

The Palestine Committee of Norway
Trade Union Section



Annual report 2013

Published since 2006

The Palestine Committee of Norway is a solidarity organization dedicated to the Palestine cause. Since it was founded late 1969, the organization has done its solidarity work both in Palestine and Norway. The Trade Union Section (TUS) was founded in 2006, and has since then worked towards members in Norwegian Trade Union movement.

See the Program of principles for the Committee (Palcom – for short) here:
<http://palestinakomiteen.no/join-the-palestine-committee-of-norway/>

The Trade Union Section has members from different trade unions in Norway. This report is a translation of our annual report which we are distributing to our contacts. We also want to share what we do with our Palestinian friends.



Leader of New Unions, Mohammad Bleidi, to the left and coordinator of Stop the Wall, Jamal Jumá, to the right, outside the chemical factory which was moved to West Bank because it polluted Israel too much. From study trip March 2013

Photo: Harald Haukaa Fjørtoft

Palestine Committee Trade Union Section was established in autumn 2006. Our main aim is that all types of solidarity and support work is angled towards the trade union movement. Norwegian LO and trade unions have for many years provided financial support to unionist and other projects. LO`s exchange of delegations with Palestinian trade unions have provided many lessons and strengthened the ties.

Palestine Committee Trade Union Section will support current and new initiatives from the LO and the trade union movement. We will also draw up plans and make our own initiatives. And best adapt to our work on the grasroot members. Hopefully we can work as a supplementary force in relation to more economically demanding and top heavy projects LO is directing.

Initiative, wide range and cooperation are key words for the best to strengthen trade union solidarity work for the Palestinian people

About our study trips, background and goals

The trade union movement all over the world is based on some common values, and have come to where it has today through struggle – struggle over wages, class struggle, the national struggle — and in the very bottom of it lies the weapon of strike - and the will to use it. The Palestinian trade union movement builds on the same foundation. Because the trade union movement has the organizational strength it takes to fight for trade union rights and values, both on the national and the international arena, the trade union movement must stand as guarantor for the important social values such as humanity, dignity, human rights and form a counterforce to the strong powers released by liberalism.

Solidarity is one of those basic values, and is about the fact that the working class has common interest of standing together, all over the world, against alienation in the global economy. In the concept of solidarity lies both reciprocity and recognition of the community in the fight against a common enemy, a common suppressor or exploiter. Not out of compassion, but out of necessity.

The solidarity is also a way to organize our indignation and sense of justice to the people. We will speak up when something is unfair, and demand that those who have the power to do something about the injustice and use means of force, if necessary. With that as a background, solidarity with Palestinian workers is especially important, because they not only are susceptible to capitalism and imperialism, but also the occupation, colonialism, apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

As of December 2013 the Palestine Committee Trade Union Section have arranged 27 study tours.

We had to cancel two well planned trips to Gaza due to the political situation in Egypt, Northern Sinai and the closure of Rafah Crossing. The average number of participants per trip is 13.

Our main goal to arrange trade union study trips is to influence Norway's largest, most important and most powerful mass organization to take clear positions in the Middle East conflict, through statements, decisions, measures and actions, which in turn will put pressure on the official Norwegian foreign policy. Our target groups are regular members. We focus first and foremost on the LO unions, but does not discriminate. For example, we have had several trips for teachers, where most have been members of the Norwegian Union of Education.

Right from our first trip in spring of 2007, we have emphasized that the study trips should be angled at work and trade union conditions in Palestine, to meet and to link us to the Palestinian Trade Unions.

Study trip March 14. – 23.

The group had 16 members from 8 different trade unions.

Roger Nordland, from Energy, electrical engineering, telecommunications and IT workers' Union, Nordland local branch, is writing:

There was an expectant and excited bunch who met at Gardermoen airport early in the morning 14. March of this year. We had nine days of adventures in store. Some of us had been in Palestine before, someone had been several times and some of us were quite fresh.

In the arrival in Israel went painlessly and in an instance we were in the Al-Quds (Jerusalem). Experiences and impressions stood in line. Over the course of three days, we had been through East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus and received information about the countless checkpoints, refugee camps and settlements, the consequences of the wall, bypass-roads, ID-arrangements and segregation policies. We had a very engaging and good guide. At times I felt that it almost became too much for a simple soul.

One night or early morning at 0400 a.m. we visited Tulkarm and Irtah checkpoint, an experience leaving no one untouched. 10,000 poor workers who stood in line in the enclosure to get themselves to their jobs, with the knowledge that if you're not on time you lose the job. They slipped through in small groups. They have only two hours before the crossing closed again. Working conditions are not better in the industrial zones. It is hard to accept that such is the everyday life the Palestinians. We get to hear about the terrible working conditions in agriculture and in the settlements. It makes extra impression when we see the great, fertile lands that belong to Palestine, but is operated by the settlers.

