia*

*El Guayabo community has endured the scourge of paramilitarism and insurgency, resisting with creative nonviolent strategies. Now, a new generation of leaders arises.*

There is a pace at which justice proceeds. And true Justice, which is something different from the justice of the courts, has its own pace. Two kinds of justice, big and small.

Both have a complex, difficult, sometimes elusive and even utopian relationship in the context of an armed conflict. Colombia is deeply marked by more than 50 years of conflict, which have shaped the present through violence, fear and coercion. While these two kinds of justices move forward, each at their own pace, life can slip through our fingers: as happened to Teacher Henry from El Guayabo, when a rabid cancer took his life before either sort of justice, big or small, even showed its face.

Young Colombians have a difficult task on this long and painful road of building peace with the tools of social justice, rebuilding collective memory and truth, and healing wounds. Some of them take an active role in their communities, and are involved in organizational processes of resistance to violence. The campesino community of El Guayabo resisted the paramilitary scourge and the insurgency, and they deal with the institutionalized violence of the state that violates rights and ignores needs, stigmatizing campesinx<sup>1</sup> and community leaders.

“I am proud to be a campesina and to be called a campesina. I would never regret being so, nor do I feel ashamed to say that I am a campesina. We, the campesinxs, feed the cities.” María Fernanda, or Mafer, 19 years old, was born and raised in El Guayabo, into a family with strong leadership in the region. She now shines as one of the young leaders of El Guayabo

<sup>1</sup> Campesinx is a gender inclusive noun for subsistence farmers



with creativity and courage. “We are fighting peacefully and resisting, so that they do not take us off of the land. It is important to tell how we have remained all this time in our territory, where there has been so much violence. We use a machete, not to kill anyone but to cut a yucca bush, or a bunch of plantain. Never for violence. That’s why I would like to tell our story, so that many people would realize that we are good people and that they should not call us guerrillerxs.<sup>2</sup>”

The Peace Agreements of 2016 brought a respite of hope, a renewal of the profound will for peace of the Colombian people who choose not to hide the scars left by all these years of violence, nor the wounds that continue to be opened. But during 2018, of the 331 acts of violence of the armed conflict, 65% directly or indirectly affected children and teens. Statistics show an increase compared to the previous year. For Mafer, since the signing of the Agreements the situation worsened, “there is more war, there have been many evictions and abuses against us campesinxs.”

The pressure of private interests and the disrespect for the lives of the forgotten are felt through corruption and institutionalized violence, widening the gap between the two justices, big and small. “We have realized that the authorities are not on our side, not even the Mayor’s Office,” said Mafer. “If they do not want to be on our side, that’s fine, but they should be neutral. We can have a good lawyer, but the only one who can change everything is God, because there is so much corruption here.” Thus it is difficult to maintain hope.

“I do not know what will become of us,” Mafer told CPT. “I see that it is getting worse. I am very concerned as a young person in the community, I am worried about what is happening. But I’m going to keep fighting. This is not over. My challenge is to continue fighting and achieve what we all want, which is the land.” Where the State is absent or corrupt, grassroots organizing flourishes.

In 2017, Mafer finished high school and dreamt of going to university. But a violent eviction from their cultivated lands cut her dream short. The humanitarian crisis prevented her family from supporting her. She applied to the national scholarship system, but was unsuccessful, even though she belongs to the vulnerable populations prioritized by the system. “They say there are many opportunities but in reality they are only for those who have leverage,” she said.

The crisis in her community is not over, but she hopes to start her studies this year. “I want to study law, but my parents do not have resources, so I had to sign up for something else and I’m going to study psychology. My community needs a good lawyer, and nothing is better than a lawyer from her own land, who has suffered and fought with the campesinxs. And not only for El Guayabo but for the country, for the people who need it.”

Let us hope Mafer can study what she desires. The only certain thing at this moment is that she will work hard for the two justices to become one and, in the meantime, she will tighten her fist so that life does not slip through her fingers.

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<sup>2</sup> Guerrillerx is a gender inclusive noun for guerrilla combatant, often times used in a derogatory way to stigmatize and criminalize social leaders



*An alternative tour group stops for a rooftop view of al-Khalil (Hebron) to better view the locations of illegal Israeli settlements.*

## **An Alternative Visit to Palestine**

*by CPT Palestine and Caitlin Light, CPT Communications Coordinator*

When we picture “tourism,” we typically imagine travel to popular locations in destination countries. But here in Palestine, a new kind of tourism has gained a foothold: alternative tourism. Unlike typical tourism, alternative tours seek to share a more authentic and community-focused experience with visitors. Abdallah Maraka, a resident of al-Khalil (Hebron), took this as an opportunity to show visitors the truth of living as a Palestinian.

