

BRITAIN PALESTINE FRIENDSHIP & TWINNING NETWORK



WELCOME to the BPFTN Spring 2024 Newsletter

Welcome to new groups

On 13th March the **Sheffield Nablus** Twinning Association was launched with a live link with Seeds in Nablus. We also look forward to the launch of a new **Colchester-Bethany** Friendship Group. *WELCOME to all involved.*

Have you registered to come to this year's FREE conference?

Please do so via email to palestinetwinning@gmail.com

BPFTN Annual Conference

“Twinning and Friendship in a time of Genocide”

Saturday 20th April 2024 10 am – 4 pm

Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC14 9BD

10 minutes from Euston Station

Registration from 9.30

Many of us have struggled with the awful daily events in Gaza over the past 6 months. This year's conference is not only a time to listen to inspiring speakers, especially Palestinian friends, but a time to be with like-minded people to talk, support and encourage each other.

Speakers include:

Sameer Sal (Director Medical Aid for Palestinians) with recently returned doctors

Sir Vincent Fean (Patron BPFTN, Balfour Project)

Dr Helen Paynter (Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence)

Dr Husam Zomlot (Palestine Mission)

Breakout sessions on - Education, BDS, Politics of Culture, The Press

Tea & coffee will be provided throughout the day, but please bring your own packed lunch.

Do YOU want a stall at the conference? Could you help host others?

Don't forget to Register for –
Britain Palestine Friendship & Twinning Network
2024 AGM
Thursday 11th of April 7pm by zoom

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of last AGM for accuracy
4. Guest speaker **Kevin Courtney** former joint General Secretary of NEU, Active supporter of Palestine, personally and through promoting Union Activities, such as Teacher Delegations to Palestine
5. Chair's report
6. Madeleine McGivern report
7. Treasurer's report
8. Motions
9. Election of committee members 2024 – 25
- 10 Conclusion

NB. Please confirm your attendance by emailing - palestinetwinning@gmail.com

The Zoom link will be sent out a week before the meeting. Look out for it.

Note from the Editor

If your partnership doesn't appear in this Newsletter it is only because you haven't sent me anything. Please send material to Geoffrey Marshall at brecondeanery@btinternet.com
Thank you.



Learning about refugee life in the West Bank: A zoom event in early March was held to bring together supporters from all over the world to hear from friends in 2 refugee camps.

Palestinian Refugee Camps and UNWRA Funding Cuts

Jean (the Chair) introduced the Unite Community Shu'fat Twinning Committee. Tim gave background on UNWRA. After two short videos describing life in Shu'fat and Am'ari refugee camps, Tim introduced guest speakers Dr Salim and Ashgan of Shu'fat and Ahmad of Am'ari.

Gaza War's Impact on Shu'fat and Am'ari camps

Dr Salim talked about collective punishment, increased use of tear gas, and Israeli confiscation of income tax collected in the Occupied Territories. Shu'fat, Am'ari and other camps in the West Bank are experiencing high unemployment, poverty, and destruction of homes. The charitable society centres in Shu'fat and Am'ari support people with food parcels, clothing, and other aids on a daily basis. They often visit people in their homes as it is dangerous for people to attend the centres in the current situation. Ahmad discussed the hardships of life in Am'ari camp, including frequent arrests, killings, and difficulty leaving the camp. The discussion also focused on the challenges faced by the disabled due to checkpoints, long waiting times and security threats, which negatively impacted their ability to access the centre and participate in activities. The meeting emphasized the financial difficulties of the charitable society centre and the loss of trust in foreign organizations, leading to a reduction in programs and activities.

Mental Health Support and Funding Challenges in Shu'fat and Amari

The meeting primarily focused on the growing need for increased psychological support for men in Shu'fat and Amari, and the associated challenges in funding and stigma. Ashgan added that some men were seeking psychological support under the guise of physical therapy, suggesting a need for more discreet and accessible services. The discussion also touched on the challenges of working with foreign agencies due to perceived double standards and the potential impact of UNWRA funding cuts. Further, the group spoke about the effects of funding cuts on medical devices, medication and sanitation in the camp, with Dr Salim expressing concerns about the impact on the entire camp, including the disabled and vulnerable particularly at risk from poverty and not receiving access to medical care.

