

## Newsletter

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**Shabab FM** is a community radio station broadcasting on 97.9 FM in Birzeit and Ramallah areas, in Palestine. It is an independent media, promoted by the civil society and the local community and lead by youth and women. The objectives of Shabab FM are the following:

- strengthen social cohesion and participatory processes in Palestine, also in order to promote conflict resolution practices by communication tools
- empower the social protagonism of women and youth in Palestinian society
- spread independent information and build networks with international media involved in human rights issues

The project is promoted by [COSPE](#), [PYU](#) and [AMISnet](#), cofinanced by European Commission.

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### End the "Health Siege" on Gaza

The Gaza Community Mental Health Program will be holding a conference in coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO) and The Palestinian International Campaign to end the siege on Gaza. It is the Fifth International Conference of the program and will be entitled "blockade and mental health barriers and bridges ..", from the 27<sup>th</sup> till the 28<sup>th</sup> of this month in Rashad Shawa Cultural Center Hall.

The aim of this conference is to discuss several issues related to the siege and its effects on mental health and human rights, in addition to assistance in understanding the negative effects of the siege on all aspects of life in Gaza Strip, with the participation of 700 people of various international solidarity organisations with the Palestinian people, politicians and human rights activists, academics interested in this issue and also journalists, along with a number of participations through a video conference from Ramallah for those who are not granted entry into Gaza Strip by Israeli administration, due to the increasing grip of this siege on Gaza.

The Palestinian international campaign to end the siege coordinate field visits of foreigners to get to know more about the reality of the siege and the suffering of the land sectors, factories and homes affected.

The opening of the conference will be an exhibition of contemporary art entitled "Multi-colored siege" which will be held on the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> until the conclusion of the conference, which will include innovation, photographs and artistic experiences & video clips, and the technical vehicles, and many forms of modern art today under the siege.

infos:

[www.end-gaza-siege.ps](http://www.end-gaza-siege.ps)

### Sport Under the Siege

The [Sport Under the Seige campaign](#) started in 2004 by a call from Italian organisations addressed to football team supporters, aiming to promote sport activities and the principles of sport in some Palestinian refugee camps. Recently the difficult situations in Gaza Strip caused the impossibility of implementing new activities planned by the campaign.

In this radio feature we present the campaign, with interviews to two Italian volunteers who took part to the last initiatives.

by [Leopoldo Calabria](#)  
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EU Project

MED/2006/124-456 COSPE

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### EU and PNA provide social allowances to 46.000 families

The European Union and the Palestinian Authority have today launched the payment of social allowances to over 46,000 vulnerable Palestinian families across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The assistance takes the form of an allowance of NIS1,000 (around €200) per household, which is being channelled through the European mechanism, PEGASE.

The 46,025 families who will receive this assistance have been identified in cooperation with the Ministries of Finance and Social Affairs, through the latter's "Social Hardship Cases" Programme. The Palestinian Minister for Social Affairs, Mahmoud Habbash, said today of the programme: "The contribution of the European Union has helped us to meet our obligations towards those who most need our support. We share a common objective of alleviating poverty." Mr. John Kjaer, the European Commission Representative in Jerusalem added: "The European Union has promised time and time again that it will not let the Palestinians down. Today's contribution is a tangible expression of that promise, which we hope will help to ease the difficulties faced by many families throughout the territory. This is particularly important during the holy month of Ramadan."

Compared to the payment made in June, an additional 5,000 families will receive the allowance; more than half of the recipient families are from Gaza strip. Beneficiary families can collect their allowance in 39 designated bank branches throughout the territory until 30 October 2008.

This is the third payment of social allowances under the EU's PEGASE mechanism, bringing the total amount contributed so far to over NIS128 million (over €24 million).

PEGASE is the main financing mechanism of the European Union, the largest donor to the Palestinians. PEGASE programmes are designed to meet priority needs as identified by the Palestinian Authority in the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan.

source:  
[Reliefweb](#)

### Is Akko burning?

Throughout its thousands of years of history, Akko has never been an Israelite town. [...]

