

### Images of the Intifada

**T**his spring I went to the West Bank and Gaza Strip to visit ANERA's projects with some of our donors. I have worked with ANERA's Washington office for four years, and this was my first trip to the Middle East. I was eager to see firsthand the effects of the Palestinian intifada.

One frequently hears of the violent incidents of the intifada. But my first encounter, visiting the ancient town of Jericho, was marked by stillness. In solidarity with the intifada, Palestinian shopkeepers close at noon each day. We drove through streets eerily deserted, past shuttered stores and houses. Only a few people were out, in contrast to the hubbub one would expect. We went on to the nearby excavation site of Tel Jericho, the earliest site of

the city. Looking down at the primitive stone walls ten thousand years old, I briefly wondered what mark the intifada will leave behind.

History stretching from ancient to modern times is apparent everywhere. In the West Bank town of Hebron, the Ibrahimi mosque is revered as the final resting place of Abraham and Sarah. Glimpses of Bedouin camps tucked into valleys throughout the area reveal a way of life little changed over centuries. Along Lake Tiberias, the biblical Sea of Galilee, pilgrims solemnly trace the steps of Jesus of Nazareth.

The sense of the ages is strongest in Jerusalem. The city's mythical aura of history and religion is hardly  
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*Hassidic Jews at the wailing wall, the Dome of the Rock, and Catholic Nuns near Lake Tiberias.*

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dispelled by its present reality. In the walled city at twilight, the haunting cry of the *muezzin* calling the faithful to prayer lends the tranquility of a distant time. The many holy sites bear silent tribute to the exaltation of worship common to all humanity.

But man's darker face peers through the shadowy window of history as well. Reminders of wars past are everywhere, from the Horns of Hattin in the Galilee where the Crusaders fell to Saladin to the tanks from 1948 littering the sides of the highway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Throughout the country patches of prickly pear cactus mark the borders of Arab villages that have disappeared from the land. Tomorrow's history is written in the crippled bodies of the men, women and children injured during the intifada.

I had heard many stories of the difficulties of life for the Palestinians, but I was nevertheless unprepared for the magnitude of their oppression: not simply the incidents of violence, but the pervasive efforts to make simple daily activities into situations of humiliation. The juxtaposition of scenes of ancient history and modern injustice was dramatized one day outside Bethlehem. We turned off the road to visit Solomon's Pools, following a small dirt road past some houses. We noticed a group of people outside one of the houses; suddenly someone cried, "Look, they're demolishing the house!"

*Repairs continue at Beit Jala.*



As we watched, a large machine relentlessly ate away at the side of a house, turning a family's home into a pile of rubble. A soldier waved us to move on. As we turned onto the main road, a woman began wailing over her life's possessions strewn about the yard. Later we learned that the reason the entire house was demolished was because the family had built a room on the back without obtaining a permit.

As a result of more than forty years of this type of repression, the Palestinians have become ingeniously self-reliant. Without a government to provide leadership or services, the Palestinians have developed a strong tradition of voluntary action, much as in the United States. Individuals and cooperatives working to change the situation contribute their time, talent and wealth. This tradition of voluntary action and self-reliance contributed directly to the intifada: a generation that grew up in this tradition is now putting it into practice to gain political ends.

ANERA complements voluntary efforts by supporting the charitable work undertaken by local groups and institutions and the community development projects of municipal leaders. In this way, we insure that money is spent on projects that are truly useful. There are other benefits to this approach: despite curfews, general strikes, and other myriad constraints over the last eighteen months, ANERA's projects are moving forward. Stores now carry yogurt made by a dairy cooperative in the village of Nassariya; West Bank residents still get their cars

repaired by experts at the Beit Jala industrial complex; and farmers wait expectantly to sell their crops at the wholesale fruit and vegetable market in Halhul.

As our trip drew to a close, I reflected back over the people I'd met, their hope and determination. I wondered what place their intifada would take in history, and what lasting contribution ANERA's efforts might make. I thought again of the walls of ancient Jericho, still standing after ten thousand years. Our projects may not last that long. But I know ANERA's work makes a substantial difference in the lives of the Palestinians we serve. We are helping them build a better future—a future of peace and justice.