The most common narrative that the world sees is constructed to show all Palestinians as violent or terrorists. Abdallah believes that alternative tours can expose visitors to the realities of the Israeli Occupation, and reveal a more genuine, humanizing look at Palestinian culture.

Abdallah started living in Hebron in 2002, after moving from Saudi Arabia with his family. Because they returned to Palestine during the second Intifada, when everything was intensified and most families put heavy restrictions on their children’s activities, Abdallah never had the time as a child to learn about his country. He first saw the Old City of al-Khalil (Hebron) in 2009, while he was in university, and he was shocked by what he saw: the evidence of the Occupation.

“From that time, I had this idea that someone should tell the story of Hebron,” Abdallah told CPT. “I was living in the city and never understood or knew anything about it.”

After finishing university, Abdallah briefly worked for a telecommunications company, but soon decided to commit full-time to beginning his own alternative tourism company. “I feel this is a very important thing, and since no one took this step in Hebron, I decided to be the first one,” he explained. “Hebron, it has one of the worst reputations ... Which is bad for us because people, they feel scared all the time from visiting Hebron. While actually it’s one of the main cities that people should visit to understand what an occupation [is].”

One side effect of the Occupation is a damaged economy, and many shops in the Old City of al-Khalil (Hebron) have been forced to close. In addition to combating misinformation about life in



Palestine, alternative tours bring visitors into the heart of al-Khalil (Hebron), where the remaining shopkeepers stand their ground against the barriers placed in the way of Palestinian businesses.

A long time friend of CPT, Abdallah began working formally with the Palestine team in February of 2019, to help newcomers become accustomed to al-Khalil (Hebron) and gain valuable insight into the area. He views his tours as a responsibility to combat the overwhelming global narrative of Palestine. “The only way for people to understand is to come to Hebron,” he told CPT. “And I don’t need to tell [them] any propaganda, any lies from the Palestinian side, because I’m only sharing facts on the ground, and then people decide what’s really happening in the country.”



*A local Palestinian in al-Khalil equips himself with a camera to fight the occupation through documentation.*

## Eyes on the Occupation

*by CPT Palestine*

There are many tools that youth can equip themselves with when facing oppression. Each brings opportunities and consequences. The camera has the benefit of being an effective nonviolent resource to help capture the abuses that Palestinians endure during Israel’s military occupation. It empowers the people using it to be proactive, and to use their energy and creativity in a way that shows the truth of their daily life.

Palestinian Human Rights Defenders (PHRD) is a local grassroots group that has formed in response to the hidden elements of oppression in the city of al-Khalil (Hebron). They equip themselves with cameras and “start filming when an incident begins and continue until it ends.” The PHRD is “committed to non-violence and the rule of law.” Because their cameras shine a light on the darkness in al-Khalil (Hebron), PHRD has been targeted by the Israeli military and settlers through harassment, death threats and physical violence. Despite these challenges, their faith in the power of the camera grows stronger, and there has been a decrease in the number of violent incidents.

There are 22 active video cameras throughout the community that are operated by PHRD youth, the youngest 12 years old. The adults teach them how to effectively capture incidents in a way that ensures that the camera operators are as safe as possible. These youth believe that a video camera is a weapon of life, the necessary tool “to reveal the reality of the occupation and settlers.” Because Israel has so much control in the West Bank, PHRD knows that if they didn’t film, “[Israel would] say we’re liars.” During their training, safety is prioritized not only for their personal protection, but because “if they kill you, the story disappears.”

The power of the story has undeniable impact. Reflections of the truth can be turned into a story and sold as propaganda; however, with easily accessible video cameras and phones, it’s easier to capture reality. Modern technology and social media belong to the youth, and with this power they can tell the stories of their lives that would otherwise be untold.



Young women and girls dance dabke, a traditional dance, on the eve of the 'Open Shuhada Street' demonstration in al-Khalil (Hebron), Palestine. The photo was taken on a weekend that is the anniversary of a massacre by a Jewish settler at a mosque in 1994. Dance becomes an opportunity for these youth to channel strong emotions and work towards healing from the trauma of the Occupation.

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