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COEXISTENCES / MAY 2024

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Testimonies

We invite you to read the testimonies of those who, motivated by the spirit of dialogue, have one day come to Switzerland as part of our program. For the most part, they are responses to messages of sympathy sent by Coexistences members or families that hosted them here.

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FEBRUARY 24

A. from Beit Ha'Gefen in Haifa replied to an e-mail of support from the Coexistences committee. We had learned from Haaretz on February 7 that the Haifa authorities had forbidden him to organize the meeting he had planned around the Hebrew translation of Colum McCann's novel *Apeirogon*, which tells the story of two fathers from the Bereaved Families Forum.

Dear friends,

Thank you so much for your support!

I believe that even though the event didn't take place in Beit-Ha'Gefen, it still took place and attracted a lot of attention (over 200 people attended) and, more importantly, raised public awareness of the importance of freedom of expression.

It's encouraging and heartwarming to know that you're following our activities and that you're there to help us.

I hope we'll have the opportunity to meet again around a common program.

Best wishes to you all!

BEFORE MARCH 3

As far as our other partners are concerned, the news is rather gloomy.

S. from Jerusalem said she was completely depressed and preferred to send an article (strong and angry) by Eva Illouz, a sociologist, who talks about the broken social contract between the Israeli people and their government. Adding "that's without mentioning what's happening in Gaza".

M. (her son) has huge doubts about the country's future. He seems very depressed and bitter too.

E. from Galilee shares these feelings and opts to withdraw (initially to work internally for the Israeli society). At the start of the conflict, she couldn't see any innocent people in Gaza. We don't know where she stands today.

M., an Israeli, is upset by what is being perpetrated in Gaza. Very critical of her inability to find information in the Israeli media, she turns to the foreign media for information.

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Delphine (committee member) is in regular contact with **M.** from the **YAP** group (Young Ambassadors for Peace). A few days ago, he wrote to her to say that he had given up hope: the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and in Jenin in particular, is really tough. He shared images of streets dug up by Israeli bulldozers. We know that Palestinians from Israel and the OPT are thinking of leaving forever, the area is in such pain. Everyone now passes through Allenby (border crossing with Jordan), when they can get out.

T., who came to Switzerland last year, is very terse. He responds with images of streets devastated by tanks, buildings blocked off (as if the street was moving up against the buildings). He's a nurse, he's poised, he's got the fire of medicine, he's traveled (a bit, for training), he's cheerful by nature. But he's also lucid. He has put his participation in the **YAP** group on hold.

I. doubts his values and his work at **Roots**. He doesn't think that what's happening is Israeli self-defense (he was referring to the commando executions in Jenin hospital, and what's happening in Gaza). He was taken out of WhatsApp groups by his Israeli Jewish colleagues.

A. (who came to Switzerland with young people from the Jerusalem **YMCA**) says she's not doing well, and she too doubts her values and her work. But like **I.**, she needs the income from her work in binational organizations.

From the group of facilitators who came to Switzerland in the summer of 2023, we received several messages:

At the beginning of November, **S.** recorded a sobbing interview (by a journalist friend, Fanny). Over the past month, she has taken part in two regional meetings, including one on the day after in Israel-Palestine.

S. says she's angry. While trying to analyze what's going on. He and **K.** choose their words very carefully in their professional exchanges in a mixed environment. He feels a gap between the words he uses in his social contacts and his inner feelings. He feels constrained to silence.

K. is doing a little better, the classes at the university are a relief, but she also comes across soldiers there, which is difficult for her because she thinks about what is being done in Gaza. But where she works, a mixed organization, relations are strong and supportive.

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N. says that dialogue is impossible at the moment, and is actively involved in the “A Land for All, 2 states 1 homeland” initiative.

