

Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) Interview with friends in Ramallah after recent events in Gaza:

Teenage Boy (14) in Ramallah:

What would you like the people of Oxford to know about life now in the Occupied West Bank?

Life is difficult we are suffering. People are suffering every minute. We suffer not just because of the occupation but also because of the wider perspective outside Palestine. People don't know what is happening in Palestine and so they stand with Israel – this makes us very sad. **People are trying to stand with Palestine in the West Bank by not eating – they think this is a way of standing in solidarity with the people of Gaza. This is not right.** Others are fighting the government in the West Bank and speaking to them badly, this is also wrong and unproductive. **My mother is suffering seeing other mothers in Gaza hurting so much. She has to ask herself what it feels like to lose your son and she feels a shared pain even if she has not her own son.**

I woke up this week like normal to go to school but I saw my school account that there are Israeli soldiers near the school. The school was worried about us and told us it will open at a different time. The occupation doesn't just affect our daily lives but also our education. **They took 10 children from my school.** This means school times had to be delayed out of worry they would return. We were concerned for the safety of our teachers and students and my mum really didn't want me to go to school. When I got home, I saw the news, I was so heartbroken to see the updated news in Gaza. They are trying to make people in Gaza go to Sinai, but we know this is a trick and it is hard for us to watch our worst fears turn into reality. **Education is a weapon! Our feelings are another weapon! They are trying to take our weapons (education and feelings), but we won't let them – that is not going to happen.**

What would you like from your Twin City right now?

I know people are cheering for us right now and we know people are standing with us. **We need hope right now.** There are a lot of deaths and fear here and it is hard to have hope.

We need people to pray for Palestine.

Let our voices be heard! Not just in Oxford but also in London and on a larger scale. Please educate people and teach them about us in the curriculum. **I saw a history teacher in the UK show people the map of Palestine in the UK and they didn't know anything about it. Please teach children and everyone about Palestine. This really affects us.**

We want people to have an accurate perception on what is happening to us right now, this has a big impact on us. **Someone in South Africa was cheering for Israel on a video I saw but when he saw a 5-minute video of the situation in Gaza, he apologised and said he didn't realise what was happening and he now stands with Palestine.** This has a big impact on us. You feel that finally there is some positive energy and people are understanding us when they are allowed to see the truth of our situation.

What is your message to the British Government?

The government started this; they have a hand in this. The UK is the reason we are in this mess. They now stand with Israel, but they caused this mess. This has really destroyed us. **We know the government doesn't represent the whole population, but they have the power to stop this.** It is heart-breaking for us. We see the British population supporting us and we feel that. This is so meaningful to us. They have been destroying us for 75 years with aggressiveness I cannot describe. The British government is looking at this situation with a very one-sided lens. They have been attacking us for 75 years. We are victims. The numbers do not compare. **Why are their lives more valuable than ours to the UK government? What would you do if we were your kids? Would the same rules apply?**

What does it mean to you to have a Twin City at the moment?

It means a lot. It really means a lot. We have a city that is standing with us. Most cities are saying we stand with Palestine, and we love Palestine, but it doesn't feel real. This feels different. In Egypt they suggested that the people of Gaza go to the Sinai desert. This is not right! They are trying to kick us out of our land. **It is a really powerful feeling to have a friendship with another city. We feel we have brothers and sisters in our twinning city. It is our family.** It really empowers us – thank you.

What are your hopes for the future?

From when I was born until now, I have never seen my dad's city. I have not been to Al-Aqsa Mosque for 9 years because the occupation doesn't let us and we have to go through so much to get there. **My hope is to go to every single place in my land without fear of being killed and without limitation and restriction.**

It hurts us – they attack us they kill us when we try to go to our land. **I want to go to my grandfather's home in Jerusalem.**

Free our land. This is what every single person in Palestine hopes for. Free our land.

Teenage Girl (15) in Ramallah:

What would you like the people of Oxford to know about life now in the Occupied West Bank?

We are going through a very difficult period ourselves so are our parents. We don't ever feel safe, and **we are afraid to go to school**. We come home unsure if they will take our home or beat our family. **All children right now are afraid to go to school. They could take anyone or kill them. I don't want to talk about it.** We don't go to Al-Aqsa Mosque except for Fridays in Ramadan. This has made me want to become a doctor and volunteer in Gaza. The occupation is close, and they can come to our camp and take people, kill them, shoot them and do whatever they want. For now, we are still able to do some normal activities freely.

What would you like from your Twin City right now?

I appreciate everyone who stands with us. **I don't want them to just stand with us standing though. I want them to talk to their governments. I want them to share the problems we are facing as a country.** We can't settle in our own homes freely. We want them to know the reality of what we are facing. They will certainly stand with us once they know that. **Protesting is not enough. Talk to your governments please!**

What is your message to the British Government?

See the truth. Look at this in the right way. **I know they will stand with us if they know the truth. Don't believe the lies of the occupation.** We want them to know we are losing our families and our tears, but we are not losing our hope. **WE are not losing hope! I will repeat this for the hundredth time if I have to: we are not losing hope. We are strong. The pain makes us strong,** and I want the government to know that if they see the truth and stand by us, the people typically follow. **We rely on the government to change the minds of its people. Please hear us.**

What does it mean to you to have a Twin City at the moment?

This has left me so much more hopeful. Right now, a lot of hope has come into our lives. We just want to live in peace and comfort. **Having a Twin City gives us hope. We don't want them to just stand with us by talking, we want them to change minds.** Stop the occupation and their lies.

What are your hopes for the future?

Right now, **my hope is to have peace without occupation**. During this period **my hope is to be a doctor. I want to volunteer in Gaza**. I hope the occupation will have ended by then. **I am building new dreams and hopes. They think we are sitting afraid and paralysed. I am going to be the best doctor in Gaza. They have not stopped me from dreaming and hoping and planning.**

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