Palestinian Education, Healthcare, and Detention

Dr Salim discussed the challenges faced by Palestinians in accessing education and healthcare due to transportation issues and the presence of checkpoints throughout the region. He also highlighted the issue of drug use in the camps, with dealers from Israel

distributing cheap drugs in the camp. The meeting also touched on the issue of administrative detention, where young men are arrested without charge for extended periods. Ahmad shared a personal story about his nephew's detention, describing the poor conditions and lack of food and hygiene in the prisons. This led to his nephew losing a significant amount of weight and developing a long beard due to his inability to shave. Detention causes long term physiological damage.

Palestinian Refugee Camps Support Discussion

The discussion revolved around the support provided by the Palestinian Authority and Israel to refugee camps. Dr Salim and Ahmad revealed that the PA does not offer any support to refugee camps due to political reasons; instead, services are provided primarily by UNRWA. The IDF and Israeli Police frequently enter the camp to search homes and arrest people, particularly young Palestinians men. They offer no support. The Israeli Ministry of Education controls the curriculum in schools in the camps. Words like 'Palestine' and religious references are forbidden. Currently, it is not safe for foreigners to visit the camps.

Teachers' Financial Challenges in West Bank

Teacher salaries have been drastically reduced in the West Bank, where taxes collected from Palestinians have been confiscated by Israel, leading to salary cuts of 60-80%. Dr Salim explained that camp schools run by UNRWA face financial crisis if funding cuts are carried out.

Supporting Refugees and Disabled Centres

Disabled people cannot access support centres due to safety concerns. However, efforts are being made to support them, including home visits by workers of the Al Quds Charitable Society who provide some needed items.

Solidarity

It was discussed how audience members could show solidarity with refugees in Shu'fat and Am'ari camps. Dr Salim emphasized the importance of raising awareness through marches and rallies. Ahmad also expressed appreciation of protests and demands for the Palestinian right of return. Ashgan also appreciates the good wishes she has received and for continued support for the projects of the Charitable Society, particularly physical therapy, speech therapy, and the embroidery program. In the past, the Charitable Society organised a summer camp in Tiberias for children with disabilities so they could get away from the trauma of camp life. Whether this will be possible now is uncertain. They suggested raising funds for necessary goods instead of sending goods over. The spirit of resilience among the Palestinian people was highlighted.

Further Information & to Donate

If you would like to know more or be added to our mailing list, please contact us on:

unite.shufat@gmail.com

Donations can be made via our bank account: Unite Shu'fat Group, Unity Trust Bank Sort code: 60-83-01 Account number: 20453815.

kenningtonbethlehem

Connecting London with Palestine, Kennington with Bethlehem

From Pat Gaffney, Chair, Kennington Bethlehem Link:

This comes by way of an 'beginning of year' message from us. These are very sad days for our friends in Bethlehem and the West Bank, not forgetting the terrible plight of those under siege in Gaza and Israelis who still await news of family held hostage.

We are especially worried about a good friend and colleague from Bethlehem, Anas Abu Srour, Director of the Aida Youth Centre, a project that we have supported for some time. Almost two weeks ago now Anas was taken by IDF soldiers as he travelled from Ramallah to Bethlehem. Only this week did his colleagues learn that he has been sentenced to six months administrative detention. One of our local MPs raised a question about Anas in the House of Commons, for which we are most grateful. You can see this, and other posts about Anas and actions we have taken [here](#). You can sign a Petition in support of Anas [here](#)

At our recent AGM we shared a brief report on our work over the past year.

THE KENNINGTON - BETHLEHEM LINK

2023 Overview of activities. We also held several committee meetings.

July: in person book group and discussion. We chose poems for this month exploring the work of Ghazi Jaber about the topic.

February: in person book group and discussion held at our local Dining Culture.

March: We took part in the in street Palestine flagging & raising awareness (performance) - We are a member of the network.

April: speaker meeting with Examiners of Accompaniment. (Chris) Talking on work in Palestine and local facilities, on Gaza and Beirut directly on their visit to Bethlehem.

October: Book club - 'The last' Fundraising for AIDA project, Bethlehem. Their work is centered on advancing the professional wellbeing and resilience of Christian medical staff who reported to students. www.aida.org

May: on the anniversary of the Nakba we wrote to two local MPs, Caroline Dutton and Neil (both) expressing our concerns for deteriorating situation in the West Bank.

