



ISM IN THE WEST BANK AND THE ASSASSINATION OF AYŞENUR EYGI

THE FINAL STRAW RADIO - SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

This week on the final straw we're featuring a conversation with Tom and Miriam of the International Solidarity Movement, a Palestinian-led network of activists standing in solidarity with Palestinians on the ground in the occupied territories. For the hour we talk about the organization, its history, what got these folks involved, the recent and tragic murder of Ayselur Eygi in Beita in the West Bank which Miriam witnessed, and how conditions have changed as the war by the Israeli settler state has expanded.

ISM: <https://palsolidarity.org/>

Not mentioned in the interview is Wafa Al Udani, who was murdered in her home by Israeli forces shortly after this interview was recorded.

From ISM's website:

ISM mourns Wafa Al Udaini, a Palestinian activist and journalist we were honored to have worked with. Israeli forces bombed her home in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, in the early hours of Monday morning, September 30, murdering Wafa, her husband Munir Atiyeh Al-Udaini, 5-year-old daughter Balsam, and 7-month-old son Tamim. She is survived by her two young sons.

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

TFSR: Hi. Can you please introduce yourselves with any names, pronouns, location, or affiliation information that could be useful for the audience?

Tom: I'm Tom, he/him. I'm part of the International Solidarity Movement and an anarchist from the UK, from Bristol. In my other life, I'm involved in prisoner independent solidarity organizing, and I was on the show a couple of years ago talking about solidarity with the uprising that happened against the police in Bristol. But I've also been volunteering with the ISM since it started back in 2002.

Miriam: And I'm Miriam, she/her, also an activist with the International Solidarity Movement, and I've been in and out of the West Bank for the last couple of years with the ISM, following the work very closely, especially the media work.

TFSR: Thanks a lot, both of you, for taking the time to have this conversation. I really appreciate it.

Miriam: Thank you for having us.

Tom: Yeah, thank you.

TFSR: First, I want to express my condolences on the loss of Ayşenur Eygi. I want to give space to hear about your experiences of Ayşenur Eygi's life, her assassination, and what impact you're seeing it have on the genocide that she was working to end. But first, I'd like to ask some more general questions about the International Solidarity Movement and your experiences in the West Bank more widely. My understanding is that you return from the West Bank volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement. Would you tell us a bit about the ISM, and its history? I had no idea that you've been with it since 2002, that's crazy, that's so cool. What role does the group try to play in defense of Palestinian rights and lives?

Tom: ISM began in 2002 and it was set up by international organizers, by Palestinians inside Palestine, by Palestinians from the diaspora outside of Palestine as well, and by some Israeli comrades. They wanted to set up a group or a platform for people to come and do work in solidarity with the Palestinian popular struggle against the Israeli occupation. The International Solidarity Movement was set up as a non-hierarchical, consensus-based group to take direct action in solidarity with the Palestinian popular struggle, using non-violent tactics with principles of anti-oppression, and importantly, a principle of Palestinian leadership.

One of the important things, I guess, about Palestinian leadership, it

doesn't mean we have Palestinian leaders. We're a group that operates non-hierarchically by consensus. But it means that the actions that we take in Palestine are called for by Palestinian communities. So we don't initiate actions. We go to support Palestinian popular committees and communities who call for international support in different ways in the struggle. When I got involved in the ISM, it was the beginning of the Second Intifada, which is the context of the founding of the International Solidarity Movement. ISM was involved in direct action in different ways: removing roadblocks that had been constructed by the occupation forces, dismantling sections of the apartheid wall, which was being constructed hundreds of kilometers long on Palestinian farmland and was stealing land from Palestinian villages. It was a massive land grab, and we were involved in dismantling sections of it and participating in demonstrations against the wall called for by Palestinian communities.

At the start of ISM, some of the actions that were taken were breaking the Israeli siege in different ways. So, for example, there was a famous action in 2002, where ISM volunteers were able to break the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where Palestinians were taking shelter and were under siege by Israeli forces. And ISM members were able to bring food to the people inside the church. There was also a famous action at the start of the movement which broke the siege on the Mukata'a, Arafat's compound in Ramallah. It was hearing about that kinds of actions, particularly the actions where people were breaking the curfew in Bethlehem to give solidarity to the people under curfew, that I decided to go as a volunteer in 2002 and then I went back repeatedly during the years of the Second Intifada.

ISM's role has been really different, depending on the needs of Palestinian communities, on what's been asked for by the communities and popular organizations that we're working with. One key role of the ISM has been to be part of the movement against the apartheid wall. In the early 2000s communities all over the West Bank took part in regular demonstrations and acts of direct action against the construction of the wall, and they called for international participation in those demonstrations. Some of those demonstrations were successful in reclaiming some of the land back for the communities. There were many, many martyrs from those communities, people who were killed during those demonstrations in the early 2000s and ISM played a part in many of those communities over the years. We also took part in a protective presence against settler violence in the city of Hebron, for example, or Al Khalil. We had a presence in Gaza up until 2013. It hasn't been possible for us to access Gaza since then. I was in Gaza just at the end of ISM's time in Gaza, I was there in 2012. To talk about some of the protective presence work that ISM has done over the years...for example, in the city of Al Khalil, of Hebron, ISM has been involved in accompanying school children to school, where they've been

under threat of settler violence, and the communities have asked for us to provide a protective presence. And in Masafer Yatta too, do you want to talk about that?

Miriam: Yeah. Masafer Yatta, maybe we can talk about it more in a bit. It's a collection of small villages and communities dispersed in this desert area. Not every village has a school, so the kids have to walk from their village to the other [village] to go to school, and the settlement outposts have been very methodically placed in areas so that they can disrupt communication and connection between villages. One example is Tawani, which is the main entrance to the area of Masafer Yatta. It has one of the biggest schools in the area and the kids from nearby villages, including Tuba, have to walk from Tuba to Tawani to get to school. This is a 15-20 minute walk. There is a settlement of Ma'on that was built on that road, and kids over the years have been attacked by violent settlers. After internal and international pressure, it was decided that the Israeli army would escort the children across the settlement. That, of course, was done reluctantly by the army. A lot of time kids are left in the summer, these are desert areas in the South of the West Bank, so temperature rises massively over summer. As a result, kids and teachers were feeling sick because of the heat, during winter they were left waiting in the rain. Sometimes the army didn't show up. So there was a request for activists to make sure that the army was doing the job that it was requested to do, which we all know they never fulfill. So the ISM has also helped with that. Making sure that the kids are safely arriving from Tuba and safely going back to their homes after school.