I am left with two main impressions from the journey. One is the infernal cunning and systematic oppression of the Palestinians which is taking place. The list of methods to prevent trade and development, freedom of movement and freedom of speech is so long that it cannot be included in here. The fact that each item is part of a systematic planning from the Israeli authorities was very apparent over the course of the journey. The other main impression is that the Palestinians are an incredibly wonderful people. Even after many, many years of occupation and oppression, they welcome strangers with open arms. They hold Israel responsible for the occupation and all the misery that follows from it, but they never said one bad word about the Jews (!)

For me it was amazing to find that there is no more fear and hatred among the people, in spite the situation they are in. Maybe this is the strength of the Palestine, which will give them the freedom when the time is right. Of course the struggle against occupation make a lot of strain on the people. In East Jerusalem hope is more and more vaining, as the settlers steal homes with government blessing, and any form of development is stopped through the provision and the legal framework, which is created for segregation. It's not better in Hebron, or the other places that are held in a continuous iron grip and how settlers in the most primitive way tries all their best to make everyday life untenable for people, at the same time that the Palestinians are unable to take any action to protect themselves. After decades of occupation this is not so strange.

I have been through my life's most important journey. I would like to thank the Trade Union Section in Pacom for the invitation and the opportunity to join. The program I can recommend to anyone. I also want to thank the travel leaders, Petter and Thomas for the job well done. Last but not least I want to thank the group at large. We were a very diverse bunch, in every way, and all contributed to that there was an unforgettable travel, and I am confident that everyone will bring home their experiences and tell the stories that we have seen and heard. And what we knew for sure: the occupation must end. Simply and easily.

Teachers study trip, easter, March 23. – April 1.



teachers' unions.

15 people took part, from all over the country. In addition to trips to Jerusalem and Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah, the program also contained a lot of teacher professional visits, among other things, Birzeit University on the outskirts of Ramallah, where they met with student organizations and university management. Visit to Nablus and the Balata refugee camp, the largest in the West Bank with 25,000 inhabitants, where they met Yafa Cultural Center, in order to get an idea of what it's like to grow up in the camp. Further a visit to a school in Nablus and a meeting with the students and management at Nablus University. Then visit to the Jalazone refugee camp; to a YWCA-daycare, meeting with UNRWA representatives and a visit of the UNRWA school in the camp. Meeting with the

The participants were also present during the weekly Friday demonstration in Bil'in, where the Palestinian News Agency Maan News had this posting on the same day:

80-year-old activist injured in Bilin rally, witnesses say

RAMALLAH (Ma'an) -- An 80-year-old activist was injured during a protest on Friday to commemorate Land Day in the village of Bilin, locals said.

- The international solidarity activist was shot in the hand by a rubber-coated bullet, while other protesters suffered tear gas inhalation.
- The rally was to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the deaths of six Palestinian protesters shot dead by Israeli police and troops during mass demonstrations in 1976 against plans to confiscate Arab land in Galilee. Israeli soldiers fired tear gas, rubber bullets, and foul-smelling liquids at demonstrators and chased villagers through olive fields, witnesses said.
- Locals were joined by Israel and international activists, who raised Palestinian flags and chanted slogans to support Palestine.



On this picture we can see Mr. Ola lead on. The 80-year old activist was not one of our group..

Study trip to Gaza October 4. – 14.

With a heavy heart we had to tour cancel this year's trip, very well planned, like last year. The security situation after Mursi was deposed was out of hand, it was war-like conditions in the North of the Sinai, and the Rafah Crossing was closed. We are very sorry for this. Still we will not give up. We will await the situation, and go as soon as it is possible.

Study trip October 19. – 29.

Together 12 persons participated in the group. One of them, Øyvind Andresen, wrote diary of their experiences. From the day October 20. He wrote the following:

October 20.

I've never understood all this with West and East Jerusalem until today. I knew that Jerusalem was divided into a Western, Jewish part and an Eastern, Palestinian part, and I have heard of the Jewish settlements in the Palestinian part. But there is something else to see how the walls inside the Palestinian parts of the city with the outrageously high walls with barbed wire and checkpoints. One place we saw how a wall shared a Palestinian neighbourhood in two parts, in which the family members became separated from each other. School kids have to get up at four o'clock in the morning to reach a school that is only a few kilometres away.

Or how Orthodox Jews, usually from Brooklyn, throwing out Palestinian families. Or how fascists, from the Jewish Defense League, harasses the Palestinians in a neighbourhood in order to get them to move out without any intervention from the Israeli authorities. (Goldstein who massacred 29 Palestinians during Friday prayers in 1994, was a member of the JDL).

In the old city of Jerusalem, which is located in the East, the David flag with its star is flying on the top floor in someone's house where Jewish settlers have decided to expel the other inhabitants.