November-December: During this recent war in Gaza - Israel has lost thousands more from our friends in Gaza. Includes (Lina, Tzipora, they are both experienced nurses and staff within their community. Aid and capital raising.

January: Eat your goods and materials stall at St. Joseph's Lambert Parish Fair, Lambeth Palace. A great awareness raising opportunity.

December: Book club - 'The last' Fundraising for AIDA project, Bethlehem. Their work is centered on advancing the professional wellbeing and resilience of Christian medical staff who reported to students. www.aida.org

ACCOMPANIMENT www.accompaniment.org

Would you like to become a committee member and help plan events and work for the year ahead? Drop us an email, kennington.beth@gmail.com [kenningtonbethlehem.org.uk](https://www.kenningtonbethlehem.org.uk) and Facebook.

With every good wish for 2024. We look forward to sharing our work with you in the year ahead.

<https://www.facebook.com/kennington.bethlehem.790>

Hanwell Friends of Sebastiya

At a recent meeting of the Hanwell Friends of Sebastiya (the ancient city of Samaria) Abu Yasser spoke about the increase in incursions by the occupying army. Last week [this was written at the end of February], they arrived with a bulldozer and several jeeps, plus a drone and snipers who appeared on rooftops in the centre, by the ruins.

They appear intent on enticing the young men to react so that they can then shoot them. One young man was recently shot in the thigh and is now recovering at home. And of course, an 18 year old, Fawzi, was shot and killed last year in a car with his friend while driving home one evening - totally unprovoked.

Illegal Settler activity has also increased and is very alarming now that they have been armed by the Israeli government. Leaflets in Arabic have been distributed telling the villagers to leave, to go to Jordan or there will be another Nakba and they will be killed just like is happening in Gaza.

The gas masks that HAFSA has provided over the years are being put to good use, particularly in the centre of the village where the IDF is constantly tear-gassing the locals.

Checkpoints, including 'flying checkpoints' are popping up all over the area. Often large vehicles block the roads, or huge mounds of earth. This makes travel to other towns and villages very difficult and hazardous, as well as stopping farmers accessing their land. This difficulty with travel is impacting on food supplies so HAFSA is providing funds for stockpiling in case of a siege, as well as for the purchase of staples such as flour, rice, lentils, etc for the poorest families.

There is little work in Sabastiya and tourism is almost non-existent. So a great deal of fear and anxiety about the future is being experienced by the villagers, though they remain determined to stay on their land.

Smah spoke from the perspective of a woman and mother. Roba translated for her - it worked so well - woman to woman. Smah spoke of her fears for her sons, in particular her eldest who is in his early 20s. She is too afraid to let him go out alone and tries to accompany him to keep him safe. She doesn't trust the Israeli Occupying Force as she knows how they are intent on killing or maiming young Palestinian men. She says her fears are shared by all the mothers of young men, and for all their children.

Smah worked with the village women's enterprise, making snacks to be sold in local schools, something that HAFSA has supported in the past. However, since October 7, with the proliferation of checkpoints, school teachers and other staff have been unable to travel to the village, so the women are no longer employed. This has had a big impact on their finances and families.

Women are also concerned about feeding their families and are using up everything in their cupboards. So it is a time of great worry for the women of Sabastiya.

Bradford on Avon Friends of Palestine (BOAFOP)

A report on a successful visit by Palestinians from 13 to 23 February 2024

BoAFoP were shocked and numbed by the horrific Hamas attack last October which meant they had to cancel their 10th anniversary celebrations that had included receiving five Palestinians from Tubas, the city with which BoA has a Friendship Link. When word came in January that the five courageously wished to come before their visas expired, BoAFoP were thrilled to be able to welcome them and sprung into action.

Despite the short notice, the committee managed to ensure suitable accommodation in peoples' homes and to draw up a varied programme of events for our five guests: Jalal, the inspirational retired head teacher with whom we regularly communicate; Hossam, mayor of Tubas; Wajih, a major farmer and councillor. The younger visitors were Sana, a sports coach who has set up the first female Sports Academy in Tubas, and Naseem, 28, a youth worker.

We liaised closely with our Town Council. Mayor Katie Vigar immediately arranged for a welcome reception and tour of the town, which culminated in both mayors planting an olive tree near the Twinning Garden between St Margaret's Hall and Westbury Gardens, where there is a plaque commemorating the visit and our town's Friendship link with Tubas.



