

in Palestine



July 2007



The members of the mission in front of Yasser ARAFAT's mausoleum at the Mokata in Ramallah. From left to right (standing up) : Régine SCAPS, Nina CHARLIER, Salima M'SAAD, Jacqueline LE CORRE, Nicole JEHENNE, Françoise LEGORJUS, (in the first row), a friend of the group, Marie Jeanne JAUNÂTRE, Marie-Caroline GUERIN.

This booklet recounts some intense moments experienced during our mission in Palestine – mission CCIPPP (International Civil Campaign for the Protection of the Palestinian People) number 132 of July 2007, organized by the movement of the « women in black » from Caen. It has been realized in order to support a project there.

Our mission

In July 2007, eight women went to Palestine, determined to meet the families of the women they had been writing to for several months. They wanted to know why they did not reply or rarely... They wanted to know what was behind these names, these regimental numbers. They wanted to know everything about their prison life, their arrest, the motives that led them to this hell. They wanted to meet their family, the mothers overwhelmed by their absence, the fathers themselves incarcerated before their daughter, see if hope filters into these broken families...

Town after town, family after family, they listened them, wrote, supported, debated and finally understood : resistance, tenacity, support, but also injustice, arbitrary, violence, contempt...

Nina CHARLIER

The political prisoners, who are they ?



The pieces of information below are taken from a document the Addamer association gave us (association for the support of the Palestinian political prisoners and for the human rights). It shows the number of the Palestinian female political prisoners kept in the Israeli prisons from April 13th 1997 to July 11th 2007 (they are 100) and mentions their political stance, their age at the time of the arrest, their family situation, their potential profession (or current studies), their native region, the date of their arrest, its motive when it is known, the sentence when a trial took place, the prison in which they are currently incarcerated and the phone numbers of their family, sent to their supportive correspondents.



The aim in doing this is not to carry out an exhaustive sociological research on the Palestinian people incarcerated in Israel, but rather to focus on an active solidarity to help out the women who are fighting against the occupation.

However, to get a better understanding of the situation, it is interesting to linger over several points.

- Their political stance : there are 30 members of the Fatah, 25 of the Islamic Jihad, 9 of the FPLP, 6 of the Hamas, 1 of a group called Jaber, 1 independant and 22 whose political stance is unknown.
- Their age at the date of the arrest varies from 15 to 45 years old; it is unknown for 3 persons.
- Their family situation : 63 are single; the others are married, widowed or divorced, sometimes with a lot of children (up to 8). Some of them were arrested pregnant and gave birth in prison.
- Their profession or studies : 18 college students, 7 high-school students, 13 employees.
- Their native region : 24 of them are from Naplouse district, 14 from Hebron, 12 from Ramallah, 11 from Bethleem, 9 from Tulkarem, 7 from Jenine, 6 from Jerusalem, 6 from Gaza and some from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel State).
- The severe sentences, condemning their real or supposed crimes : for attempting murder of soldier (between 4 and 12 years), for stabbing colonists (between 4 and 15 years



Former prisoners

and sometimes isolation) for being and accomplice to kidnapping and murder (imprisoned for life and isolation), for transporting or possessing weapons or explosives (between 1 year and 1 000 shekels (5 shekels = 1 euro) and 25 years + isolation), for helping resisting people (between 17 years and 3 years + 5 000 shekels), for having planned, helped and/or accompanied « suicide bombings » (between life prison sentences + isolation and 25 years).

Administrative arrests and lighter sentences are often inflicted on women because a relative is suspected, to put pressure; a lot of women are incarcerated only for being the wife or the daughter or the sister of a resisting man. Administrative arrests can be extended with the most arbitrariness and opaque way. Only 5% of the sentenced women have been involved in attacks.

As for isolation, it is decided by the court during the trial, when there is one, or by the head of the prison, such as retaliation in case of incident, of hunger strike or of any forms of protest.

The majority of the female prisoners (94) are in Telmond, 3 are in Ramleh (very strict) and 3 in El Jalameh.

Here is the message the families of these Palestinian female political prisoners and the former female prisoners we met, asking us to say : « **We are resisting women, not terrorists !** ».

