

From Tony Davies, Professor of Physiology Edinburgh University

Tony Davies, retired Professor of Physiology from Edinburgh, has been going to teach at Al Quds for the last few years. He spends 1 to 2 months teaching physiology at Abu Dis, supporting the teachers at the Medical School. Professor Davies writes:

Jerusalem, November 8, 2006

Education - A right under threat

Yesterday a teacher at Birzeit University in the West Bank told me how the Israeli army of occupation is interfering with the education of his students. I said I would not use his name in anything I wrote, but he said he did not mind as he feels he must speak out even if he is imprisoned, beaten or killed - threats he feels are constantly present. A Jewish friend of his, who refused to serve in the army and has now moved to the US, said to him that he understood why he smokes and drinks much coffee because of the strain of living under the occupation.

When the teacher was a student, his studying was delayed for four years, from Feb '88 to Mar '92, by the longest and last closure of the 15 the Israelis subjected the university to. Now Israel interferes with education by delaying, refusing passage to, or arresting students at checkpoints, and the situation has been made much worse by the Wall. Students imprisoned by the wall round the West Bank have been unable to see their parents in Gaza for five years.

"Education is a right which Israel is denying," said the teacher. "Israel dominates our lives; we need a free state and to be given back our dignity."

Birzeit university receives 40% of its income from student fees. These can no longer be paid by many of the student because of rising unemployment suffered by their parents, as a result of Israel's measures to destroy the Palestinian economy. The threat of being sent down from the university for non-payment of fees recently led to a student strike. There is now a pressing need for additional funding so that students who can no longer pay fees may receive bursaries or scholarships. A channel for this is the Friends of Birzeit University in Britain. Likewise the charity, The Foundation of Al Quds Medical School, could support the provision of bursaries which will let students continue to attend the Palestinian medical school in Abu Dis.

I was there last year as part of FQMS' assistance to the school by arranging visits of medical teachers from Britain.

On a lighter note: returning from Birzeit to Jerusalem I was held up at Qalandia checkpoint as the Israeli soldiers there did not like me photographing the turnstiles and X-ray equipment which has replaced the more usual sort of checkpoint which used to be there. "We are herded like animals," complained a Palestinian with justification. I was refused exit from the checkpoint and no one was permitted through while I was trapped between the in and out turnstiles. I was then made to wait in a small room before an officer came to erase my pictures. In the meantime I swapped the memory chip in my camera so there was only a blank one for him to view!

To see the unbelievable tally of Israeli crimes suffered each day by Palestinians, do take a look at www.sapienspromise.org (and better still, 'subscribe,' for free, to daily emails by contacting orca@clear.net.nz).