Tom: And I guess another aspect of the protective presence work that is worth talking about is the olive harvest. From the beginning of the history of the International Solidarity Movement, one of the big focuses has been to support Palestinian communities who are struggling to access their land during the olive harvest season. We're coming into the olive harvest season now. In the next few weeks, people are going to start to need to take in their olives. People are prevented from getting to their land by various things. The Israeli military sometimes imposes a ban on people going into their lands, and that's very likely to be the case this year. Closed military zones are set up to prevent people from accessing their land. Obviously, people are also targeted by violent settlers. If they do have a chance to get to their lands, settlers will try very hard to prevent them from harvesting their crops. That has a dual purpose. The army and the settlers want to prevent the Palestinian communities from having a sustainable livelihood from their trees. But ultimately they want to seize that land and colonize it. If they prevent the community from going there, then that gives them a legal basis sometimes to seize the land for the state.

Miriam: As Tom was saying, this is all a system of coordination. A lot of the olive

groves are in Area C of the West Bank, and lots of them are close to settlements or are in the areas that the Israeli military has declared as military areas. For all these 'hot' areas, there's a system of coordination with the Israeli authorities and the Palestinians have to ask for permits to access their land. They're normally not allowed to access their land throughout the year. But during the olive harvest, there's a system of permits that are given to farmers. Permits are ridiculous because farmers are given two days to cover, hundreds of dunums of land, very extensive lands, hundreds of trees. And of course, two days are not enough to harvest. Or during the day they're set with certain time frames, for example you need to finish at two [p.m.]. It's again this colonial system of controlling Palestinian access to the land. Last year, because harvest starts normally in the second week of October, most of the permits, if not all of them, were withdrawn after the 7th of October. So most of the farmers could not get them, and that was a massive economic loss for farmers and the Palestinian economy. This year, because of the extreme escalation in settler violence, they are expecting a very, very violent olive harvest, especially, as Tom was saying, when farmers have to go very close to settlements. I was there in 2022 for the olive harvest, and in almost all the places that we went to, we were either attacked by settlers or harassed by the army. So it was already very difficult before what happened last year. And we're sure that this year is going to be even more violent.

Tom: Just to give a brief anecdote, one of my first experiences with ISM was helping to take in olives in a village close to Tulkarem, and settlers from the nearby settlement came and fired live ammunition at Palestinian farmers. But the olive harvest, the collective taking in of olives is a massive act of solidarity by Palestinian communities, and an act of steadfastness, of not allowing the colonizers to stop people from accessing their land. So despite this kind of massive violence leveled against communities, they support each other and call for international support to take in the harvest. We've called for international volunteers this year. We've got a general call for international volunteers to come, but we're particularly asking for volunteers to come from the first week of October to help with the Palestinian olive harvest campaign in villages around the West Bank.

TFSR: I guess I'll mention it later as well, but I spoke with Mohammad Hureini of Youth of Sumud earlier this year, who was talking about some of the accompaniment of children to schools that you were mentioning, and the violence that was being enacted, not only on the children and the teachers, but also on the activists that were attempting to keep the military doing what they said that they would do. So if listeners want to hear more perspectives on that specific stuff, I suggest that they go back and listen to that episode or read the transcript.

I've seen videos on Instagram from 'I Am Palestine', and also Youth of Sumud of Israeli settlers setting fires to olive groves and orchards. Most listeners are going to be familiar with this, but can you just talk about the impunity of settlers and land grabs and the collaboration of police and military in those acts of seizing multi-generational groves that families and communities have planted and taken care of for so many years?

Miriam: It's not only the olive trees, but yeah, the olive trees are a part of it. So I remember that, for example, during the olive harvests that I participated in, lots of times we were going to fields, and the trees were cut down. They were destroyed. This summer in Masafer Yatta, there was a pogrom* in one of the villages, in Khalet Al Daba'a, where an international activist, who was not with the ISM but with another organization, was also attacked and beaten by settlers. And at the same time, they [the settlers] were setting fires to trees, to the land, to cars. They tried to set fire to houses. These, as you said, are all acts of impunity. They've been carried out for decades, and they've been going on with impunity. What normally happens is that settlers carry out their crimes, the army is alerted, they arrive after the settlers have gone or finished, and they then arrest or detain the Palestinians, the activists. While the settlers are allowed to walk free.

Tom: I think olive trees are symbolically important for the Palestinian struggle, and a symbol of the land. The olive harvest is one of the times that agriculture is particularly targeted, but all year round, all types of agriculture are targeted.

TFSR: Shepherding, right? For instance.

Miriam: Water pipes. I've witnessed that in the Jordan Valley and Masafer Yatta, settlers go and cut the water pipes. Palestinians don't have access to their water resources, because they are prevented by the Israeli regime, and they need to buy water. They very often get water in these tanks, but there is a very basic water network. Again, they cannot build in Area C. So it's impossible to build a water network to properly distribute water among different areas, and the settlers repeatedly go and cut and destroy the few pipes that Palestinians use for their family and agriculture. So this is something that we've seen this summer, and it's something that's commonly done, again, without any consequence whatsoever for the settlers.

Tom: Another thing that's done is the killing of Palestinian animals on a very large scale. What you have at the moment is a tactic of pastoral colonialism by settlers, where settlers establish small outposts on Palestinian land with a large herd of goats, for example. They graze those goats on Palestinian land with the intention of stop-

ping the Palestinian community from being able to take their goats out to graze. And that's a really big issue for Palestinian communities right now because the settlers can dominate the land, as they're able to carry weapons and use them with impunity, with the protection of the army and the police. And Palestinians, as a result of this kind of pastoral colonialism, are only able, in some cases, to take their flocks a few hundred meters away from their houses. They have to buy animal feed, for example, which is a massive economic pressure on the communities. It's one of the ways in which the settler movement is trying to displace Palestinian communities right now, with that tactic.

Miriam: Also the stealing of livestock. The ISM witnessed a few weeks ago in the Jordan Valley settlers stealing some 300 sheep from a Palestinian shepherd. These are rural communities that get their livelihood from either agriculture or livestock. So that means that their economic means are down and they are forced to leave their land because they have to find work and a way of surviving somewhere else. So this is one of the tactics of forcible displacement that the Israeli state is applying and imposing on Palestinian communities.

TFSR: You've used the phrases "Areas A, B, and C" a couple of times and "the Green Line". Can you talk a little bit about what those mean in the context of the occupied West Bank?

Tom: So the Green Line is the 1948 armistice line of the advance of the Zionist forces in 1948. And that's the line that was crossed in 1967 when the Israeli forces occupied the West Bank and Gaza and also the Sinai and the Golan Heights. Ever since that's been a boundary between the West Bank and the territories occupied in 1948 by Israel, and it hasn't been respected. It's been constantly encroached upon by the Israeli state, who are intent on colonizing the West Bank and Gaza. Areas A, B, and C.