Jacqueline LE CORRE et Salima M'SAAD



It is a heartfelt cry... « We are not terrorists! ». At the association « Le lien » in Jenine, Hanadi NIMEH ABRU GANDED opens out a large sheet of paper with many pictures on : she holds it against her, shows it, explains it, tells stories... Here is a brother, there a cousin or a friend. Yet, before the first Intifada, her parents were imprisoned. From their 11 children, there are 7 left. One of them died resisting, five others are imprisoned. She also served one year in prison.

Terrorist ? Only brother or sister of someone resisting...

Régine SCAPS

Nour, born in prison

Nour (light in English) has large brown eyes that stares at you with surprise. He does not talk much, he is still tied to his mother's apron strings or holding his father's hand. He is four years old but only two years old...

He was born in prison during his mother's incarceration. For two years, he has only known women prisoners, hold in Ashkalon and the women soldiers who were watching over them roughly.

No games, no ball, no brother, no sister, no children around him. He only lived surrounded by uniforms, wire mesh windows, dark cells, squared yard, areas without trees or flowers, protected by the prisoners.

When he was two years old, the army had him leave his mother and the prison. A new life started with his father, his brothers and sisters he had never seen before.

Now, he is back with his mum, in the refugee's camp of Tulkarem, getting to know again the relationship he had forgotten. The family lives back together. But in his large dark eyes, one can see absence and fear. We will need long hours to see him smile, which proves that ductility exists, even for Nour.

His mother, Manal, welcomes us warmly. She knows about the great movement of solidarity that allowed her to give birth out of prison. Her « shoes box » countains a lot of letters received from the whole world during her four years of incarceration. For her it was the sign that her fight against the occupation was just, that living separated from her family had a meaning, in spite of isolation, arbitrariness and injustice.

Nina CHARLIER



The courage of the families

During our travelling, it seemed important for us to meet the prisoners' families. Therefore we were confronted with the painful reactions that were caused by the unbearable situations of arrests, imprisonments and sentences.

And this obsessive question, for us, powerless witnesses : « *How do these families resist to the unbearable ? How can they adapt themselves to it ?* ». As and when we met them, we realized the different way in which they endure these situations.

For some of them, anger was the strongest feeling. It is the case of a mother met in Tulkarem, at the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs. She indignantly denounces the ill-treatment suffered by his 17 years-old son. Wounded during his arrest in a demonstration, his shoulder was damaged by a bullet. « *They put him in prison like this ! They did not even look after him !* ». She made tremendous efforts and contacted the International Federation of Human Rights, Doctors without borders, thanks to the associations helping the prisoners. « *They finally took him to get medical care and they only gave him analgesics* ». She adds exasperated : « *This is how they treat all the wounded ! On top of that, he developed an eye disease and he must be operated otherwise he risks losing it ! Nothing is done !* ». She was coming back to the association to make them support her request to the Red Cross. When we asked her about the reason of his arrest : « *He was known as someone resisting, he was wanted. They wanted to catch him, he was a target!* ». And she denounces with a contained rage : « *Anyway, they could have killed him! The soldiers are protected, they always plead self-defence!* ».

Two days later, a mother from the refugees'camp of El Arroub receives us with a big smile. She seems gratified by our visit. She goes into a large room in front of us, that seems to be made for such meetings : some pictures of her daughter's arrest can be seen on the walls, conspicuous. She accepts to be filmed and have her picture

talked. She has invited another mother of a young female prisoner and answers all our questions openly. She seems very proud of the resisting act of her daughter : she considers her as an heroine. The whole family is politically active and recognized as such. Two sons are incarcerated in prisons far from each other. Her daughter who has been imprisoned for six years, was only a member of an activist group and she was accused of offence against national security.

The next morning, in a neighbouring village, it is in a pretty house in the middle of a flowered garden that we visit the mum of one of our correspondants, who has been in prison for two years. She seems very reserved and refuses at first to be filmed. No pictures of her daughter can be seen in the small living room where she ushers us. However, she accepts to answer our questions. It has been a year since she succeeded in seeing her daughter. She speaks about it very sadly. « Sometimes, I thought I could come and see her in prison. They were telling me : you are on the waiting list ». Every two weeks, she goes to the Red Cross and one more time makes her request that comes to nothing ! « They say that parents themselves are dangerous, so they don't even allow us to see them ! ». According to the letters she receives, she thinks her daughter is ill-treated. She fears for her other children. This interview is painful for her; she starts crying... and says « Reeham was so important for me ! Three days before her arrest, I felt that something bad would happen to her ! They arrested her the morning when she was going to her classes; in her bag, she had only put the Coran and a small pair of scissors... ». And, after a long silence, she adds : « She wanted to be a martyr ! ».

