

Weeping for Gaza

David Halpin reaches out to the people of Gaza

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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“The diagnosis is evil ... the cure is truth and love.” David S. Halpin, FRCS.,
Founder, “Dove and Dolphin.”

Today, assembling a pile of reference material, I was planning to write something entirely different. Then, with the mail, came a small, beautifully produced newsletter from Dove and Dolphin, a charity with a difference.

Founded by retired trauma and orthopaedic surgeon, David Halpin, the organization reaches out to the people of Gaza, not alone with essentials as medicines and other vital needs, but with projects aiming to bring dignity, pockets of normality and humanity back to a people living where normality is crushed brutally, daily, under the searing cruelty of Israeli occupation.

The newsletter makes eye watering reading, combined with a silent scream at the world’s silence. As with Iraq and Afghanistan, an inaudible, creeping, holocaust is taking place. But in Gaza it has amounted to official Israeli policy since this state cuckoo landed in the Middle East nest, in 1948.

“The five million people in the three remnants of Palestine - the ‘West Bank’, ‘East’ Jerusalem and Gaza, have never suffered so much since El Nakba (the catastrophe) when two thirds of the Palestinian Arab population were driven from their homes, their land and thus their living, by terror and force of arms in 1948”, writes Halpin, referring to their their “torment and loss.”

The newsletter spans a fifteen month period, late because constantly overtaken by events in the horrors the people of Gaza have suffered, since November 2008.

That month Halpin and fifteen fellow medical professionals had planned further fact finding visit to Palestine, with three days in Gaza. Physicians for Human Rights in Israel worked strenuously, liaising with the authorities regarding the delegation’s entry to Gaza, but failed: “I wondered if the Israelis were preparing for an invasion ..” In February of 2008, Israeli Defence Minister Matan Vilnai “promised a ‘greater shoah’ for the people of Gaza.” Shoah means holocaust. The powerful in Israel would seem to resemble the abused child, who as an adult, in turn, abuses.

Unable to reach Gaza, the physicians had meetings in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus. Two especially impressed, meetings with Addameer and Defence for Children International (DCI), both who defend the rights of the children of Palestine. “As I write, there are over four hundred children in Israeli jails ..” Halpin relates the story of one, traumatised,

but free (if anyone in Palestine can be called “free.”) Husam, aged ten, was chased, beaten and detained for approximately eleven hours by Israeli soldiers.

He told DCI: “ .. I feel scared whenever I remember what happened to me ... it might happen to me again ... they threatened to kill me or lock me up.”

Welcome to “the only democratic country in the Middle East.”

“The holocaust promised by Vilnai was released on 27th December 2008 ... Military and some other Rabbis encouraged attacks on the civilian population”, notes Halpin. Further, the assault began during Hannukkah, the eight day Jewish religious Feast of Dedication, or Festival of Lights. Named “Operation Cast Lead”, this alluded to “ a dreidel, a four sided spinning top, with a Hebrew letter on each side (a) game of chance played by families during the festival.”

“Over two hundred people were killed in the first fifteen minutes of the bombardment.” They included schoolchildren “as packed schools” were changing shifts; in the same time frame, all of the Civil Defence centres were destroyed, rendering ambulance co-ordination beyond challenging. Ambulances and medical personnel were challenged, breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Nuremberg Principles, as a war of choice and aggression, the supreme war crime”from which all other crimes flow.” Halpin includes here reports from journalist Eva Jasiewicz. (www.tiny.cc/hauGI)

“Most of the five hundred pages of the Goldstone Report to the UN Human Rights Commission focus on Israeli actions.” These “actions” include the fate of the Samouni family. Fleeing the bombardment: “They were ... herded in to a basement in their dozens. The building was then shelled. Ambulances were prevented from going to the dead and wounded for two days. A live child lay alongside a dead parent.”

“Goldstone (states) in no uncertain terms that Gaza was not an aberration in Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians”, writes Halpin, adding that the former Judge Richard Goldstone’s Report concludes that a “collective penalty” was inflicted upon Gaza’s people, amounting to “intimidation and terror.”

This from a man described by his daughter as: “ A Zionist who loves Israel.”

“Israel could and would not, have engaged in the level of wholesale destruction ... without the support of the outgoing Bush Administration and acquiescence of the incoming Obama” one, comments Halpin, adding “and not without full UK and EU support.” (see www.tiny.cc/IHzUG)

On 29th December 2008, David Halpin flew to Larnaca, Cyprus, to join with the Free Gaza movement, on behalf of Dove and Dolphin, in solidarity with the people of Gaza. As night fell, just an hour after he landed, they left Larnaca for Gaza, in the MV Dignity, a fifty metre motor yacht, with three tonnes of medical supplies, mostly donated by the Cyprus government – in stark contrast to vaunted Western democracies. “I wanted to offer myself as a doctor or surgeon”, failing that, “help the living to find the dead.”

