

Adopt a Doctor, Adopt a Patient, Adopt a Window, Adopt a Meal

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

“We travel like other people, but we return to nowhere ...

“We have buried our loved ones in the darkness of the clouds, beneath the roots of trees ...

We have a country of words. Speak, speak, so we may know the end of this travel.”

“We travel like other people”, from **Victims of a Map**, by Mahmud Darwish

As Israel plans celebrations – which mark sixty years of Palestinian deaths, displacement and grief – with a Jewish “cultural and heritage pavilion”, it can only be hoped, in the interests of historical accuracy and authenticity, that it will include replicas of mounds of ancient masonry, the remains of the demolished Palestinian ancestral homes and lands upon which Israel has been built. Some pictures of the biblical-scale exodus of the generations of rightful occupiers of their birthright, nurtured and revered by their forbears, now buried lovingly in the earth they had tended, would be thought provoking. As Israel demolished, erased history itself, replacing it with tacky modern “settlements”, Palestinians left – and leave – their heritage with just what they could and can carry, or for the lucky ones, move a little more on donkey, donkey cart or in a car.

Another authentic touch for the pavilion would be a year by year display of photographs of the six decade destruction of ancient olive groves, citrus orchards, multitudinous blossom trees. The entrance, woven of olive branches, could be marked by a dove with an olive leaf in its beak, those symbols of peace whose genesis were a symbol of peace at the naming of Athens – for the former – and Noah’s Ark for the latter, both recognised the world over, transcending religions and ethnicities. A statement, at this auspicious time of, well, the turning of a new leaf, a mea culpa – and a commitment to no longer being the neighbour from hell.

There is a bit of a way to go, admittedly. The State of Israel, of course, is not just modern history, but a work in progress. As surgeon and a founder of Hamas, and now its Foreign Minister, Mahmoud al-Zahar, writes in the Washington Post (17th April 2008) “... the ratio of Palestinians to Israelis killed in 2007, was forty to one.” Collective punishment “in violation of international conventions”, is rife, he writes, adding poignantly:

“Only three months ago I buried my son Hussam, who studied finance at college and wanted to be an accountant. He was killed by an Israeli airstrike. In 2003, I buried Khaled — my first-born — after an Israeli F-16 targeting me, wounded my daughter and my wife and flattened the apartment building where we lived, injuring and killing many of our neighbors. Last year, my son-in-law was killed.” State terrorism comes to mind.

Hamas, of course, was legally elected as the Palestinian government, in January 2006. Hundreds of independent monitors, including former US President Jimmy Carter, credited with brokering the 1979 peace accord between Egypt and Israel and 2002 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, declared it the fairest election ever held in the Arab Middle East.

President Carter returned to the region last week and collided head on with “the only democracy in the Middle East”, which refused him permission to visit Gaza and to also meet the political representatives of Hamas, whose election he had endorsed as democratic, free and fair. Whilst he was entangled in the complexities of not being allowed to meet the wrong kind of democrats, Israel was pounding a Gaza refugee camp with, reportedly, six attack helicopters and also extensively damaging the El Wafa Medical Rehabilitation Hospital, which was surrounded by ten Israeli Machaver tanks.

Hospitals: “...enjoy special protected status under international humanitarian law. It is a war crime to deliberately attack a hospital or other medical unit, whether civilian or military. It is also unlawful to use a hospital in direct support of a military operation ...”

Attacks on medical staff, all medical facilities, the sick and the wounded are prohibited under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and 1977. The rogue states occupying Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine have, it seems, abandoned the rule of law and indeed, are deliberately targeting everything painstakingly enshrined as protected, since the earliest laws on conflict were devised.

Apart from the barely recognisable bloody bits and pieces that had been parents, relatives, children, trying to do normal things on another abnormal day, there was plenty for President Carter not to witness. If it can be said that the shelling of one medical institution is more deviant, appalling and inhuman than another, the damage to the El Wafa Hospital, attacked on Wednesday, 16th April, deserves a special category in Israel’s 60th Birthday Hall of Shame.

The Hospital’s Medical Director, Dr Khamas Elessi explains that this is the only facility where cases of spinal chord and severe head injuries are treated. Patients are paralyzed and comatose, relying entirely on various life supporting equipment, constant care, frequent suctioning, all reliant on highly specialised medical skills and sophisticated technical facilities. The attack, states Dr Elessi, has left: “massive damage to departments, complete outage of power and water (and caused) damage to the only generator, putting in great danger the life of paralyzed and coma patients needing constant medical and nursing attendance.”

“Patients and staff are in a state of shock”, says Dr Elessi, their lives seriously endangered and for the patients: “Our hospital has been the lung through which our disabled clients breathe.” Even breathing is now at risk. Further, shrapnel and bullets “penetrated into patients’ rooms in every section of the hospital.” At least the comatose were unaware. The terror of the paralyzed immobile cannot even be imagined. And if the electricity dies, so do they. The operating theatre has been shut down. Anaesthetics have, anyway, run out.