At the association of the Helron prisoners, we can see an elderly woman coming, very slim, obviously demoralized. Her son and her daughter-in-law, having been arrested and put in administrative detention (the trial can be put back until six months, and there is no right of access !), she finds herself alone to bring up six children

– the oldest is 14 years old and the youngest two - . She is without resources and has nobody to help her ! (the high number of prisoners – 13 000 – reduces help to everyone). She is exhausted and has trouble expressing herself. We ask her permission to film her. She refuses. She complains, she does not understand their arrest : « They haven't done a thing ! Nothing was proved ! ». But someone explains us that the brother of her daughter-in-law took part in an ambush during which Israeli soldiers were killed. A question is asked : « Do the activist who are parents think about their responsibility regarding their children ? ». The grand-mother lowers her head. She does not answer. She is shattered. She does not even dry her tears... « Resistance ! Even at this cost ! » interrupts the president who, as soon as the grand-mother has left, shows on the screen of his computer the picture of his 3 years-old-son holding a kalachnikov. « He is so small ! », cannot stop reacting one of us. A journalist present there gets going again on this exclamation : « I have been arrested three times and I did many years in prison. Before christmas, I asked to my six years-old-daughter : what gift would you like for christmas ? Dad, I want a rifle ! I want to kill them all, they are too bad ! ». Yes ! Weapons take part of their daily life from very young !

Then, when young female teenagers are arrested and imprisoned for several years because they hide in their school bag a pair of scissors, a penknife or even a knife : activism, vulnerability, provocation ?

I only witness, I refrain from judging, but what I saw every day during 15 days, was a whole territory occupied by an omnipresent army, and in front of it, a people who resist as they can...

Nicole JEHENNE



Picture shown in the living room of the prisoners' families visited, which shows the arrest of their daughter.

Ahmad from the camp of Jenine



Ahmad would have been 14 years old this year. In 2002, the Israeli soldiers made an incursion into the refugees'camp of Jenine. 67 victims fell under the Israeli bullets, 50 of them were children. Ahmad was one of them.

Ahmad's father wanted to give a message to the whole world : « All of the Palestinian children have the right to live in peace, like all the children ».

During the attack, Ahmad received two deadly bullets, one in the head, one in the belly. His father decided then to give his son's organs to other children independently of their nationality. On the seven recipients, five of them are still alive, four are Israeli children. « I regularly see these children, he explains, and through them Ahmad is alive ».

After this tragedy, he organized the Children Foundation of Jenine. He created a center in the middle of the refugees'camp so that the children could meet to

dance, play music or go on stage (activity at the planning stage). A lot of children suffer from psychological troubles and this center allows them to express themselves through these activities. The Children Foundation of Jenine welcomes 180 children from 6 to 16 years old. His founder hopes to see again the smile and happiness in the eyes of children, the smile of Ahmad... his son.

A beautiful message of peace...

Françoise LEGORJUS



The children



They play, they run, they laugh, they squabble, they are shy or cheeky... The Palestinian children look like all the children of the world. The difference... - one difference they share with all the children living in a country at war – they die sometimes, victims of the bullets of the army of occupation. The war, the soldiers... invade the daily life of the small Palestinians, their games. In Naplouse, male laughing children shot on us like the soldiers... with plastic guns and even a piece of wood hold like a « kalachnikov ». No doubt, some of them lived the army invasion in their town, in their village, in their house... seen their dad, their uncle, their neighbour... with a weapon.

Another scene in Hebron, in the alleys of the old town. A group of young soldiers takes aim at some children - maybe to swagger about in front of foreigners visiting as we were - .

Marie Jeanne JAUNÂTRE et Françoise LEGORJUS

A wall for security, who can beleive this !

A security fence for some, wall of the Apartheid for the others...

Built on stolen territories... Illegal and recognized as such by the International Authorities, the WALL means to totally close up Cisjordania shutting in its population, to isolate this territory and cut it off from its water sources. Inescorably, as if nothing nor anybody could restrain it, it is progressing, built in concrete terms by those it shuts up, that is to say by Palestinian workmen reduced to accept any task to feed their family. Could the economic stifling of the occupied territories be more than strategic ?