During the Oslo Agreement of the 1990s, which was perceived as "a peace agreement", but in fact was a colonial plan by the Israeli state to set up a new system of control in the West Bank, there was a new system of control established. It was supposed to be an interim agreement that would be in place before a Palestinian state was established. 30 years later, obviously, the Palestinian State has not been established, but this system of control still exists. Area A is a de facto Palestinian-controlled area, essentially it's the Palestinian cities and the areas close to the Palestinian cities. And of course, that area is controlled to some extent by the Palestinian Authority but Israeli forces can come into Area A whenever they want to. The Palestinian Authority forces, which are supported by the US, Europe, etc, don't engage the occupation forces when they come into Area A, and they're free to

carry out violence against the Palestinians living there. Then there's Area B, which was supposed to be joint control between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority, and Area C, which was controlled by the Israeli Civil Administration. The Civil Administration is essentially part of the Israeli military. Palestinians living within Area C for the most part are unable to build any structures at all, because of the discriminatory use of building permits in Area C, which basically means that Palestinians don't receive any permits for building. Whereas Israeli settlers can build as much as they want. They might not receive a permit, but their structures usually aren't given trouble by the state, and, in fact, are supported by the state in many, many ways. Whereas if Palestinians build houses or schools, or villages, then they're at risk of having those structures demolished by the Israeli forces.

Miriam: Yeah, one thing that we didn't talk about is demolitions.

Tom: And we saw many, many demolitions over the last year, particularly in Masafer Yatta.

Miriam: Many structures in Area C are deemed illegal by the Israeli regime. There are all these demolitions across the West Bank. In Masafer Yatta there are demolitions every week. I think in July in one of the villages in Umm al-Khair, they demolished around 11 structures. Most of them were houses, and they left around 40 people without shelter. Half of them were children. The communities put up tents to replace the demolished houses. And then a few weeks ago, the Israeli army went again and they put down the tents. And we've seen this happening over and over again. In 2022 a school was demolished in another village in Isfey in the West Bank. And the army came to take down the tents that the Palestinians put up for kids to continue their education twice after that. So again, this is part of the plan of forcible displacement. Palestinians are also forced to pay for the demolitions [of the structures they built]. So many times they are told that they have to either demolish [the structures] themselves or if the army or the civil administration would intervene, that they will have to pay for the cost [of the demolition]. And the costs of demolitions are, of course, very expensive. It's a very high cost for Palestinians, not only do they lose their house, but they are also supposed to pay for that.

Tom: International companies are allowing their equipment to be used in these demolitions, companies like Caterpillar, JCB, Volvo, and they know that they could prevent their equipment from being used in the demolitions. In the case of JCB, for example, they have a sole dealership, Comasco, in Israel, and they know that Comasco is providing equipment to be used in these demolitions, which are happening daily in the West Bank. They do nothing about it, despite civil cases

being taken against them in different courts in Europe. They try to say “It’s not anything to do with us that our equipment’s being used this way.” But they could very easily stop their relationship with this Israeli dealership, Comasco, and that would stop the complicity that they have in these demolitions. And they don’t.

TFSR: You’ve been talking about a lot of examples of ongoing repression of Palestinians and ongoing solidarity actions that people have been trying to take in the last 12 months. Obviously, much of the world’s attention has been focused on the destruction, displacement, and murder of more than 41,000 people (by the lower and official estimates that the US is using at least) by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip. There’s been an increasing acknowledgment of the impunity and violence of Israeli settler pogroms and Israeli official complicity in the West Bank. I mentioned the chat that I had with Mohammad Hureini some months ago, talking about some similar experiences that you’re talking about. Can you share with us some of your understandings of how conditions stand for Palestinians in the West Bank currently, and how that has changed as the war in Gaza has escalated?

Tom: We were going to mention a few examples of things that have happened over the last year, and of situations or places that ISM has been over the last year as well. Just before October 7th last year, I was in a village called Wadi al-Siq. We as the ISM had been asked to come and take part in a protective presence against violence from a settler outpost, which had been set up in the style of a pastoral colonial outpost that we mentioned to you before. Palestinians from all over the West Bank were coming to take part in that protective presence in Wadi al-Siq. That’s something which has repeated itself again and again in different villages. Palestinians from different places have come to give solidarity to villages that are experiencing violence and pressure from settlers. People would carry out a night watch every night in the village. They’d stay up all night. They’d walk around with torches, and flashlights, trying to have at least an early warning, if an attack was to come from the nearby outpost. There were attacks regularly in the daytime and at night. There was, for example, an incident where settlers came to the local school. The local school was a persistent target for the settlers from the outpost. On one day, a few days before October 7th, I spoke to teachers from the school who said that settlers had come and pointed their guns through the window at the children who were studying, and they’d also attacked the school bus. They’d stolen solar panels and other equipment from the school.

Wadi al-Siq was kind of the next target for the settler movement, after the displacement of several other villages in the area in the months prior. I think it’s

worth remembering the violence that people are facing didn't suddenly start after October 7th. It was something that people had been facing since 1948 and before, but which had been escalating over the months and years before October 7th. Several villages have been forcibly displaced. The entire population of those villages has been forced out. As we stand now, 18 villages in the West Bank have been completely forcibly displaced since October 7th, along with seven communities that have been partially displaced. Wadi al-Siq, unfortunately, turned out to be one of those communities which were forced out. So after October 7th, the Palestinians who'd been taking part in the collective protective presence in Wadi al-Siq became a target for the settlers. The settlers were emboldened by the statements of the fascist government, who made persistent death threats against the community and the Palestinians taking part in the collective protective presence. Some of them were kidnapped by the settlers, raped, beaten, had cigarettes put out on them, were tortured, and that was in the hours before the forcible displacement of the village at gunpoint, where the residents of the village were forced to leave their lands, to leave their vehicles and leave on foot, take refuge in a nearby town. In the days and weeks after October 7th, there was a massive escalation of violence that was faced by Palestinian communities, and in Masafer Yatta people also faced a massive escalation of violence.

Miriam: Now everyone is talking about settlers and settler violence as if this was a new thing. No, this has been a plan that the Israeli colonial regime has had since its formation, and then since 1967. But the situation has escalated massively since October 7th. Both I and Tom have been in Masafer Yatta for a while before October 7th, and the situation now is just insane. We've been running emergency after emergency in the villages around Masafer Yatta because settlers are harassing and invading Palestinian lands, and the army is coming over and arresting [Palestinians]. It's worth underlining that many of these violent settlers have been drafted into the army since October 7th. They've been armed by Ben-Gvir. They already were [armed before], but now they've been heavily armed. And they've been drafted into the army, so they now go around harassing people, and they're the same powers as the army. The Palestinians know them. We know them, sadly we got to know them as well. And they just go around acting with impunity. Plus there is the civilian settler militia, or whatever they are, often armed. They go into Palestinian lands and graze their sheep, attack people. There are night raids.