An early visit to Jamie's Farm near Box, led by Jake Curtis, co-CEO, was a great experience for them all. Jake, who a few years ago had done six months with Project Hope in Nablus, treated them royally, despite the mud, as they toured the farm. They were able to see the transformative effect for troubled children of living and working on the farm. Follow-up research shows that the self esteem of participants is an amazing 67% . It is a model which farmer Wajih plans to work on for children in Tubas who are traumatised by the persecution they face daily.



Sana, Naseem and Jalal had fun visiting the Easton Cowgirls football team in Bristol. The next morning at 8, Sana and Naseem joined a training session at Bath University Sports Village, where Jalal and the head coach discussed the possibilities of a link with her Academy in Tubas. After lunch they enjoyed a Bath skyline bus tour, a visit to the Roman Baths, and a pizza meal before hearing Avi Shlaim, an Iraqi Jew, speak at a Bath Friends of Palestine meeting, entitled "The wrong kind of Israeli".

We all went by train to London to join the regular Ceasefire march held on Saturday 17th. Here they saw and were able to join the 300,000 people calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. They found the experience both amazing and uplifting, especially to see the presence of so many Jewish groups also calling for a ceasefire. On both Thursdays they were here they supported our local Thursday vigils, after which Jalal thanked those attending.

Another very significant event was the visit to St Laurence School when, having attended the Collective Worship, we had an informal meeting with pupils from the lower 6th form. Jalal showed them a short video clip of his daughter Sulaf who, in near perfect English, (she has benefitted from the language labs we helped finance), made the point that most Palestinians do not discriminate against people based on their religion; however, they can never accept the suffocating Israeli Occupation imposed on them. By the end some of the pupils were in tears. We invited them to attend our final evening's big event at St Margaret's Hall and were thrilled when six of them came.

And what a momentous evening it was, starting with delicious Middle East mezze prepared by a local Syrian Samar and his wife. Presentations from Naseem, Sana and Jalal followed.

Naseem, always so quiet, became very animated as he told us how young men were being targeted and arrested by soldiers and how he was no longer allowed to work in Israel.

Sana told us of the challenges she had faced and overcome to get her sports academy established, having been told by one person when trying to book a pitch 'Girls don't play football': a wonderful role model for Palestinian girls.

Jalal's father had instilled in him as a young lad, that though one of his sister's had been killed when fleeing their home with his family in 1967, he must never hate, or he would be consumed by hate. He is a shining example of the many people who are working for peace in Palestine, and we are fortunate to have such a principled person with whom to liaise in our Friendship link.



Some up-to-date comment from a friend in Ramallah



“LIFE in the West Bank has turned upside down since the first week of October,” according to the Rector of St Andrew’s, Ramallah, the Revd Fadi Diab.

“But we need also to remember that Palestinians in the West Bank have been under military occupation for more than 55 years now,” he continued. But the situation in the West Bank could “not in any way be compared to the amount of pain in Gaza”, he emphasised.

“Since October, there has been an intensification of restrictions and Israeli troop incursions into cities and towns in the West Bank,” Fr Diab said. More than 500 people had been killed, and 7000 had been arrested, he said.

Travel had become even more difficult for Palestinians than before, he said, owing to violence and harassment from Israeli settlers, and this had had knock-on economic effects: the travel permits of many who had travelled into Israel to work had been cancelled, and they had lost their jobs without compensation.

Fr Diab’s church, in Ramallah, helps to organise summer camps for young Palestinian Christians. The situation for young people in the West Bank was especially challenging, he said. “Many young people have lost hope that there’s going to be peace one day in the future, especially with the rise of violence in Israeli society and the far Right.” The difficulties that young people, in particular, faced in moving around in the West Bank, or in applying for permits to enter Israel, fuelled frustration and a desire to move abroad, he said — and, of those who left, “most of them won’t come back.”

Speaking about the London marches calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, Fr Diab said: “It’s very virtuous to march on the streets for a just cause — to stop a war. No one should in any way support a war. Wars are against God’s will; killing the other is against God’s will.”