The wall parts Palestinian lands from other Palestinian lands – this is particularly flagrant in the surroundings of Jerusalem where it tends to isolate the East of Jerusalem (the arab part of the city) from Cisjordania - . It is tearing the villages apart, it takes the child away from his scholl, the farmer away from his field, it spoils the hills, kills the olive trees, changes completely the landscape... It does not follow a border. It goes far into Palestinian land to include the Israeli colonies. It allows itself detours to put « on the right side » some properties. On its way, the street becomes deserted, the metal shutters of the shops do not open anymore, life disappears...

Long snake of concrete and steel, it spits out its venom, threatens, hurts. It spreads distress, anger, will to resist, to which answer humiliation and repression. Witness what happens in Bil'in, village of 2 000 inhabitants situated 15 kilometers west of Ramallah, that was turned into the symbol of peace resistance to the wall. And Bil'in is not alone. Other areas in Palestine, where the wall carries on with its deathly work, other non violent gatherings are organized. The wall goes on, the resistance does not weaken...

The wall is scandalous, the wall is outrageous, the wall is unfair. It dominates with violence. How could the « fair and lasting » peace pleaded in time or at an inopportune moment by those who support it happen ? Why this non-interventionism ? Why this indifference ? Why this complicity ?

Marie Jeanne JAUNÂTRE



Bil'in, a village which resists

That Friday, July 20th 2007, some of us went to Bil'in to join the weekly demonstration against the wall of the Apartheid and annexion (demonstration in which I had already taken part in August 2005, during the international colloquium of the women in black, with several hundred of women coming from the whole world). The soldiers were ready and waiting for the line of activists to arrive (150 to 200 people) : inhabitants of the village, mainly young people, some « Israelis against the wall » and « international people » in quite great numbers at this time of year - there were less women, among others, grandmothers of the village than two years ago - .

As soon as the head of the march came up to around 100 meters from the barbed wire fence, the soldiers threw smoke grenades in great numbers and other projectiles ; yet the demonstration was peaceful, olive branches and Palestinian flags

conspicuously mixed. An undergrowth fire broke out, quickly extinguished by the demonstrators helping themselves with their clothes. A young Palestinian was seriously wounded, and Red Crescent first-aid workers in several places.

The confrontation of soldiers and demonstrators lasted around two hours. That is what happens every friday.

Bil'in acquired a following, notably around Bethlehem, in Ma'assara, where a demonstration also takes place every friday, except today because there were arrests during their last rally. Some activists were released, and a reorganization of the movement is in progress.

Jacqueline LE CORRE



Jerusalem

Abuhassan makes us go for a walk round Jerusalem, tells us the means that use Israel to « judaise¹ » the city, in order to colonize it. A walk of several hours, full of information, emotions and frustration. A walk that helps to understand a bit better...

Since the invasion of Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has used several means and taken some measures concerning Jerusalem and its inhabitants in order to control the city. Israel wants to make « Jerusalem capital of Israel » a reality and so :

- by national or international statements, from high political officials mentioning unified Jerusalem as the capital of Israel ;
- confiscating Palestinian lands ;
- going on a colonialist strategy inside and in the city area. Israel widened what is called the Jerusalem borders in the North or in the east, annexing (in the east) the colony Maali Adumin where are living more than 30 000 colonists. This colony splits in two the Arab territory, which forces Palestinians to travel 2 hours (or more) passing by checkpoints to go from a village to another. 14 colonies are at the east of Jerusalem borders.
- connecting the city center with three colonies of the east of Jerusalem by a tramway delivered by two French companies – tramway considered « outlawed » since connecting colonies considered illegal by the international right ;
- surrounding Palestinian property groups and limiting extensions in height or in length in order to contain the natural increase of the Arab population ;
- throwing out more than 240 000 Palestinians from Jerusalem ;
- allowing the demolition of more than 600 Palestinian houses, leaving thus several hundred of people homeless ;
- encouraging jewish associations to attract American rich jewish colonists ;
- working for passing a bill in USA which imposes the recognition of

Jerusalem united and indivisible as being the capital of Israel, against the recognition of a future Palestinian state. The AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) is at the origins of this bill ;