A lot of land has been taken over. Outposts have grown dramatically along Masafer Yatta. We've seen small outposts growing and forming around all villages. Tom will tell you more about Um Dorit in a second. But there is an exemplary case, which is not in Masafer Yatta, but it's in a southern area of the West Bank, not far from Masafer Yatta, very close to the Green Line. There's a village of Zanuta,

where, at the end of October, settlers went in and threatened the residents that they needed to either leave within 24 hours, or they would kill everyone. The residents left because it was days, weeks, and months of escalating settler violent harassment. And then after [the community left] the settlers destroyed all the houses. In August there was an Israeli court case which declared that now the Palestinian inhabitants of Zanuta can return to their homes. Imagine that you needed a colonial court to tell you that you could return to your land. So they allow them to go back. The houses are completely destroyed. This village is in Area C. In Area C it's almost impossible to build, because you need to request a permit from the Israeli authorities to build, and they never allow Palestinians to build. So they've been living in destroyed houses.

Again, we've been there quite a lot with other activists, with daily settlers harassment and attacks on the communities. Some of the settlers that live around there have even been sanctioned by the UK and the US, I think one of them is Yinon Levi and Friedman. The latest development is that after being allowed to return by a court case, under the protection of the Israeli army, the Civil Administration, which is the body of the Israeli authority that basically controls the civil part in Area C, has given the citizens of Zanuta an ultimatum. They call it an "offer" to move somewhere else within 30 days, otherwise they [the Civil Administration] would destroy whatever is left of the Palestinian houses. This is just ridiculous. It's a way for them to pretend in front of the international community that they're giving Palestinians an option. This is not really an option, because the area where the Palestinians have been asked to move to, is very close to area B. So that would only continue the plan of ghettoization of Palestinians living in areas A and B. This is the final plan of the Israeli regime. To push Palestinians into this island that is now Area A/B, so that they can fully control them and to expel them completely from Area C. So that's one thing.

The second thing is that this area is surrounded by outposts where extremely violent settlers live. That puts the cities and the residents in danger of escalating attacks by settlers. They are also going to be moved on to what is called "state land", so land owned by Israel. But it is not actually state land. They call it "state land" just because they don't recognize that it's actually Palestinian private land. So they're gonna effectively settle on someone else's land. This is another colonial policy that's unacceptable for Palestinians, and it's just a show to pretend in front of the international community that they [the Israeli government] are offering or doing something. The situation is unbearable in the West, in Masafer Yatta, and in the Jordan Valley. Those are all very strategic areas because Masafer Yatta is very close to the Green Line. It's been declared a military area since the 1980s, and the Israeli army and the Israeli government have been trying to take over the area for decades. Those are all areas within the borders of what the Israeli colonial project is

trying to take over. Plus all those areas are part of the West Bank. I think we might talk a bit more about demonstrations later, and demonstrations in the West Bank have always been heavily repressed by the Israeli army. But it's now the norm that the soldiers are using live ammunition to disperse the crowd. Before it was tear gas, sound bombs, and rubber bullets, which have killed people by the way. Now it's just tear gas and live ammunition, straight away. It's become the norm. Again, this is part of the escalating violence that the Army has been using since October 7th.

Tom: I just want to throw in the anecdote about who the settlers are. We're talking about how the settlers have been armed increasingly since October 7th and drafted into the reserve army. And I just wanted to mention one individual, which is Jonathan Gabbai, who lives in the settlement of Ma'on in Masafer Yatta. He's the security coordinator for that settlement. If you check him out on social media, you can find lots of videos that he's made about his life in Ma'on. He is one of the people who has been given policing powers by the Israeli state. He's a civilian, but he can put on a uniform. He can drive around doing patrols, detaining Palestinians, demanding people's IDs, etc, carrying weapons. He is a recent colonist, who came from Texas in the past few years, came to Ma'on and now is spending his days as a violent militia member, harassing the Palestinian community. So this is the kind of fascism that is developing.

TFSR: Rav Jonathan Gabbai has a kosher meat company. Is that him?

Tom: Probably. He is in the dairy business in Ma'on. You can check out videos that he's made for Israeli TV, where he's talking about how the area of Masafer Yatta has been overrun by Arabs. This is Palestinian land. It's a Palestinian area. He's come from Texas, and he's going on TV talking about the area being overrun by Arabs. Sorry to use that kind of racist colonial language on the show, but it is the norm to hear that kind of thing by settlers, by the army, and in the Israeli media day to day.

TFSR: I'm sure he says much worse things we won't repeat right now. [laughs]

What Miriam was describing in terms of claiming Israeli state land, shifting communities into those spaces, and putting them under military occupations, is just so reminiscent to me of the reservation system in the US, or the reserve system in Canada, or the Bantustan idea, projects in South Africa, settler colonialism. It's so insane, just how [Israel] borrows from those different contexts. So at the end of August of this year, the Israeli military began incursions into the northern West Bank cities of Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, and Tubas. An operation which they've dubbed "sum-

mer camps”, while Palestinians have dubbed it “horror of the camps”. It’s involved hundreds of Israeli soldiers, and it’s the largest of this type of operation that this area has seen as a military operation since the Second Intifada and 2002, as I’ve read at least. While this operation may have ended under that name, there’s an ongoing intimidation and displacement that hasn’t abated. I wonder if you could talk a bit about those military incursions. What do they look like for the civilian population, how do they justify it, and if any of this is still going at that same rate, or if that was a spike in military activity among other spikes?

Miriam: I think it was a spike. There are incursions in Jenin and Tulkarem and they have increased since October 7th because in the time that I was there the camps have been invaded regularly, a few times per month.

Tom: But it’s worth saying that even before October 7th, there have been escalating attacks on Jenin and Tulkarem and they have been using more and more heavy equipment. Before October 7th, I think in July 2023, you saw the use of Apache helicopters in Jenin. And now you’re seeing the use of drones as well as helicopters and strikes by aircraft in those cities. So the use of equipment has rapidly escalated in those days.

