



TRADE UNION FRIENDS OF PALESTINE

Campaigning in solidarity with the Palestinian people

TUFP TRADE UNION AMBASSADORS TO PALESTINE



TUFP delegates with Norwegian trade union delegation in Tulkarem with the New Unions

Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPA) was formed in 2006 in response to the policy commitment of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to 'campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian people'. In 2007 ICTU adopted a policy of full support for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel to help bring about an end to the occupation, colonisation and repression of Palestine, and to help achieve full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel and to support the right of return of Palestinian refugees. See:

<http://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/palestine/trade-union-friends-of-pa.html>

The Norwegian public sector union Fagforbundet, and their partners Norwegian People's Aid, developed the model of trade union 'ambassadors' to Palestine. Following a meeting with them in Belfast we were convinced that sending delegations to Palestine was worth the time and effort, and use of limited resources – that it was one of the most effective ways to achieve meaningful trade union solidarity, to develop links with Palestinians, and to bring a broader understanding of the situation to the wider trade union membership.

We were also very fortunate in early 2016 in making contact with 'Workmates International', the Trade Union Section of the Palestine Committee Norway. A small delegation of 4 TUFPA activists joined with them on a visit to the West Bank over the Mayday period in 2016. This introduced us to the **Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE)**, and to remarkable guides like **Abu Hassan, Lama Adel Yahya** and **Jamal Juma**.

The Organisation of Trade Union Delegations

Our model – In order to develop a cohort of active trade union ambassadors, who will be committed to promoting ICTU solidarity policy in their workplaces and communities, we seek to include in each delegation a combination of senior officials, to encourage union participation, and committed activists who are formally sponsored by their union organisation. The groups therefore have the status of official delegations.

Preparation – Briefing documents will be made available, and a commitment required to comply with the TUPF delegation guidelines, including participation in briefing and de-briefing meetings. Our requested programme of visits and meetings, which will change with each group, will be arranged by our Palestinian partners in PACE. With each delegation there will be a different itinerary and series of meetings, some of which will be determined by the interests and service area of delegation members. The design of the programme however will follow a basic model with 4 categories of activity. These are:

1] The political geography of the occupation – Experiencing apartheid in action by witnessing the extent to which the West Bank and East Jerusalem are under Israeli military occupation, with the West Bank being fractured by its hundreds of checkpoints, the Apartheid Wall, the by-pass roads and the ever-encroaching settlement-colonies. Experiencing the reality that Area C, over 60% of the West Bank, is effectively annexed by Israel. As well as experiencing life in other Palestinian cities there will be specific tours of East Jerusalem and Hebron, where the occupation can be experienced in its most brutal form, due to ethnic cleansing, military clampdown and imprisonment of whole communities.



2] Field trips – visits to specific villages, refugee camps or communities experiencing the occupation in its harshest form, and experiencing the remarkable resilience of its people in their determination to oppose the occupation, to survive in their homes, to work their fields, and to resist ethnic cleansing and colonisation, including the colonisation of the mind.

3] Meetings with Palestinian civil society organisations - Visits to relevant actors, political parties, NGOs, human rights organisations etc. For an example see below for the programme of meetings of the March 2017 delegation.

4] Trade Union Meetings – The aim of this is to learn more about Palestinian trade unions and the challenges of living under occupation from the perspective of workers and the trade union movement. We hear about the difficulty of accessing work, working conditions, terms and conditions, the involvement of women and youth. This is an opportunity to hear about any industrial action, and the shared context, and our common struggle, in maintaining workers' rights and dignity in an era of global neo-liberal transformations. We will continue to develop our understanding of the Palestinian trade union movement by meeting with the independent federations as well as the PGFTU. We will also visit workers' crossings for the 50,000 workers who are driven by poverty to cross over each day into Israel, many of them queuing from 3.00 a.m.

Our approach: Solidarity is with the struggle – not the suffering!

Like our Norwegian colleagues our approach and philosophy is based on this – the promotion of trade union ambassadors is meant to be a solidarity project, not aid or charity. It should be based on reciprocity and partnership between two equal partners -learning from each other's experiences of struggle.