To read and hear is required, however, to see give a totally different kind of cognition

Trondheim Conference January 2013



Palestine Committee and International Section in the LO in Trondheim, Norway organized the international seminar in advance of the Conference. The seminar was divided into two; one part dealing with the crisis in Greece, and the other part where Kjetil Larsen from the Trade Union Section and Berit Aaker from Palestine Committee was in charge. The topic was a follow up from the Solidarity Conference in September 2012, on how trade unionists can work politically at home in support of the Palestinians, about G4S campaign, about the union study trips, about the Histadrut and the proposal for a decision on the LO Congress 2013. 35 people took part.

Trade Union Section and Palkom, Trondheim had a stand during the entire Conference; where we among other things, handed out information and leaflets about the "Boycott the Histadrut" campaign, and Kjetil Larsen had short appeals in the meeting room.

The LO Congress 2013

TUS' campaign to get LO-Congress to break relations with the Histadrut started already in early 2011. The most important thing with this task in hand was all the work that was done in advance of the Congress. We have been present with the parole about break with the Histadrut at conferences, like the Trondheim Conference in 2012 and 2013, and several youth conferences, we have been present at several union congresses, we have held appeals and handed out material. We also have encouraged local clubs and unions to make resolutions, and that's what many also have done. We could not have achieved such a result on Congress without a lot of good resolutions locally.



During the whole Congress, we had a position in the Youngsbakken with four or five people each morning. When the delegates came to the Congress Hall, they were given brochures and information, and we got good recognition and lots of pat on our shoulders from the delegates. People were really excited to see the Palestinian flag outside the Congress.



The delegate Roy Einar Nilsen, the leader of the Transport workers' Union's Youth Committee, spoke for the proposal to

break with the Histadrut from the Congressional floor. With a very good and dedicated appeal, he delivered the best arguments for this proposal.

The proposal was voted over by raising of hands, but unfortunately not counted, as we wanted. It lost, but an estimate of 1/3 of the delegates voted to break with the Histadrut and the proposal was adopted "submitted to the Secretariat". This can mean many things. But it was not rejected, and it had a large amount of supporters in the Congress Hall.

It was also unanimously adopted a fairly good resolution on Palestine. You can read it in whole in the link below.

We believe that we have done very good work, both before and during the Congress, and that "our" representatives in Congress Hall did a very good job.

A large minority of the delegates voted to break. We are regarding this as a big win and a big step forward in the trade union movement in Norway. And - we hope-good news for the international trade union movement.

The result of the Congress was an expression of the whole TUS's collective work, together with the skilled and committed friends of Palestine in the trade union movement. The interaction between the delegates within and the activists outside worked well.

We are very pleased with the result. We have not given up, but are now discussing ideas of how we're going to work this in the time to come.

Read a summary of our work, previously and under the congress here:

<http://palestinakomiteen.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Summary-LO-Congress-2013.pdf>



Guests from Palestina – meetings in Oslo

Two good Palestinian friends and partners from the study trips were in Norway in October, as part of the Conference "The missing peace" 1. and 2. of November, where they were keynote speakers.

Jamal Jumaa , Coordinator of the Stop the Wall/anti-apartheid Wall Campaign, central in Popular Resistance Committees and the BDS-Movement.

Mahmoud Subuh, director of "International Relations for Yafa Cultural Center", the Balata refugee camp, Nablus. Balata is the largest refugee camp in the West Bank

Under their stay in Norway we arranged three meetings with activists in the Oslo region.



Meeting together with LO in Oslo

Jamal spoke, the theme was:
Union work in occupied Palestine-PGFTU, the Histadrut, New Unions.

In addition to telling about the latest Facts on the ground in the West Bank, he told about the the existing conditions, constraints, and opportunities to build Union in occupied Palestine, what opportunities which exist for finding work and the significance development of the colonies have for the Israeli economy.

Meeting in cooperation with the The Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees

Mahmoud told vivid and appalling about what it's like to be a refugee in his own country, about how a huge refugee problem was created by the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, why it has not been resolved to this date, about the immense social problems in today's camps, and how they with very limited resources try to stave off a ticking time bomb.

More to read about Balata here: <http://palestinakomiteen.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/balata-history-of-a-camp.pdf>



Meeting in cooperation with Palcom Oslo.

From the invitation:

Meet the Palestinian human rights activist Jamal Juma and Mahmoud Subuh from the occupied West Bank. Hear them tell about life under occupation, resistance and future visions.

They will describe the political situation in Palestine and how the occupation works on a daily basis.

Furthermore, they will tell about the work to build resistance to the occupation, and how the Norwegian Solidarity movement can help to strengthen the palestinians struggle for freedom and justice.

After the meeting, we all had an enjoyable dinner at the palestinian meze restaurant Habibi.