Miriam: These are daily raids. This morning a Palestinian was martyred by the Israeli forces near Tulkarem. This is a plan of displacing, yet again, people who live in refugee camps, that were displaced in 1948 and in 1967 when the State of Israel was created, and then after the occupation of the West Bank. It’s under the same excuse of preemptive acts against armed resistance. It’s the same excuse that we’ve seen used in Gaza to completely destroy the strip, and it’s targeting everyone at the same level. I know that they’ve destroyed most of the infrastructure, for example in Jenin refugee camps. Even before this operation, I passed by Tulkarem, and some houses were completely destroyed, the main road was completely destroyed. This is all to make Palestinian lives unbearable and to force people to leave.

Tom: I also visited Tulkarem, I think in June, and I saw displays for the martyrs from the camp. It was something like 80 young people at that time that had been killed since October 7th from Tulkarem and Nur Shams refugee camp. The level of loss of the young people, not just - but especially young people, I think is really hard to express. ISM has contacts and Palestinian members who are living in those areas and who are telling us what they’re living through day to day. The military operation recently expanded to Tubas, which is another Palestinian city in the North. I think the use of airstrikes against people in Tubas is another escalation.

Miriam: The Israeli regime is trying to destroy any type of resistance to their colonialism. Whether it's armed resistance or non-violent resistance, it doesn't really matter for them. They just want people to be subjugated to the rules and the colonial regime.

TFSR: That said, even international law, which maybe isn't a thing that we should be relying on so much and expecting a response from, declares that a suppressed and occupied people has a right to resist by whatever means. Not to say that there's any position that ISM needs to take on that or you as ISM volunteers, but we need to recognize that it's a right to resist for survival and a dignified life.

So obviously solidarity can look a lot of different ways. After months of international pressure, including demonstrations against Elbit Systems and other weapons producers, the UK Foreign Secretary, David Lammy has announced a halt to some of the arms shipments to Israel, in recognition of the possibility of them being applied in war crimes against Palestinians. Alongside this, student movements in the US are resuming against the occupation and the war. People across the UK and other territories of states that are complicit in the arming and training of the Israeli forces are continuing to disrupt investors, ocean traffic, and otherwise sabotage the war profiteers. There have also been a few public self-immolations inside the US, in despair of the war, that have meant to shift policy and affect the wider population. I wonder if you could talk a bit about your experience of the efficacy of this wide-ranging list. I just laundry-listed a bunch of different kinds of ways that people show solidarity or try to take action to affect the situation from abroad. But I wonder if you could talk about your experience of the efficacy of these actions to change foreign policy towards Israel, and if you've seen any impact in Israeli settlers or the military or among the people that are suffering the brunt of the occupation?

Tom: First of all, I think it's really important to say that ISM is not saying that the only way that you can be effectively in solidarity with the people of Palestine is from the ground. I remember the first training I did with ISM, the Palestinian trainers said to me that 70% of the work that you might do in solidarity with Palestine is outside, and the rest of it might be here with with us or with other groups. But the majority of the work is building solidarity from the outside and taking action outside. I think the actions that people have taken over the last year, since October 7th, have been amazing acts of solidarity with the people of Palestine.

When I traveled to Palestine earlier this year it was at the height of the university encampments that were taking place, inspired by people in the US. Peo-

ple in the UK were really inspired to reinvigorate their struggle because of seeing the strength of those encampments in the US, and the struggle that people had against the cops, who were coming onto the encampments, etc. And in Palestine, I remember speaking to comrades, and everybody would mention the university encampments. Not just comrades, but people on the street, people I'd be buying a cup of tea from, would mention the US university encampments.

People in Palestine are watching what's happening. They're watching what the world is doing. What people are doing outside might feel difficult and futile sometimes, because when you're outside, you're far away from the struggle in Palestine, you're not necessarily seeing the results of what you're doing. But it's massively important that all of these things have been done in the context of this unfolding genocide. We were talking about the actions against the arms trade. Just to talk about what's been happening in the UK. People have been relentlessly taking action against Elbit Systems in the UK, as you mentioned, have been smashing up Elbit factories up and down the UK. Two of Elbit's premises in the UK have been forced to close down as a result of those actions. Just a couple of days ago, there was a jury here in the UK, who refused to return a verdict, even though the judge took away the defense, you know, said "You can't make this defense in court". The defendants were able to sack their lawyers and to make statements in court in front of the jury, and the jury refused to return a verdict of guilty against them so there's going to be a retrial, but many people have been convicted. There are at least 19 people in prison as a result of those actions, and it's massively important to be in solidarity with them, to write to them, to do whatever we can to support them.

You mentioned David Lammy. So David Lammy, the new Labor Foreign Secretary, has canceled some export licenses to Israel on the basis that those weapons will be used in war crimes against the people of Gaza. It's actually only 10% of the UK's export licenses to Gaza. It's 30 or 28 out of 350 export licenses. And crucially, he didn't cancel the licenses for the F-35. F-35 is a fighter jet that is being manufactured internationally by a coalition of international arms companies. And he said, "It's too complicated to cancel the licenses for this jet because it's international, it will disrupt the supply of F-35 worldwide." So we're just going to carry on supplying weapons to the Israeli state, which it is using for genocide. And it is confirmed that an F-35 was used in the bombing of al-Mawasi in Gaza, which killed 90 people just recently. So that's the result of states refusing to stop arming the genocide. And the US government, crucially, is refusing to end its role in the arming of the genocide. But also European governments are just taking very tokenistic steps in what they're doing.

So you know, the answer to all of this isn't going to come from states. It's going to come from people taking direct action in support of the Palestinian people and against the genocide. ISM stands in solidarity with the global movement for

Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, and with the global movement of people, doing whatever they can in their workplaces, and in their communities that organized against Israeli apartheid. We need to keep on doing whatever we can, wherever we can, because what's unfolding is the biggest act of violence in my lifetime*, globally. And if people don't force states to end their complicity, then they won't, and the genocide will continue. And there's every sign that it's not going to stop, and it will escalate if something doesn't happen to stop it.

Miriam: On state complicity, there have been all these reports, well into the genocide, that this state might be held accountable, might be complicit, if we find out that there have been war crimes. I mean, this is all nonsense. Our state has been complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine for decades. This is the last extreme expression of what this colonial regime is now doing in Palestine. But it's [been] going on for decades, and we've supported this for decades. Some people were saying that this is just a small gesture to show the international community that the state cares and is doing something. But it's nowhere near enough, not for now and not for what has been happening since 1948 to the Palestinian people.

Tom: You were asking about whether we can see any difference on the ground with the steps being taken by states. I think that the sanctions being placed on settlers by the US, the UK, and other states do have the potential to make settlers think twice before they carry out acts of violence. Because they want to go on their holidays to Europe or other places, they don't want to have travel restrictions, etc.