- taking away their resident cards to more than 5 000 Palestinian families of Jerusalem in order to, among other reasons, respect the instructions of the Jerusalem Ministry Affairs Committee which consists in not leaving the Palestinian population of Jerusalem exceed 22% ;
- making legislation (law of planning and organisation). This law is one of those which allows Israel to « judaise » Jerusalem. It created different, difficult and paralysing requirements for the construction authorizations. 40% of the Jerusalem lands are intended for parks (awaiting new colonies). The Palestinians cannot build on it, which leads to an exodus out of Jerusalem towards lands where it is easier to build ;
- making use of the « new Great-Jerusalem borders » bill. This bill concerns more than 600 km², which corresponds to around 10% of the Cisjordanian area.

- selling posters showing the Mount of the temple instead of the Mosque of Alaqsa. Some will say that it is an historical map, others will see in it the Israeli bill of the new Jerusalem.

This policy of colonisation leaves the Palestinians in a continuous situation of distress, particularly after the attacks of armed Israeli colonists.

Going out for a walk by night in Jerusalem, blue signs, written in Hebrew, drew our attention. We learnt later that it commemorated the invasion of Jerusalem in 1967.

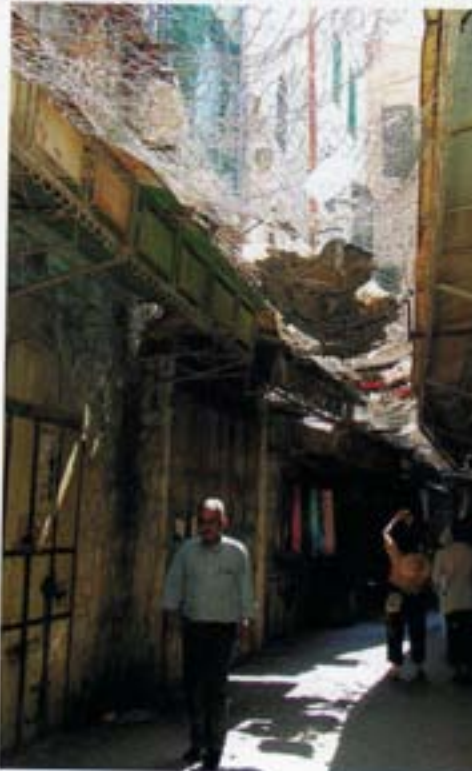
How far will go the Israeli ? And what will be the repercussions on the peace project ?

Salima M'SAAD

¹ « judaise » is a term used in Palestine and by the pacifist Israelis.



Hebron



Hebron stole Al Khalil. Al Khalil is its arabic name. Hebron is its Hebrew name. Five hundred zionist colonists took away the houses and shops from the inhabitants of the old town, depriving it of the life and hustle and bustle particular to oriental medinas.

But whom does this town belong to ? Colonisation here began to look like a fortress. It is hard to meet colonists, ready to do anything to stay here – including living walled up behind housing blocks stolen from the historic inhabitants of this place. The occupation is deadly. It emptied the old town of its Arab inhabitants, shopkeepers and craftsmen who developed local activities in odds and ends typically Mediterranean.

Place of all dangers, the old town is crossed every day by soldiers, protecting some, attacking others. You enter this place as if falling in a comic book of Bilal... and it looks unreal ! Control towers, barbed wire fence, checkpoints, destroyed or abandoned houses, closed shops... Disaster is in front of us ! Contempt and pressure on a people can take unthinkable forms. Rubbish rains down above their heads – material arrogance of the colonists who live on the floor upstairs. The street scenes are a good example of a slick partition... Here one terrorizes, despises, believes that with the force of weapons, people will be submitted. Children do not venture often into the streets where the soldiers « play » frightening a population whose resisting forms are numerous.

And yet, Al Khalil is a treasure... A rehabilitation comitee restores the center of the old town which enables a population to go on living in housing respecting the architectural traditions old of several centuries. Some old families are still present. And every year, if you come back to Al Khalil, you will find again the seller of traditional objects just before the checkpoint way that leads to the mosque and the one that sells embroidered dresses several meters away ; you will stop at the small square to drink boiling hot tea and observing that old blind man guided by his son ; you will speak to the young people of the neighbourhood giving out pictures taken the year before... And when you will leave this place, looking back, you will notice again the Israeli army and think: « *But what is the world doing ?* ».