This is the second time the hospital and its infrastructure, has been attacked. In 2002, says Dr Elessi: “Two of our nursing staff were shot dead by Israeli military forces, whilst positioning one of the spinal chord patients inside Room 214.” Any comment is redundant.

Dr Elessi is appealing: “To the international community, human rights organisations, the

United Nations, the World Health Organisation and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to put an end to this repeated aggression on civilians, health institutes, patients and staff." Given the deafening silence at the highest level from all of the above, breath holding is inadvisable.

Your help is needed and any amount, however small, can make a difference. Due to the Israeli siege on Gaza, hospital staff work for love and dedication and have not been paid for up to five months. Food for staff – and patients, for whom correct nutritional is especially vital – suffers more than a shortage. The hospital windows need replacing due to the attack. Medications and equipment need replacing and repairing.

Trauma surgeon David Halpin and his wife Sue, a former nurse, who were in Gaza and spent time at the El Wafa Hospital last month, have a charity for Gaza, **Dove and Dolphin**, through which moneys can be donated and will make a difference: <http://www.doveanddolphin.co.uk>

David Halpin has many insights, from many visits, even on windows, of which he writes: "Repairing windows is a well honed skill in Gaza because many thousands are shattered each year due to sound barrier booms from F16's and from the millions of bullets and shells that are directed at houses and other precious property like schools. Of course, sometimes there is complete destruction, as with the levelling of the Interior Ministry in a residential district in Gaza City." Shards of glass from windows shattered under pressure, of course, become lethal weapons, razor shards, travelling at speed, shredding, maiming and dismembering humanity. Ministry employees and residents alike, in their multi-storey blocks, must have been a gut wrenching, eye watering sight, for rescuers.

In spite of challenges of such enormity, Halpin comments on the latest outrage that: "Al Wafa looks after the most difficult conditions with great skill and humanity. Visiting doctors have commented on the absence of pressure sores, which reflects the excellence of the care."

Sue Halpin writes of their recent visit ('Have a Nice Holiday', Middle East Online, 21st March 2008) and driving to El Wafa: "... passing dereliction like you can't imagine", the "shattered buildings ... the scars of gunfire", the unusable roads, ruined by Israeli tanks. Just before they arrived 130 people had been killed in another attack, the youngest just days old. At the hospital: "We could hear the shells landing not so far away and see the puffs of smoke." The road to recovery must be specially challenging in Gaza. And she writes of the isolation of the people, encapsulated by one visit to a home, where a three year old tried to lock them in to stop them leaving, so thrilled was she to meet strangers from another land. Mahmoud al-Zahar refers to: "The continuing warfare against and the enforced isolation of the people of Gaza."

In this latest onslaught, to which one Western medical expert refers as: "This unlimited and pitiless killing and maiming of innocent people", the BBC reported that El Wafa Hospital had been "caught in the crossfire". But Dr. Elessi's description indicates that this was not the case, stating: "The hospital was hit by four Israeli shells and by many bullets ... I am 100% certain the shrapnel is Israeli – the number of shells fired so closely together. Militant rockets aren't that accurate." Further: "A person from the Red Cross came to look at the damage. The type of bullets are the long ones from Israeli tanks, not the smaller ones from Palestinian militant weapons."

The attack went on for hours, says Dr Elessi, the hospital in darkness, with off duty staff unable to reach it to assist until 6 a.m. In an act of extraordinary tenacity and courage, the doctor described how: "Our oldest patient, in his fifties, managed to throw himself off his bed and drag others, on their bed sheets to (an inner corridor) where it was a little safer."

President Carter, speaking at the American University in Cairo, the day after the attack, described Gaza's plight as: "An atrocity what is being perpetrated as punishment on the people in Gaza. It's a crime." It was also, he added, "an abomination".

Mahmoud al-Zafar pointed out a supreme, heartfelt irony: "Sixty-five years ago, the courageous Jews of the Warsaw ghetto rose in defense of their people. We Gazans, living in the world's largest open-air prison, can do no less."

If governments choose to stand by, their citizens of conscience need not. Adopt a Doctor, Adopt a Patient, Adopt a Window, Adopt a Meal at the El Wafa Medical Rehabilitation Hospital.

Donations can be sent via Pay Pal at <http://www.doveanddolphins.co.uk/helpus.asp>

The "contact us" link for donations other than Pay Pal is: <http://www.doveanddolphins.co.uk/contactus.asp>

Dove and Dolphin is a (UK) registered Charity assisting with a number of imaginative, practical initiatives in Gaza, where even batteries for hearing aids at the school for hearing impaired children have been denied by Israel. As that country celebrates its birthday, Palestinians remember the Nakba (catastrophe) which befell them at its birth - and is ongoing.

Any queries or problems with links: david@infoaction.org.uk

Felicity Arbuthnot is a journalist and activist who has visited the Arab and Muslim world on numerous occasions. She has written and broadcast on Iraq, her coverage of which was nominated for several awards. She was also senior researcher for John Pilger's award-winning documentary,

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