TFSR: Or they have dual citizenship in the US and want to go back and forth and not have to face sanctions when they return to the US. Because a lot of settlers are American citizens also, right? Sorry to cut you.

Tom: Many people have dual citizenship in Europe as well. But think how ridiculous that is that the US, UK, and other countries are placing sanctions on the settlers. Absolutely there has to be action taken to stop the violence by the settlers, but taking action against the settlers while arming the genocide, while enabling the killing of more than 40,000 people... Sanctioning the settler movement, which is just one arm of Israel's colonialism.

Miriam: The settlers are culpable of all the crimes that they have committed over decades. But they're now being used as the scapegoats when they're moved there,

* editors note: *The Rawandan Genocide in the mid-1994 measured more than 500,000 murders of Tutsi people over 100 days*

empowered, and supported by the whole colonial regime. So it's just meaningless to only sanction and go after settlers. It's all the structure that's behind them, that's rotten.

TFSR: Getting back to the activities of ISM. Tom, you mentioned that you've been involved in ISM since 2002 and during the Second Intifada. I wonder if you wouldn't mind sharing some of the reasons that you got involved in the project or the movement and also started building these relationships? Because it's not just about going off and doing activism. You're building relationships. You're investing yourself and your energy and strengthening ties, despite these borders, with communities, with the land base, with individuals who are there.

Tom: Before the Second Intifada, I had a friend who had connections to the region, and that led me to educate myself about what was going on and feel a connection to what was happening. And when the Second Intifada started, I became involved in a Palestine solidarity group that was involved in the boycott movement, the fledgling boycott movement. You know, the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement started in 2005 but there have been calls for boycotts for decades before that. I went to an info night about ISM, about what ISM was doing in Bethlehem, about people going out, taking direct action to break the curfews, and bringing people food and medicine during the curfew. We organized a delegation from my group to join ISM, because it seemed like a way, number one, to directly take part in supporting Palestinian popular resistance on the ground. But also to deepen relationships with Palestinian communities, which seemed really important for the solidarity work we were doing in the UK.

I think that going as a volunteer with ISM was really integral to the development of different solidarity projects that I was later involved in in the UK. Having friends and comrades in the West Bank and Gaza and in Palestine generally, really helped to direct our organizing in the UK and to feel that we could struggle jointly against the occupation with Palestinian communities. Also, of course, struggling with Palestinians in the diaspora in the UK as well. There are many, many Palestinians living in the UK who can't go to Palestine, and who are struggling all the time against the occupation and for a free Palestine. I think that's why I kept on going back, to keep on deepening relationships with Palestinians, to have that connection with Palestine informing the organizing that we did in the UK. I became quite heavily involved in the BDS movement in the years after 2005 and I think having that connection with Palestinians inside Palestine really helped to inform some of the campaigns and actions that we took.

Miriam: I come from a bit of a less activist background than Tom, but I followed campaigns in the UK in support of the Palestinian struggle for many years, and then at some point, I just decided that I wanted to go. This was a few years back. I read more about the ISM and I remember that I particularly liked the fact that it was Palestinian-led and consensus-based. There are lots of NGOs, and other organizations that work on the ground. They've got their own agenda and there's all this kind of white colonialism on how things should be done on the ground. I went to one of the trainings, and then I didn't get to go because COVID-19 happened, so I joined afterward. It's been a big learning curve for me. I've been involved with the movement since I went. As you said, this is not an isolated experience, that you just go and then come back and forget about. The relationships that you build on the ground and what you experience, especially for me, coming from a white privileged background, it's very impactful. I'm very grateful that I joined the movement and got involved with this activism and activities, and it's something that I'm definitely determined to carry on.

Tom: You mentioned learning from experiences in Palestine. I think that's really an important thing about internationalism, right? As internationalists, we can learn from each other's struggles. And I think from the Palestinian struggle I and a lot of people learned experientially about people's solidarity with each other. About how in the worst possible situations people support each other. People don't bow down to the colonizer. People don't give up their land. There's an important word that Palestinians often use, which is "sumud" or "steadfastness", which means not giving an inch to the occupier, despite all of the violence and pressure leveled against you. I think that the spirit of resistance that you can feel from Palestinian communities, despite the intense violence leveled against them, had a huge effect on me. It made me believe in humanity and solidarity in a way that maybe I hadn't experienced quite in the same way before. And it's always striking to see that manifestation of solidarity that exists in the anti-colonial struggle.

TFSR: One way that people take action is to put their lives on the line, to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine. The world recently lost your fellow ISM activist Ayşenur Eygi, stolen by a sniper's bullet after a demonstration in Beita in the West Bank. I wonder if you could talk about her, her life, and her martyrdom.

Tom: I didn't meet Ayşenur, but Ayşenur came to volunteer with ISM in the West Bank. Before that, she was at the University of Washington. She was involved in the university encampment there and became deeper and deeper involved in organizing in support of the Palestinian struggle. Sadly, ISM only had a few days

to get to know her once she arrived in Palestine.

Miriam: I met Ayşenur only two days before she was killed because she joined the training on the ground that we do for new volunteers. The Friday demonstration that she joined was her very first action on the ground in Palestine, and it was the first action that we did together. So it was a bit of chit-chatting with the Palestinians before the demonstration started, and... Yeah and we told this story many times to journalists as it's right to do because we want the truth to be out there. We know that the truth has been spun and we want justice for Ayşenur but it is of course difficult to speak about what happened that day.

That day, we traveled to Beita, which is South of Nablus, as I've done many other Fridays because the ISM had joined these demonstrations in the past. This year since July the residents of Beita have been struggling and resisting against what's now the settlement of Eviatar, which was built on Palestinian land over a decade ago. There have been problems on the biggest demonstrations in the West Bank throughout the years, and there have been thousands of people injured. Since 2021, seventeen Palestinians have been martyred on those mountains during the demonstrations. A lot of them were children. At the end of June, Eviatar was one of the five settlements that the Israeli government "legalized". So from an outpost, it became a settlement.

Since July, the demonstrations in Beita have restarted. It's worth noting that the Friday demonstrations, which normally the Palestinians are doing against the confiscation and colonization of their lands, had almost stopped since October 7th because of the increased settler and army violence. Beita and other places in the West Bank have been among the few villages that have recently restarted the Friday demonstrations. A big part of these demonstrations is Palestinians praying on their land as a way of resistance against one of the most powerful armies in the world. They are very often prevented from praying. On other Fridays that we went to, I saw the army throwing tear gas and stun grenades toward people who were just setting down the carpets to pray. There is again the excessive use of force. This Friday started as other Fridays. The Palestinians did manage to pray in a garden on a hill in front of the settlement of Eviatar. This was a noon prayer, and after prayers, we left. When we arrived, we already saw the army that was stationed outside the garden. This is a way of intimidating people, of pressuring them to leave. But you know, the Palestinians are steadfast, they prayed, and then we left. Again there was the army in the street, and there were some confrontations with the Palestinians. And the army immediately used a lot of tear gas to send people away. And soon after that, they started using live ammunition. People retreated, because, as I said, there's been lots of people that have been killed on those hills, and we retreated as well.

