
SAMPLE CPTNET RELEASES

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IRAQ REFLECTION: The next Palestine
by Greg Rollins

Words: 454

[NOTE: Greg Rollins worked with CPT's Hebron team in the West Bank for three years and currently works with CPT's Iraq team.]

Iraqis talk about becoming the next Palestine.

In general, the Arab world loves to harp about the issue of Palestine, but they find Palestinian refugees a bother. Many Iraqis are afraid of becoming the next bother. They are also afraid of becoming an endless smoldering affair, of becoming another example of the politically sticky Western interest in the Middle East.

Iraqis have every right to be afraid of these things. Listening to Iraqis talk about suffering under the hands of Coalition troops and policies is like listening to Palestinians talk about the Israeli occupation. At the hands of their occupiers, both experience similar ordeals.

Many Iraqi families, have a father, a son, brother, or even a cousin who lives and works somewhere else in the Middle East or the west. He sends his money back to Iraq so his family might eat, go to school or buy clothes. This same thing has been happening in Palestine for over fifty years.

Right now, there is hope that Iraq will become its own, independent nation. There is a future. There is a timeline and structure. There is the newly elected Prime Minister and the cabinet he has formed, a cabinet that has begun to criticize the U.S. and the unbalanced power structure it installed.

In the latter half of the 1990s, there was hope in Palestine. The Israeli government gave the Palestinian Authority (PA) some hope of land, power and status. Palestinians legally voted Yasser Arafat into office. The PA took control of cities and set up ministries. Today, the Israeli government ignores the PA. It uses its military to control the Palestinians and achieve its goals in the West Bank and Gaza. If the U.S. so desires, at any time it too could override – even dismantle – the new Iraqi government for the sake of its own interests. It has announced that the international military force will remain under U.S. rather than Iraqi authority.

There are other parallels: detention techniques used by the two militaries, checkpoints, villages encircled with barbed wire, the rules and regulations. But the Iraqi people are not the next Palestinians yet. Right now, what separates them from the Palestinian people is their spirit. The U.S. occupation has not crushed the spirit of the Iraqi people as the Israeli occupation has crushed the Palestinians. Thinking like victims, many Palestinians believe they cannot help themselves, that others must help them. Most Iraqi people have yet to reach that point, but if no real change appears, if they fail to obtain real independence from their occupiers they may lose their spirit too.

If they do not achieve real independence, the Iraqi people will eventually declare their own Intifada (shaking off.) The tension and fighting will continually grow and diminish like a tide. The news from Iraq will become depressing and tedious. The world will look somewhere else. This is what most Iraqis are afraid of: they are afraid of turning into a cause people have forgotten.

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ARIZONA/SONORA BORDER LANDS: Desert fast calls attention to migrants' plight
by Sara Rickard

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Members of the Christian Peacemaker Team and visiting delegation began a six-day fast in the Sonoran desert to pray for the safety of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and to raise awareness of unjust border policies.

The CPT fast is part of a series of actions coordinated with No More Deaths/No Mas Muertes. No More Deaths is a Tucson-based coalition working to end the deaths of migrants through direct humanitarian intervention, support to migrant centers on both sides of the border, and advocacy for humane border policy.

To alleviate the physical suffering of migrants, participants in the fast offer survival food, water, and medical attention to those who pass their camp. By the end of the first day, CPT members had distributed their entire supply of food and water and had seen more than twenty migrants pass through the immediate area. Some migrants wandered in alone, after having been separated from their traveling companions, and asked to have the Border Patrol contacted to take them back across the border. One woman who was abandoned by her coyotes (paid guides) said that they had raped migrant women from Honduras who had been traveling with them. Human rights activists claim that in this area of the desert 20-30% of migrants are assaulted on the trail.

According to Mexican Consular officials, 49 migrants in Cochise County and over 200 migrants total died while crossing the border this year. Most of last year's deaths occurred during the month of July. Eight Mexican migrants have died already in the county this year. While delegates visited Thursday, the Mexican consulate received a call reporting the death of a woman from Zacatecas.

Aside from the inhospitable climate, migrants face the dangers of traveling with often-unreliable coyotes, the attacks by bandits on both sides of the border, and mistreatment by Border Patrol agents and local vigilante landowners.

"As a nation, we discuss immigration in economic terms and security terms, but we rarely discuss the issue in human terms," said Tim Kortenkamp (Santa Cruz, CA) "Being in the desert puts a face on this very human reality."

CPTers Mark Frey (Chicago, IL) and Ron Friesen (Loveland, CO) are fasting in the desert for the first three days, and Scott Kerr (Evanston, IL) and Le Anne Clausen (Mason City, IA) will fast during the second three days. CPT delegates are joining team members in their fast and the team is also receiving visitors from local organizations and community members. CPT delegation members include Tim Kortenkamp (Santa Cruz, CA), Paul Horst (Evanston, IL), and Sara Rickard, (Chicago, IL).