A recent delegation - summary of visits and meetings

Day 1 – Arrive at Ben Gurion airport Tel Aviv. Picked up at the airport and overnight in East Jerusalem.

Day 2 – Ethnic Cleansing and Apartheid in East Jerusalem – A tour with Abu Hassan. An afternoon walk through the Old City.

Day 3 – Tour of Hebron and its imprisoned communities. Late afternoon meeting in Beit Sahour with the Defence of Children International – Palestine. Travel to hotel in Ramallah.

Day 4 – Meetings with Fatah, Hamas, Omar Barghouti and visit to an UNWRA school to meet trade union leaders. Travel to hotel in Nablus.

Day 5 – Tour of Nablus region, the village of Khirbet Tana, meeting the New Unions and NU Women’s Department in Tulkarem.

Day 6 – The locked in city of Qalqilia, Palestinian Medical Relief Society, seminar on Qalqilia, tour of area, seam zone and checkpoints. Return to Ramallah.



Day 7 – Meeting Janna Jihad and the Tamimi family in Nabi Saleh, the Women’s Association in Sali Barouti, Rantis Oil Field and the Rantis Women’s Association

Day 8 - Knowledge and Socialist Thought Institute, Visiting PACE, Meeting PGFTU

Day 9 – Check out and drive to Ben Gurion Airport Tel Aviv.

A detailed report of this delegation visit, and the visit of the 2016 delegation, is available from TUFFP.

Delegation Outcomes

Deepened understanding - As every one of our delegations agreed, no matter how well prepared you are it is not until you set foot on Palestinian soil that you begin to appreciate the full reality and horror of living under intense and ever present military occupation. It is only by travelling across the West Bank, and meeting the Palestinian people in their homes and on their land and in their workplaces that the extent of the occupation, human rights abuses, traumatising, abuse of children, military repression and settlement colonisation becomes apparent. By participating in delegations we bear witness to this atrocity, to ethnic cleansing and to apartheid. Time and time again we were thanked for being there with them, to show our support and solidarity, and for bearing witness.



This experience is also matched however by the inspiration we receive in turn. At the same time the members of the delegation were able to witness the strength of the Palestinian people and the grassroots Palestinian resistance – a powerful sense of unfaltering resistance amidst the repression and ruins. This took many forms, and it is articulated in what the Palestinians call the *sumud* –steadfastness - of resistance.

Competency building - These experiences provide our ambassadors with the authority, and the understanding, to be effective advocates for Palestine.

Trade Union links - Meetings with unions and other organisations provide an opportunity to explore how ongoing relationships of support and solidarity can be established within the trade union movement here, and how the solidarity policies of our own unions can deliver concrete outcomes. This can be in terms of union or sectoral twinning, making available resources, help with training and competency building, sharing of information, advocacy through our networks including international affiliations and at the level of government. It also supports the work that the trade union movement here is undertaking with the European Trade Union Initiative for Justice in Palestine.

Action – Trade union ambassadors can ensure that Palestine and international solidarity are kept on the agenda of their union organisation at all times. They can mobilise the membership and help ensure that all sectors of the union, at national, regional and local level, are mobilised to play their part. Ambassadors too can play a part in their local communities, solidarity organisations, rights groups and in their schools and faith groups.



Norwegian and TUFPA delegates meeting the PGFTU in their Jericho office

Norwegian Workmates: Baard Thorkildssen, Herald Haukaa, Torill Ask, Kjersti Nordby, Per Martinsen

TUFPA: Deirdre Murphy, Kevin Daly, Ryan McKinney, Eamon McMahon

Does your union/trades council have a solidarity policy on Palestine?

Do you want to help promote that policy, and make it effective?

Do you want to be a trade union ambassador to Palestine?

If so – then promote or join a TUFPA delegation!

Contact: Email TUFPA secretary: eamonmcmahon@hotmail.co.uk

Twitter: TUFPA@TUFPApalestine

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