Then when Ayşenur was killed, I was standing with other people a bit fur-

ther up, and we were close to a road. We had the army in front of us. There were some soldiers on the street on a hill. And then there was also a soldier placed on the rooftop of a Palestinian home. They were very far, over 200 meters away from us. They were above us. We were very clearly visible to them. They just shot to kill her, because that was a precise shot to her head, in a moment where next to us there was nothing else happening. It came to me as a surprise. Again, I've been to quite a few of these demonstrations, and there were others when I thought that someone had been seriously injured, if not killed. We know the risk, and we know that the army can escalate things as they will, and for no reason. It was really a moment when everything was quiet and they just decided to kill someone. That's what happened. I was in the ambulance taking her to the hospital, but there was nothing to be done. She was just bleeding to death. Again, these are deliberate actions of the army that they keep carrying out because they are acting with impunity. There have been thousands of Palestinians killed. There have been international activists killed with no consequences whatsoever. So it's not just the army and the Israeli state that are guilty, but it's all the governments in Europe, the US, and Canada. They have supported this for years, for decades, with impunity.

TFSR: I think in the Al Jazeera interview, or it might have been in coverage on Democracy Now, there was a mention of Ayşenur joining people in prayer. And I'm not sure how many participants in ISM or other people, that are going there alongside of the residents of these communities, are observant Muslims. But I wonder, if between having darker skin and being Turkish, I mean, obviously Turks and Arabs are different people, but if they sort of were like, "We can take this potshot because this is probably a Palestinian that we're firing at right now." I mean, that's totally off the top of my head.

Miriam: I saw Ayşenur praying. We've got Muslim members who join the ISM.

Tom: Including hijabi Muslims who came to the West Bank last year.

Miriam: But I saw her praying, and she was on the side. She was not with the main group of men that were praying, she was just sitting discreetly on the side praying. So I don't think that's connected to that. I think just someone decided that they wanted to kill someone that day...

Tom: One reason for that could be because of a general atmosphere of encouragement of violence, by the state itself, by Israeli politicians, by the settler movement. In 2003 Tom Hurndall was killed by an Israeli sniper on a street while accompany-

ing Palestinian school students in the city of Rafah in Gaza. I think historically and now, the level of violence that is encouraged in the Gaza Strip is a step above what's the norm in the West Bank. But in the last month, you have Israeli politicians like Ben-Gvir, who have said "We should treat the West Bank like Gaza." That was the last few weeks when it was said, I think just at the end of August, before the operation that you mentioned. So that's going to be in the mind of the soldiers that were on duty at that demonstration. So whether it's an order from on high for the soldiers to carry out that murder, or whether it's an individual soldier who's just been encouraged by the egging on of the state, which is encouraging violence, we don't know that. But it was clearly a deliberate murder.

Miriam: Two separate shots were fired. I've been other times [on the demonstrations where] they were shooting multiple times towards the crowd, even at times when we were just running away from them. So we were retreating, clearly not opposing them and not being any threat, despite what they keep saying. But these were just too clear shots, and at least one of them was a shot to kill.

TF SR: Thanks for going through that. I appreciate it.

I was in college in the US during the Second Intifada, and remember the shock waves people felt with the murder of Rachel Corrie, who was run over by a Caterpillar vehicle operated by the IDF while helping to defend a Palestinian home. And as you mentioned, Tom Hurndall was killed that same year by an IDF sniper. It's obviously important for people getting involved in the ISM to understand the stakes that a possible outcome of being in solidarity and standing witness with people enduring occupation means that you might come to harm or even be killed. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you as activists prepare for this possibility?

Tom: We carry out training for the volunteers, and one of the key parts of that is impressing on volunteers the danger that ISM work entails. Trying to make sure that everybody understands the complete unpredictability of the situation and the fact that ISM work does carry a risk of severe injury or death. I think that's one reason that we think our principle of consensus is very important to us because we don't want anybody to put themselves in a dangerous situation because of decisions that have been made by other people. We want people to have complete agency over their own actions, and to be able to make decisions on a level playing field about what work they do in ISM. We try very hard to support volunteers when they return from Palestine. I've returned many times over the years, and it can be a really hard experience returning from being in these kinds of situations. I think it's super important to support each other when we have been through those situ-

ations, maybe when we lost comrades or when we've experienced acts of violence. I think it's super important to make sure we're standing with people after they come back as well.

Miriam: As Tom was saying, we try to have everyone starting from the same ground, understanding the risk and the work that they're going to do. Demonstrations are probably the most violent event that we witness and participate in, because of the excessive force that's used. But really on a daily basis, you never know when situations can escalate. Settlers are very often armed, so you never know when the situation can escalate with them, with the army, with reservists now. So people are prepared for that. Of course, I think mentally it is very hard to prepare for the loss of a comrade. And you know, we do have the privilege as people carrying international passports, but we do suffer in a minor, minor way the oppression and violence the Palestinians have also been going through for decades.

Tom: Very often ISM volunteers are exposed to violent and scary situations, but we see the value of the work that ISM is doing and has done over the years. And I think that's why volunteers keep on coming, despite the threat of violence. Because they don't want Palestinian people to have to stand against violence alone when they're calling for international support. And you know, it's an important way that people can stand in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.

TFSR: Talking about privilege and the ability to come and the ability to leave in a lot of cases. While putting yourselves on the line to be there in solidarity, there's a privilege that's been displayed. In the international media's coverage of the murder of Ayşenur, they are saying that this person was murdered in this terrible situation, and the media is asking the US government to respond to it. I think that it's important that people talk about her being killed and the dangerous position that she was put in.

Do you think that the way that the coverage has happened in the media, though, is ignoring the fact that her killing is a wrong thing, but also the fact that she was standing in solidarity with a bunch of other people who are always in danger of being killed in a similar way and targeted? Has the coverage of her murder or martyrdom been making an exception of her, as if this was the thing that should not have happened, but the situation is normal otherwise, or has the media been covering that in a good way?

Miriam: There's been, I think, a range of reactions. In all the interviews that we've been doing, we've tried to put this into a context of colonial violence and violence

against the Palestinians. And some of the reports that I've seen from bigger media outlets have reported that, some of them have ignored it. So I think it's been mixed.