“Just after 5.30 a.m., there was a tremendous crash off the bow ... then another, then another ... it was still pitch dark, with a stiff wind and a ten ft sea.” They had been rammed by one of two Israeli gun boats. As the Master put out a “Mayday” distress call, an Israeli

Captain came on the radio accusing the group of being terrorists, saying he would shoot at the boat, which was taking in water, badly damaged, “not seaworthy”, but somehow, still afloat. Former US Congresswoman, Cynthia McInney, who had also joined in solidarity, said simply: “I can’t swim, David.” Without enough fuel to return to Larnaca, they limped in to Tyre, in Lebanon, “to a massive and jubilant reception.”

The age of the vessel, its sturdiness, saved them. One “of glass reinforced plastic would have shattered (survivors) would have been run down.” The official line, suggests Halpin, would have been: “The MV Dignity with sixteen ‘activists’ on board, has been lost (in) poor weather (in) a vessel nearly thirty years old.”

The Dignity had broken the siege of Gaza five times. Repairs could not be done quickly enough. She sank, in April 2009. (See “Piracy off the Promised Land”, and “The Ramming of the Dignity with Clear Lethal Intent.” www.tiny.cc/ncklF)

On return, Dove and Dolphin sent £thirty thousand, donated by the charity’s supporters, to a trusted friend and contact, to be split three ways: for basic medical supplies, cash grants for families whose homes had been badly damaged and for the poor to buy groceries, by way of vouchers. In spite of continuous electrical failures, email communications updated on the life sustaining projects.

Halpin describes speaking to a close medical friend in Gaza one night, huge explosions halted the conversation. The line went dead. “I thought he and his family (had) been killed. It transpired the (bombing) was four miles away at the Islamic University of Gaza ...(maybe) those which razed the two science towers of this splendid university, which started in tents.” (www.tiny.cc/qQhAO)

Dove and Dolphin also supports the Al Jazeera (the island) Sports Club for the Disabled. “About forty thousand people have been injured since September 2000 in the West Bank and Gaza.” Providing for all ages and men and women, it needed to expand. ‘\$thirty five thousand, in stages”, has helped rapidly and “to a high standard. Teams of athletes, some missing both legs, some paraplegic”, have competed overseas, “.. including Japan ... returning with medals .. keen as mustard to represent their people, in spite of all.” Halpin was invited to speak at the inauguration ceremony and to meet the athletes, when the expansion of this remarkable project was completed. Israel barred his way and Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth, declined to help, as ever, playing dead.

\$ten thousand have been contributed to the Turathona cultural centre, where men and women create crafts from embroidery to carving, distributed abroad for sale, providing income, morale and “maintaining Palestinian cultural identity.”

Thirty students in secondary school are given a \$thirty a month allowance. Reaching the age of eighteen, they are replaced by younger needy ones. D and D supporters contribute by monthly banker’s orders and “know the children” they support, human to human solidarity “the essence of D and D.”

Grants to small businesses “have been difficult to maintain since last January, but we hope to continue with this... in an economy where 80% live below the poverty line.”

“Our optics centre has been a great success, providing eye tests and spectacles at low costs”, another project which is expanding.

Further help goes to the Lajee Youth Centre in Aida Camp, Bethlehem, another “inspiring” project, about which Photographer Rich Wiles has just had a book published: “Behind the Wall, Life, Love and the Struggle in Palestine.”

Dove and Dolphin’s International Medical Centre was to include a distance learning project, also interrupted by last year’s bombardment. Medical experts from abroad were to join their Palestinian colleagues and impart new knowledge and methodology. Also, for the moment, disrupted. However the Ibn Zuhr Medical Forum website has been set up “to help unify (medical disciplines) in the remnants of Palestine.” (www.ibnzuhrmedicalforum.org)

“As the MV Dignity steamed north for Tyre, I thought of simple words (to) say to the media in Lebanon .. I chose these:

‘We must control barbarism, uphold international law and cherish all children everywhere.

We must never give up, however Herculean the task.’ ”

The remarkable and courageous David Halpin admits he “wept” over Gaza. So should we all - and for the complicity in the silence of governments.

A personal appeal from the writer: many do not give, because they feel the small amount they are able will make no difference. But if all in one small community - say of five thousand - gave just one pound or dollar, that would raise £/\$’s five thousand. If half or quarter of those in a larger community of, say thirty thousand, gave the same ...

Dove and Dolphin is throwing a life line to the people of Gaza and Palestine’s other remnants - and takes no overheads out of donations. Every pound, dollar, euro counts, shows solidarity, confirmation that a proud, brave and betrayed people are not alone and forgotten. All details: (www.doveanddolphins.co.uk)

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