# A Glimpse of Gaza

Even without the checkpoint, I would have known immediately that we had crossed from Israel into the Gaza Strip. Parched fields and stunted orange trees are only the first signs of poverty. The years of deprivation and isolation show up most vividly in the city of Gaza. Donkey carts are still the most common vehicle in the streets, streets crowded with veiled women.

The intifada first erupted in the Gaza Strip and one can feel the tension, the anger, smoldering beneath a veil of calm. Grim reminders are the slogans of the intifada painted on walls—whitewashed at soldiers' orders, only to reappear shortly thereafter. Gazans joke that the most important tools in a home are the broom, the pot and the paintbrush.

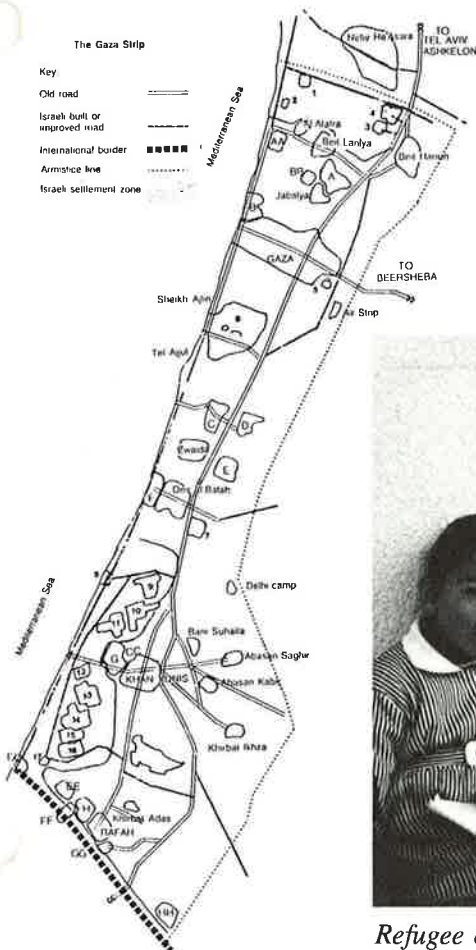
Nearly 70% of Gaza's inhabitants are refugees, the majority of whom live in eight camps scattered throughout the Strip. UNRWA (United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) loaned us both a van and one of their representatives as an escort through some of the camps. At Shaykh al Maghazi camp, we watched hundreds of children line up for their ration of pita bread, half an orange, and a serving of *hummus*. These children are the third generation to grow up as refugees. Neither they nor their parents have known any other life.

We went on to Jabalia Camp, where the intifada began, and then to Beach Camp, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Our escort told us that the Israelis frequently smooth the sand of this beach in the evening, in order to leave a surface that will record any footsteps left by invaders coming in from the sea. I thought it ironic that so much attention is focused on threats from without, while across a two lane road, thousands of people seethe with anger and frustration.

While in Gaza I spent a few days at the Sun Day Care Centre for

handicapped children. Behind the center's high walls I was surprised by an oasis of happy children. In an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance, highly trained teachers provide the children with an education and skills that will help them earn a living later. The school also runs an outreach program for children unable to come to the center. Teachers go to the children's homes once a week to work with the children and to train families to continue the lessons during the week. An innovative twist to the program is its extension to children judged to be at risk of becoming handicapped. Early intervention prevents disabilities from developing.

The Palestinians in Gaza are dedicated to philanthropic efforts. Because of their isolation, the work of individuals is all the more vital. One of the most impressive private undertakings I observed was a modern medical center being funded by a Gaza lawyer. The multi-storied center in downtown Gaza will provide a wide range of medical services not now available. I asked the lawyer why he had chosen to have the medical center built. He answered simply, "Because it is needed."



Refugee children in Gaza.



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*Text and photos by Margaret Bay.*

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