

Sumud: Freedom Camp

An open letter from Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

October 11, 2017

Sumud Camp

On May 19th, 2017, 300 activists: Palestinians, Israelis, and a group of internationals (mostly young Jewish Americans), set up the Sumud: Freedom Camp on land belonging to the Palestinian village of Sarura in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The coalition behind Sumud: Freedom Camp now consists of four groups: The Holy Land Trust (Palestinians), Combatants for Peace (a joint initiative of Israeli and Palestinian former fighters), The Center for Jewish Nonviolence (mainly young Jewish Americans), and All That's Left: Anti-Occupation Collective (mainly Jewish Israelis). The coalition is calling for the "return of Sarura Village to the homes from which they were forced out, an end to the systematic displacement of Palestinians, and a future of freedom, dignity, and equality for all."¹ The camp has successfully returned families to their homes. The work of sustaining Sarura continues to be led by its families, local communities, and the Popular Resistance Committee of the South Hebron Hills.

Historical Context

The village of Sarura, is located in Masafer Yatta, in "Area C" of the occupied West Bank. As Sarura is part of Area C, Israel maintains full security and administrative control of the village. The Israeli government expelled Sarura's residents through a series of campaigns that began with turning the area into a "closed military zone" in the 1970s, and took on a more violent character between 1980 and 1998.

Nonviolent Resistance and Quaker Values

In Arabic, *sumud* means "steadfastness" or "resistance," values the Palestinian people have been putting into practice for decades in their struggle for dignity and rights. Sumud: Freedom Camp embodies these values through its commitment to nonviolent co-resistance with the people of Sarura.

As the coalition explains, "We are a diverse community whose sacred values compel us to join in shared nonviolent resistance to discrimination, inequality, and occupation and build a future in which the civil and human rights of all people are recognized unequivocally."² They continue, "Invited by the families of the local communities, we will work together to reclaim their lands, rebuild their ancestral homes, rehabilitate their historic wells, and steadfastly advance the

¹ "Protesting 50 Years of Israeli Occupation." *Sumud: Freedom Camp* May 21, 2017, <https://sumudcamp.org/protesting-50-years-of-israeli-occupation-fdad15326d95>

² "About." *Sumud: Freedom Camp*, 2017, <http://sumudcamp.org/about>

livelihood of the villagers.”³ Despite repression in the form of violent military raids,⁴ and threats of expulsion, assault, and incarceration, activists and residents alike have not wavered in their commitment to peace.

Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has a long history of supporting nonviolent peace initiatives in many parts of the world, including Israel/Palestine. In 2009, CYM formally committed to support groups that “mobilize, in a spirit of fairness and nonviolence, for a just peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.”⁵ With these principles in mind, Canadian Friends Service Committee stands by the Sumud Coalition’s ongoing work in Sarura, its approach to solidarity with affected communities through building authentic friendships between different parties, and its vision of hope, justice, and equality for all.

Supporting Sumud: Freedom Camp

The coalition supporting Sumud: Freedom Camp has issued the following three calls to the international community:

1. Host public assemblies, demonstrations, solidarity actions, discussion groups, and prayer gatherings that motivate others to become involved;
2. Help raise the material resources to sustain the camp’s presence on the village land; and
3. Advocate that your local politicians, civil, and religious leaders issue statements calling for the end of the Israeli military occupation and suppression of the Palestinian people in solidarity with the people of this land.⁶

CFSC encourages Monthly Meetings, organizations, and individuals to consider responding to these calls as led.

Find out more about our concern for a just peace in Israel/Palestine at:
<http://quakerservice.ca/our-work/peace/israel-palestine/>

³ “Our Intention.” *Sumud: Freedom Camp*, 17 May 2017, <http://sumudcamp.org/our-intention-b0fb960e50df>

⁴ Gottbrath, Laurin-Whitney. “Israeli Forces Raid Sarura Protest Camp in Hebron Hills.” *Al Jazeera*, 25 May 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/israeli-forces-raid-sarura-protest-camp-hebron-hills-170525110933587.html>

⁵ Canadian Yearly Meeting (Quakers). “Policy Statement on Advocacy for Peace in Israel and Palestine.” 5 Nov. 2009, <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CYM-Policy-Statement-on-Israel-Palestine.pdf>

⁶ “Our Invitation.” *Sumud: Freedom Camp*, 17 May 2017, <http://sumudcamp.org/our-invitation-346dbc2cc7c0>