It was a Canaanite-Phoenician town, traded with Egypt, rebelled against Assyria, confronted the Jewish Hasmoneans, was conquered by the Crusaders, served as a battle-ground for the legendary Saladin and the no less legendary Richard the Lion-Hearted, was the capital of the semi-independent Arab state of the Galilee under Daher al-Omar and withstood the siege of Napoleon. All these periods have left their traces in Akko, in the form of buildings and walls. A fascinating town, perhaps the most beautiful - and surely the most interesting - after Jerusalem. [...]

In the 1948 war, Akko was occupied by the Israeli forces, and since then it has lived under Israeli rule: 60 years out of a history of 5000 years and more. This is the background of last week's events in Akko. The Arab inhabitants consider Akko as the town of their forefathers, which was forcibly occupied by the Jews. The Jewish inhabitants consider it a Jewish town, in which the Arabs are a tolerated minority - at most.

For years the town was covered by a thin blanket of hypocrisy. Everybody praised and celebrated the wonderful co-existence there. Until the blanket was torn, and the naked truth was exposed.

I am a very secular person. I have always advocated a complete separation between state and religion, even in the days when that sounded like a crazy idea. But it has never entered my mind to drive on Yom Kippur. There is no law forbidding it, no law is necessary.

For a traditional Jew, Yom Kippur is a day like no other. Even if one does not really believe that on this day God makes the final decision about the life or death of every human being for the next year and writes it all down in a large book, one senses that one has to respect the feelings of those who do believe. I would not drive on Yom Kippur in a Jewish neighborhood, just as I would not eat in public during Ramadan in an Arab neighborhood.



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It is difficult to know what the Arab driver Tawfiq Jamal was thinking of when he entered a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in his car on Yom Kippur. It is reasonable to assume that he did not do it out of malice, as a provocation, but rather out of stupidity or carelessness.

The reaction was predictable. An angry Jewish crowd chased him into an Arab house and besieged him there. In a distant Arab neighborhood the loudspeakers of the mosques blared out that Arabs had been killed and that an Arab was in mortal danger. Excited Arab youngsters tried to reach the house of the besieged Arab family but were blocked by the police. They gave vent to their feelings by wrecking Jewish shops and cars. Jewish youths, reinforced by members of the extreme right, burned down the homes of Arab inhabitants, who became refugees in their own town. In a few minutes, 60 years of "co-existence" were wiped out - proof that in the "mixed" town there is no real co-existence, only two communities who hate each other's guts.

It is easy to understand this hatred. As in other "mixed" towns, indeed as in the whole of Israel, the Arab public is discriminated against by the state and municipal authorities. Smaller budgets, inferior education facilities, poorer housing, crowded neighborhoods.

The Arab citizens are the victims of a vicious circle. They live in crowded towns and neighborhoods that have turned into neglected ghettos. When the standard of living of the inhabitants rises, there is a desperate demand for a better environment and better housing. Young couples leave the neglected and underfunded Arab neighborhoods and move into Jewish areas, something that immediately arouses opposition and resentment. The same has happened to Afro-Americans in the USA, and before them to the Jews there and elsewhere. All the talk about equality, good neighborliness and co-existence goes up in smoke when Arab families live in a hostile Jewish environment. Reasons are always to be found, and the incursion of Tawfiq Jamal was only an especially grievous example.

Such a situation can be found in many places on earth. Religious, nationalistic, ethnic or community sensitivities can explode at any time. It took a hundred years after the emancipation of the slaves in the US until the civil rights laws were enacted, and during those years there were regular lynchings. Another 40 years passed before a black candidate could come near the White House. The police in London is notorious for its racism, citizens of Turkish origin are discriminated against in Berlin, an African can play football for the French national team but has no chance of becoming president.

