Palestine is a cry, a weep, resistance

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They've even stolen spring from us, but they can't take away our song.
It seems fragile, but it doesn't give in; it keeps singing just like you and me.
—Teresa Parodi

In October, I was in Palestine, where I traveled as a member of a peace and solidarity delegation made up of about 15 people and coordinated by the organizations FOSNA (Friends of Sabeel North America) and Sabeel. It's hard to describe what we saw and heard because the pain lodged deep in my soul and body still throbs, and it brings tears to my eyes every time I talk about what we went through.

The Israeli regime prohibits entry into Gaza so that we won't see that mountain of rubble and corpses where Gazans are still surviving or dying under inhumane conditions and being bombed with total impunity.

Although some international delegations are not allowed to enter the West Bank or are deported under false pretenses, we were able to enter and hear testimonies about the oppression and violence that Zionism has inflicted on them on a daily basis since 1948, seeking to make life for families and communities unbearable and unlivable. We saw how human rights are being trampled upon to prevent people from living their personal and social lives in freedom and peace, forcing them to migrate so that the entire Palestinian territory can be seized.

One way to harass them is to prevent them from harvesting olives, which must be done in October. Families are constantly at risk of attacks by violent groups (settlers) who seek to prevent them from harvesting fruit from trees that have been bearing fruit and providing sustenance to their ancestors for many centuries. When we were on the farms, the Israeli army monitored us with a drone for the "crime" of helping with the harvest, and the invaders attacked diplomats, journalists, and Palestinian farmers very close to where we were. Threatening, destroying homes, killing animals, razing ancestral olive groves, beating people, imprisoning them without trial, closing roads and borders, invading, and killing—these are the daily actions of the Israeli regime, which uses armed civilians or the Israeli army directly to prevent people from living in peace, freedom, and dignity.

Since 1948, Zionist ideology (which emerged in the late 19th century) has justified and disguised—under the guise of victimhood and religion—a policy of ethnic cleansing, the elimination of those who oppose the theft of their land, and the destructive occupation of neighboring countries, relying on supremacism, racism, and the power of the financial world, the arms industry, and the unconditional support of the United States, the European Union, and some Arab countries.

“There’s something beautiful here,” said Phil, a member of the group, with his youthful sensitivity. The Palestinian people love their land, their families, and their identity; they still sing, dance, and express themselves through art in the midst of so much desolation. They are seeking creative ways to escape this daily oppression and, for the most part, are organizing nonviolent resistance to this ethnic cleansing and genocide. “I don’t want to hate,” said a farmer who, for years, has been facing attempts to take away the land of his ancestors; and despite his exhaustion, he continues to defend—in every way possible—his family’s legally established rights, which are ignored by the Israeli government.

Without a doubt, the long-suffering Palestinian people need more than just our words; they need our presence to assure them that we will not abandon them, and that this land—where Jesus and Mary once walked—must bring justice and peace to those who have lived here for generations. What governments fail to do, we the people will do, because the future of humanity is at stake here—a world where international law is respected, one that prevents the triumph of money and dehumanizing weapons—because the love born of solidarity—which engages in economic boycotts, speaks out, and makes its presence felt there, whether by sea or land—can curb the hatred and deadly ambition that drive the Zionist advance.

The Palestinian people are hope that refuses to give up; they are life reborn among the stones; they are strength that dwells in their wounds; they are blood that preserves memory; they are a deep attachment to the land in the face of dispossession; they are love for their family and identity that cries out to humanity: “Don't abandon us!”

For me, being there was a great privilege: a time of deep emotion and a shower of gifts for the soul, received from witnesses who dream of the right to live in peace while enduring their own crucifixion. It meant spending two weeks with a group of companions whose faith was expressed in their commitment to the oppressed and in their care for one another. It meant learning that many people acting in solidarity and organizations from various countries, despite the risks, come to accompany and support a people who tirelessly resist dispossession and struggle to survive. It meant trusting that urgent actions for liberation, public denunciations of injustice, and prayers will help them achieve sovereignty, live on their ancestral land, and recover from so many losses.