

Protesting the IDF in Gaza, and how to help

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Jerusalem

Sunday, May 23, 2004

As most well-read people already know, the Israeli army has spent the last five days battering and bludgeoning the inhabitants of a hot and dusty town on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip, known as Rafah.

Also well known is the rally of 150,000 last Saturday night in Tel Aviv to demand that Israel leave the Gaza Strip. Less well known, however, is the frenzied activity of the Israeli peace movement to get the army to leave Gaza in one piece – to end the death and destruction as it seeks to “save face” for the killing of 13 soldiers last week.

On Monday, a small group of women drove down from the north of Israel and sought to enter Rafah from the closest military checkpoint, just 3 km east. Rebuffed by the army, they pitched camp a short distance away, vowing not to leave until the army does. I joined on Thursday and found 30-40 women, some who had driven down from the north and others from nearby kibbutzim, who kept them supplied with food and water and solved logistical problems.

Standing (and sitting) there, watching the tanks, armored personnel carriers, helicopters, and busloads of soldiers move in and out of Rafah – and being unable to stop them – was terribly frustrating. Drivers in passing vehicles threw eggs, garbage, and curses at the group. “Violence will never bring peace,” proclaimed one of our futile signs as dozens of Rafah residents met a violent death while we vigiled. It was agonizing. A decision was made to continue the protest in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.



The photo (above) shows the three vigil initiators – Hannah Safran of the Coalition of Women for Peace and Lilly Traubman and Jessica Nevo of Bat Shalom. Hannah’s sign (closest to the camera) reads “Sharon: Qibiya, Sabra, Shatila, Jenin, Rafah”, listing some of the known bloodbaths of our prime minister, while Lilly’s (second closest) reads “End the Occupation”.

For more photos from this encampment, see

<http://www.shutterfly.com/view/pictures.jsp?aid=67b0de21b3e9e5b1c4ff>

[on site, click on “View as a slide show” to see the photos in full size].

Another new women's initiative is "Shuvi: Women for Withdrawal from Gaza". Dressed in black t-shirts with a yellow U-turn signal, Shuvi activists are collecting 60,000 signatures on a letter demanding that Sharon implement the "disengagement" plan that he promised, and get out.



On Friday (May 21), a large group of organizations (including Ta'ayush, the Coalition of Women for Peace, Yesh Gvul, Gush Shalom, and ICAHD) held a dramatic demonstration at the Kissufim entrance to Gaza, through which most of the settlers pass. Close to a thousand demonstrators made their way there, many carrying black flags (see

photo, left) to symbolize "the black flag of illegality that waves over some [military] orders", citing an Israeli court judgment from the 1950s. At the end of the rally, many demonstrators charged the checkpoint, which ended, of course, in pandemonium: 8 were detained and many injured, but no one seriously (I believe). I'm sure there are better photos, but you can see mine at

<http://www.shutterstock.com/view/pictures.jsp?aid=67b0de21b3e9e2ff051a>

The agony and helplessness of last week was epitomized by the announcement that women Members of Knesset from the left would be holding a demonstration on Sunday opposite the Prime Minister's office to protest his actions in Gaza. Do MKs have to resort to demonstrations to affect government policies!?

But the worst thing I saw at the various peace actions was poised just beyond the entrance to Gaza at Kissufim – 5 armored bulldozers (photo left). Notice the driver's 'cabin' and the blade, taller than the soldier walking past it.



Maybe these were the bulldozers that demolished 62 homes in Rafah during the previous two days [\[www.btselem.org.il\]](http://www.btselem.org.il)?

Maybe one of these bulldozers rolled over Rachel Corrie? We'll never know, though whoever drove them surely knows what he was up to, and must live with it.

But the devastation continues. This morning's *Ha'aretz* reports that 700-2,000 more Rafah homes may be destroyed in order to widen the buffer

zone with Egypt. Relief agencies report that food supplies are dwindling and that potable water is scarce.

Hannah just called me to suggest the following: In every city, organize a group (even 2-3 people will do) to bring food and water to the Israeli embassy or consulate, demanding that it be delivered to Rafah. Make sure that the media meet you there to cover the event. Explain to the media that the Israeli army's assault on Rafah has caused a severe humanitarian crisis, and you are calling upon Israel to deliver the supplies and end its brutal campaign. You may also want to do this at US embassies (or Caterpillar companies), since the United States funds the weapons that make this possible (and Caterpillar sells the bulldozers).

The Israeli government is concerned about the international outcry, and just announced that it will "compensate" the owners of demolished homes. Now we have to get it to stop the demolitions.

Feel free to circulate this letter or use any of the photos.

Coalition of Women for Peace:
<http://www.coalitionofwomen4peace.org>