Nina CHARLIER

The checkpoint or the daily repression

For Palestinians, travelling in their own country is not easy. Some roads, well-lit and asphalted are forbidden to them – only the army and the Israelis of the colonies can take them. For them, there are winding, dusty, bumpy roads, numerous detours imposed by the wall, alleys of villages... and checkpoints.

The checkpoint can be fixed or flying. The fixed one, Khaki-coloured, controls the entrance and the exit of towns. People cross it walking, giving their personal particulars and submitting to the investigation of X-rays. A revolving door with its green or red light above screens the travellers. Arbitrarily, it stops people or let them go depending on the soldiers's goodwill, all-powerful in their cage of glass, their submachine guns next to them.

The « flying » checkpoint can be put up anywhere – there are about tens in Cisjordania. It generates long lines of vehicles and long hours waiting. Which means for Palestinians : to plan hours for a mere distance ; to not carry luggage because you must reckon on the changes of collective taxis (these ones not crossing checkpoints) ; to always have their identity papers to hand which you have to show many times for checking ; not showing their impatience, their frustration – that could cost them dearly ; to be subjected to controls uncomplainingly, the humiliations of having to take off belts and shoes – especially for men (seen in Hebron) ; to not go where you must not, through lack of licence, authorisations...

The Palestinian, being a woman or a man, is a suspect by nature in the eyes of the Israeli occupant, especially if he or she is less than 30 years old. To control these « dangerous » people who – for most of them, only want to live normally, to travel

from a village to another, from a town to another - , a huge collection of measures are set up.

Jerusalem is the focus point of this system. To go there, you need a licence delivered by the army administration, which is almost impossible to get for a man, young, single and not having a job in the holy city. It is the case for Sohaïb, living in Hebron. He cannot go to Jerusalem where yet, live the members of his family.

That is how live Palestinian people. For these men, these women, these children, constraints are numerous and incessant and daily life unbearable !

Marie Jeanne JAUNÂTRE



The end of our trip

From our conversations with the former female prisoners, the families and the associations, both Israeli and Palestinian, who help them, we have learnt that the Israeli army incarcerates Palestinians for the most trivial motives, that prison is a way to control the population of the occupied territories and the Arab citizens of Israel, without caring very much about the International Right.

For the Israeli government with the active complicity of western governments, prison is a way among others to try again and again to break the will of the Palestinian people, to discredit it and to make their cause seem ordinary, declaring them terrorists, and thus prevent the setting-up of the state they have the right on, according to the sharing plan declared by the UNO in 1947 and that created from start to finish the state of Israel in 1948 at the expense of a Palestinian inhabited territory.

It is easy to understand the motives of the US government and their European vassals to keep on a drip a pro-western island in the heart of the Middle East, assumed to be hostile... and full of oil !

And what to say about the situation of the Israeli people ? Are not they doomed, in the medium term, to an unenviable destiny if they do not realize, from now on, that they are used and trapped by precisely those who are behind their forced exile in the mid-20th century ?

Jacqueline LE CORRE

The « Women in black »



Watch in Caen

In 1987 when broke out the first Intifada in the Palestinian occupied territories, a small group of Israeli women formed the movement of the « women in black », on Hagar Roblev's initiative. Modeling it on « the crazy women of the May square », these female activists for peace imagine particular actions, simple to manage, organized in the long-term.

This movement inspired a lot of other feminist groups, particularly attached to promote a world without war. Their main slogan « stop the occupation » appears now in a lot of Israeli towns, in Europe and in the United States.

« The women in black from Caen » have been part of this international network since December 2003.

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Watch in Jerusalem, during the international conference of the « Women in black » in July 2005

They are not unaware of the other conflicts in the world that kill, impoverish and degrade the too large populations, but consider that in Palestine, the colonisation and the military occupation that has been going on for too years is a barrier to the peace process. The non respect of the international right by Israel and the United States endangers other regions of the world, especially in the Middle-East. It is urgent to support the just fight of Palestinians to obtain a viable and self-governing state.

The « women in black » from Caen lead, every 2nd and 4th saturday of the month, a « watch for peace » at the crossroads of the « Général Leclerc » street and the « Bernières » street.

Nina CHARLIER

The evolution of Palestine since 1946

extension of the Israeli territories



AIC