J. leads bi-national discussion groups at Tech2Peace, they spent a week in Cyprus for a seminar.

R. posts sweet, empathetic things on Facebook.

A. (who collects money to make donation parcels) reports that all Palestinian workers have lost their work permits in Israel. People are starting to sell their furniture in order to eat. The exit roads from many towns and villages have been blocked by concrete blocks. To get from one town to another, people can no longer use their cars and have to climb over these blockades and take cabs. She says that Ramallah itself has been blocked off, a rare occurrence in her experience, and that she has never seen it so empty of life.

Several of our contacts living in the West Bank say they feel in great danger from the numerous attacks by settlers with the passive support of the army.

Yet the group of facilitators continues to hold working sessions. One in November, one on February 1 and the third on April 1. On the one hand, the participants testify to the same very serious deterioration in the situation in the OPT, as the other testimonies above show. Many of the group’s participants are extremely worried and depressed, and many fear that the same kind of violence will be deployed in the OPTs.

On the other hand, the pleasure of getting together was obvious and strong: the group continues to be a refuge and a source of strength and solidarity, and the meeting was fruitful. Several meetings are to follow at short intervals to meet the needs and expectations, both professional and emotional, of its members. None of them feels that the dialogue can continue as before.

One Israeli facilitator also described her complete despair at what is being done in her name, and can’t find the words to express all her feelings.

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APRIL 2ND

This text was sent to us by S. from Jerusalem:

It's the calm after the storm.
It's the calm before the storm.
We know what happened.
We're back to normal.
We know what is yet to come.
This normal life will be lost.
The war is here, and more is to come.

Living life is like waiting to drink the wine that's already been drawn.
Something is wrong.
What's wrong is right.
Normality is disturbingly strange.
A simulacrum.
Going out to eat, laughing, enjoying life with friends.
And then a girl's face on a poster.
She's still out there, far from normal.
Every day is hell on earth.
We don't hear her screams during dinner.

Sitting on the beach, watching the waves.
A little sun, a little carefree.
Only 80 km away, the same waves are breaking.
The same sea.
Monstrously proscribed.
The beach as always.
People lying on the beach, sunbathing.
Bodies lying lifeless.
The beach remains idle.

A festival in the north last weekend.
In honor of one of the local children who fell.
The stage full, people dancing to the rhythm.
In the background, a memorial.
The pounding of music.
The glow of lit candles.
Teenagers go from tears to celebration.
And vice versa.
A grotesque spectacle.
A necessary discharge.

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Life goes on, we make sure of it.
Resilience, too, has its cost.
Imagine Yom haZikaron.
Imagine Yom haAtzmaut.
What are we doing this year?
There is so much to mourn.
So much to honor.
Presence versus annihilation.
This little land is a piece of hell.

None of this is right.
None of us are fine.
How can we just keep going?
How can we not?

JUDITH OFFENBERG, APRIL 2 2024

APRIL 15

E. lives in Jerusalem. This is what she wrote to us:

We are living through hallucinating moments, we can see Iranian missiles from our balcony, fortunately intercepted one by one. Except for this 10-year-old girl and her family... Are these painful moments leading to new peaceful resolutions? It's hard to believe. But they do serve to reveal the real plans of all concerned. We can be badly governed and still be on the side of freedom and life. And continue to put pressure on their leaders. This could also happen in Iran. Inch Allah. But we have to hold out, which is obviously no easy task.

What's next?

We know there are groups working on the day after. Some 15 alumni of the New Story Leadership organization (<https://www.newstoryleadership.org/>) are working on a communications plan to make their voices heard, while a workshop bringing together 70 people - 35 from each side, not only peace activists, but also journalists, businessmen, lawyers etc. - took part in an initial workshop in Geneva to reflect on "the day after". The process should involve several stages.

We hope that these few testimonies will enable you to gauge the feelings of our partners in Israel/Palestine. It turns out that, while the general situation is becoming increasingly desperate, some of those involved in the peace process remain united and continue to engage in dialogue with each other.

THE COMMUNICATION GROUP, MAY 2024