In these respects, Akko is no different from the rest of the world. [...]

In this country the racism is, of course, connected with the national conflict which has been going on already for five generations. The Akko events are just another episode in the war between the two peoples of this country.

The Jewish extreme right, including the hard core of the settlers, does not hide its intention of driving out all the Arabs and turning the entire country into a purely Jewish state. Meaning: ethnic cleansing. It looks like the dream of a small minority, but public opinion research shows that this tendency is gnawing at a much wider public, even if only in a half-conscious way, hidden and denied.

In the Arab community, there are probably some who dream about the good old days, before the Jews came to this country and took it by force.

When Jews carry out a pogrom in Akko, whatever the immediate reason, it becomes a national event. The burning of Arab homes in a Jewish neighborhood at once arouses fear of ethnic cleansing. When the Arab young people storm into a Jewish neighborhood in order to save an endangered Arab brother, it immediately evokes memories of the 1929 massacre of the Jews in Hebron - which, at the time, was also a "mixed" town.

There is reasonable hope that at some future time we shall end the national conflict and reach a peaceful solution that both peoples will accept (if only because there is no alternative.) A Palestinian state will come into being side by side with Israel, and both peoples will understand that this is the best possible solution.

(The Akko events should give rise to second thoughts in the mind of anyone who believes in the "One-State solution" where Jews and Arabs would live in brotherhood and equality. Such a "solution" would turn the entire country into one big Akko.)

But peace, based on two states living side by side, will not automatically solve the problem of the Arab citizens in Israel, a state that defines itself as "Jewish". We must be ready for a long, consistent fight over the character of our state.



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The extreme rightist Avigdor Liberman has proposed that the Arab villages on the Israeli side of the Green Line should be attached to the Palestinian state, in return for the Jewish settlement blocs beyond the Green Line that would be attached to Israel. That would not affect, of course, the Arab inhabitants of Akko, Haifa, Jaffa, Nazareth and the Galilee villages. But even in the villages near the Green Line, no Arab agrees to this idea. Although Liberman proposes to turn over the entire villages to the Palestinian state together with all their lands and properties, not a single Arab voice has been raised in agreement.

Why? The million and a half Arab citizens in Israel do not like the government's policies, the flag and the national anthem, not to mention the treatment of the population in the occupied territories. But they prefer the Israeli democracy, the social progress, the National Insurance system and the social services. They are rooted in the life and mores of Israel much more deeply than they themselves recognize. They want to be citizens in this state, but on terms of equality and mutual respect.

The Jews who dream of ethnic cleansing do not understand how large a contribution the Arab community makes to Israel. Like the other inhabitants of Israel, they work here, they contribute to the GNP, they pay their taxes like everybody else. Like all of us, they have no alternative - they pay value-added tax on everything they buy and they, too, get their salaries only after income tax is deducted.

There are many questions that have to be recognized and discussed, and from which conclusions must be drawn. Is it desirable or not desirable, at this stage, for Arabs to live in Jewish neighborhoods and Jews in Arab neighborhoods? How can the Arab neighborhoods be elevated economically to the level of Jewish neighborhoods, in practice and not only in talk? Should every Jewish child learn Arabic and every Arab child learn Hebrew, as the mayor of Haifa proposed this week? Should Arab education receive the same status and the same budgets as, for example, the independent but government-funded Jewish Orthodox education system? Should autonomous Arab institutions be established? Finding solutions to these problems, or at least to some of them, is a vital part of the fight against racism - attacking its roots, and not only its symptoms.

Actually, there is no alternative: the citizens of Israel, Jews and Arabs, are "condemned" to live together, whether they like it or not. But, as the Akko events have shown again, the joint fabric is still weak. In order to change this, we must all have the courage to look the problem in the eye, to see it as it is, without hypocrisy or falsification. This is the only way we can find solutions.

**Uri Avnery**

**source: Gush-Shalom**



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