Tom: But I think the reality is that there's a massive hierarchy in the way people's lives are considered, by the media, by states, globally. On the day Ayşenur died, a Palestinian comrade called me up, and we spoke about Ayşenur's death. He spoke about the fact that four people had been killed from his community the previous day, and those people weren't personalized or humanized in the same way as Ayşenur had been. And the 90 people who died in Al-Mawasi last week, who've been forced to flee from their homes, probably multiple times, and have died in the bombing of a camp for displaced people with those jets that David Lammy thought that the UK would just continue supplying components for. How many of those people are personalized? How many of those people do we know some of their life story? It's a difficult thing to think about, because, of course, Ayşenur was an internationalist, she died as part of a struggle that she'd come to join from the US, and there should be outrage over her murder. But the thing is that the level of outrage over the killings of different categories of people in this genocide, is the problem that we're facing, isn't it? The fact that people are treated completely differently by this colonial system, but also by the global system generally.

TFSR: If people want to learn more about the ISM and possibly get involved in the work, how can they go about it? What resources are there? How do they get involved?

Miriam: We've got a website palsolidarity.org that people can check, and there is quite a lot of information on how to join us, what we expect on the ground, and costs, so they can check the "About" page and "How to join". And of course, we do publish reports and updates from the ground. We've got social media: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, so they can also go on our website for more day-to-day updates of what we witness and the violence that is carried out against the Palestinians on a daily base. If people are interested, they can email us on the [ismtraining\[at\]riseup.net](mailto:ismtraining[at]riseup.net) email to get started, to join the movement.

Tom: We're asking volunteers for a minimum of two weeks, excluding travel and training. So once you've had your training, we ask for a minimum of two weeks after that. If people email us, we can start to have a conversation about coming to join us in Palestine, and about getting people started in the training process. So yeah, for people coming from Turtle Island, particularly, there is some financial support if they need it. And there's also some support in organizing community fundraising to help to cover travel costs. So if financial considerations are an obstacle, then

please do talk to us about it and we'll try to help as much as we can.

TFSR: Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you wanted to mention or talk about? I know we've been talking for a bit now.

Tom: I was thinking maybe a day in the life of a volunteer. Because I'm not sure if people listening to the interview will know what it's like volunteering with ISM on a day-to-day basis. So maybe we could do that.

TFSR: I'd be curious about that. If you want to just launch into it.

Tom: The two areas that ISM is working in at the moment are the Jordan Valley and the Masafer Yatta, which we talked about quite extensively, but to talk about the actual work that volunteers are doing. So in Masafer Yatta, people are staying in the region and answering calls from different communities who have asked for protective presence. For example, one community has faced Molotov attacks on houses close to the settlement, and so has asked for volunteers to stay with families who are most at risk. Another community, Um Dorit, has been facing intensive attacks since October 7th. The community members were supposed to leave after October 7th, when they came back, their houses had been ransacked and destroyed. And since coming back, they've had repeated attacks by settlers during the night and attacks on crops, on the house itself. There's the theft of animals and pouring of petrol down the well, the burning of vehicles, things like that.

ISM is maintaining a 24/7 presence there and has been doing so for some months because of the level of pressure on this community, and because of the construction of a new outpost, The nearest structure is under 100 meters away from where the community lives. We're also responding to many requests from shepherds in the area to accompany them when they go out shepherding. As we heard, Palestinians have been forced off their land in many, many different ways since October 7th and the act of going onto the land and taking the animals onto the land is an act of steadfast resistance against the occupation. And people who do go out shepherding are regularly attacked and face different types of violence by armed settlers. We try to accompany people as much as we can, and we work with a range of different international and Israeli comrades who do that. Along with accompanying shepherds, we are providing a protective presence to families and communities who've requested it and who are under threat of settler violence. And we're doing a similar thing in the Jordan Valley. I don't know if you'd like to talk about that, Miriam, what's going on in the Jordan Valley right now?

Miriam: Similarly, it's accompanying shepherds out in the land. But now it's most-

ly staying with communities, some of them have been forced out and are trying to return to their land. Just being present with communities overnight, they are under the threat of attack by settlers or raid by the army. I think that's mainly what we're doing.

Tom: Also, we've been in a community called Ras Al-Auja, working with different groups. That particular community is coming under attack by two new settler outposts that have been established recently, one of them in the last months. They're an example of a community that is not able to access their land in a way that they were able to before, because of the threat of settler violence. There's also a Palestinian spring next to the community, where the two settler outposts are trying to harass Palestinians, to stop them from being able to access it. So settlers are coming in at night and cutting water pipes. They're also harassing Palestinians who are taking water from the spring. They're harassing Palestinian day trippers who are swimming in the spring. It's a place that people go to, to have fun. They take their kids there to swim. And settlers are trying to prevent Palestinians from being able to access that place by having the presence of armed settlers at the spring and by harassing and assaulting Palestinians who try to access it. So again, we try to have a presence in that area.

I guess with all of these situations, we hope that our presence will be a deterrent and will lead to there being less violence. It's not always the case, but sometimes it is. And you know, the communities are our guide to whether we have a presence in the area. Sometimes it does make a difference, having international volunteers in the area. It does change the situation. Change the level of settler violence. Settlers are worried about their acts of violence being documented, and being seen. They don't want to have travel restrictions. Are sometimes worried.

Miriam: Some of them are, yeah. (laughs)

Tom: And sometimes not, sometimes we're the targets at the moment, for the settlers.

Miriam: I think it's also hard on the other side to know what the lack of our presence would be because we don't know what would happen then. I think what is important is that this is an act of standing in solidarity with these communities so that they know that there's still an eye from the international communities, and they're not just abandoned with those crazy militias. If they keep wanting activists, for us it means that our presence there is hopefully doing something.

TFSR: If you are the target of the violence [from the settlers], specifically

because they don't want you there, that really says something about the insecurities that they're responding from, right? Why would it matter [for them] that somebody else is there?

Tom: I think documentation is super important, and sometimes the documentation that ISM has managed to get on settler or army violence has had an impact in different ways. For example, ISM was able to record a settler attack on a Palestinian comrade some years ago, and the video of the attack was of big importance in the court case. The Palestinian comrade was arrested and charged with attempted murder of the settlers who attacked him, and the videotape of what had happened, that was taken by an ISM activist, was one of the main reasons he got out of prison.

TFSR: I do want to say thank you, both of you, for taking the time to have this chat, I know you've been doing a lot of interviews recently, so I really appreciate your taking the time to talk to me and the audience about this stuff and the work that you do.

Tom: We appreciate it too.

Miriam: Yeah, thank you. It's very important and good to talk to friendly voices as well.

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