The Walsall Kobar Friendship Association

The Secretary of the Walsall Kobar Friendship Association writes:

We are a group that was established in 2008 to develop friendship and understanding between the people of Walsall and Kobar, a village of approximately 4,000 people in the West Bank. I have been on four solidarity visits to Kobar, staying in peoples' homes, visiting local schools, the kindergarten and playground, the women's group, the mosque and above all sharing meals in people's homes. I have also been involved in the five visits from people in Kobar to Walsall and friends from Kobar have stayed in my home.

My contact with my friends has increase since the 7th October and I am receiving regular messages from three of my friends, all of whom have visited Walsall and have met many Walsall residents. I send regular messages as well as photos and recently, short videos of solidarity activity calling for an immediate ceasefire.

I want you to read three of the messages I've received from friends in Kobar:

This message is from a friend who showed me how to make Palestinian flatbread in her kitchen in Kobar. She sent it in response to a video I sent her of the vigil we held outside Walsall Art Gallery last Saturday: "The war is getting worse. They kill everyone, everywhere. No safe place in Palestine, in Gaza or the West Bank. No words describe what happened; I can't imagine what happened every day. Really, enough killing peoples. We can't deal with all this fighting. Now they kill eight persons from my brother-in-law's family in Khan Younis. Really this is unbelievable. It is horrible. Thank you for your solidarity this means a lot. I shared this as a post on the Kobar committee page on Facebook."

This is a message from the friend who initially introduced me to people in Kobar and later welcomed me to her family's date farm in Jericho: "Gaza was destroyed, with nothing left in it: hospitals, schools, universities, or anything necessary to live in. The suffering of the displaced in tents is indescribable. Hunger and thirst and toilets and illness affected them all. On rainy days water enters the tents, destroying the few things people have. A friend of mine was displaced from Gaza and lives in a tent with his family. His sister also lives in a tent with her family. They sleep on the sand in this cold without a mattress or cover. This is in addition to the sounds of bombing and surveillance planes constantly flying in the sky. With constant fear of artillery or aircraft bombardment. A disastrous situation for the residents of the Gaza Strip."

And this last one is from a friend after I sent her a video clip of one of the national demonstrations I went to in London. When I think of her, I think of us sitting in her peaceful garden in Kobar, drinking tea: "Thankyou Ursula for sharing - really appreciate all what you do out there. Hoping for an immediate ceasefire since the situation in Gaza is beyond anything that a human being can tolerate; it is really insane. It is very shameful that the U.S voted against a ceasefire; ironically these are the democratic countries that call for human rights. The situation is still very bad there, the weather is bad today, its very cold with heavy rain, one cannot imagine living in a tent in such weather with lack of any basic needs from food and drinkable water to heating and warm clothes."

The Derby & Derbyshire Friends of Hebron

Derby Friends of Hebron have been marching for a ceasefire and helping the Derby branch of PSC raise money for Medical Aid for Palestinians, rally both inside and outside the Council House in Derby, write to MPs, hold Café Palestina evenings and more. We liaise almost daily with the Hebron International Resources Network (HIRN). Here are some of one week's messages from HIRN:



A retired GP and a retired priest in London recently



Today we have provided two tents for a victim of settler violence. Due to weather conditions, we were not able to set it up immediately. Today, the weather has improved and both tents were set up. One tent will be used as a shelter for the 6-member family while the second tent will be used as an animal barn. Inshallah this intervention would be the start for a new beginning for the displaced family.



We are continuing our cooperation with our partner organization in Gaza, ADWAR, to provide whatever relief we can to our brothers and sisters there. We are glad to report that we have distributed hot *maftool* meals to several families in refugee tents in and around Rafah. Inshallah, we shall continue our interventions in Gaza and we shall ALWAYS look for additional ways to provide such services to other affected communities when it becomes safe to do so.



As promised, we have delivered a wheelchair to a man who has lost both of his legs during an Israeli incursion into the city. Today, he used it and was very appreciative. We LOVE the idea that we can improve the lives of the less fortunate NO MATTER where they are.

We are starting to face first-hand the dire economic conditions Palestinian communities in the Hebron area have found themselves in as an aftermath of the ongoing war in Gaza. At least 180,000 Palestinian workers who used to work inside Israel proper found themselves in a swirling cycle of need, debt and economic loss. We are currently distributing 150 food parcels to six under-threat communities in the Hebron and Bethlehem Governorates.



In cooperation with our sister organization ADWAR in Gaza, we have held a fun-day for the displaced families currently residing in the besieged city of Rafah