Project New Unions

During the last couple of years of study tours, we have encountered a new union – called the New Union. They organize workers who previously fell outside the traditional trade unions, as farmers, they work with Palestinians working in the colonies, in the industrial zones and in Israel. They are growing steadily, and they are building up in several places and in several branches. They define themselves as part of the grassroots movement and are independent, without affiliation to any of the political parties.

As a result of the fact-finding trip two of the TUS members conducted in the fall of 2012, we worked out a booklet about the development of the Norwegian trade union movement. The basis of this booklet was a transformed version of a pamphlet written by the historian Harald Berntsen. The booklet was translated into English, and handed over to representatives of the New Union and Stop the Wall on our study trip in March.

In December the TUS will establish a working group that will draw up a solidarity project with the New Union. The goal of the project will be that the Norwegian trade unionists will be part of a mutual cooperation with them, through making contributions to their building of the organization and training of elected officials and working committees. Then, we are also of the perceptions that they have something to teach us.

Read more about the NU and what they're working on here:

<http://palestinakomiteen.no/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/i-arbeid-for-okkupanten-med-bilder.pdf>

Our web site

It is constantly under upgrading, and here you will find eventually a lot of good articles on study tours, about the working conditions in Palestine, and different texts about the Histadrut. There are also some articles in English. Have a look! <http://palestinakomiteen.no/faglig-arbeid/>

Trade Union Section's strategy – seminar in October

In order to educate ourselves and for the development of our trade union work, TUS held a seminar with several hot topics: Palestine solidarity in the Scandinavian Trade Union Movement, the international Trade Union BDS movement, what do the Palestinian Trade Union Movement look like, and how are we going to develop the Trade Union approach of our study trips.

Palestinian Trade Unions are fragmented, multi-faceted and not very easy to know, and for various reasons does not function as we think that the traditional unions should. TUS has set itself the goal to increase your knowledge of this topic, and will try to work systematically to gather information.

We have also started to look at Israel's major oil discoveries in the Mediterranean Sea and in the desert, where the recovery now in earnest is on the agenda. We imagine that Norway here is an attractive partner for Israel, and in addition to the major environmental consequences, this recovery will as well involve the Norwegian trade unionists in the Norwegian oil sector.

Stand, Fagforbundets Congress November

Fagforbundet, or The Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees held its Congress in Oslo in November. Here we had information stand together with our Palestinian friends from the woman cooperatives in Deir Ghassaneh and Rantis, two villages who are regular stops on study tours. Fagforbundet in Oslo have for some years run projects in these villages, and they invited them to the Congress as guests. Here they sold local products from women's cooperatives with big success.

From the left: Um Ashraf from Rantis, our permanent guide and business partner Adel Yahya, and Shuaibi Insaf from Deir Ghassaneh.



To the Congress there was put forward a proposal to the principle- and action program to break connections with the Histadrut. The proposal did not come up for consideration. Instead, the Congress, against 7 votes, voted to work for an international trade boycott of Israel.

Habima theater

At the end of the year, we started a cooperation with the Academic and cultural boycott of Israel (AKULBI) about a joint foray on the occasion of that the Norwegian National Theatre will be conducting a theatre project with Israel. Israel uses the active culture to embellish its reputation through the campaign "Brand Israel". Habima is the State of Israel's national scene. It is a strong representative of the official Israel both domestic and international. Now the National Theatre under the leadership of Hanne Tømte ushered in a collaboration of Habima on the theme of "Terrorismus".

We do not want this cooperation between Norway's largest institutional theatre and the State of Israel's Habima, and we are looking for a partnership with the local unions at the theatre to discuss how we can get the national theatre to withdraw from cooperation.

U 21championship in Tel Aviv

As usual TUS-members are taking part in other activities, and football fan members have for the last period been engaged in the protests against the U-21 football Championship.

A movement in several European countries has since last summer been working on getting the Championship moved from Israel. A country which is occupying another people, in violation of international law should not be rewarded to be assigned as hosts for such a tournament.

While the Championship takes place in Israel, it will be impossible for thousands of Palestinian youths to see football matches because they are locked away behind the military check-points and the illegal separation barrier.

The activists did not ask the Norwegian U21 players to boycott the Championship, but they were encouraged to take a visit to the oppressed Palestinians and make their own reflections about what they saw there.

A great action.

Saturday, June 1, the Norwegian U-21 national football team with their leaders set off for Israel. They were all gathered at the Hotel Bristol in Oslo before leaving.

When the airport bus that would drive the team to Gardermoen airport arrived, and the players entered, the activists also came forward in front of the bus with their banners:

U-21- move the endgame from the occupying State of Israel – Free Palestine!

The players and the leaders showed interest and several gave us the thumbs up. Many took pictures.

When the bus drove to the airport, it was followed by a mc from Bikers for Free Palestine. The biker had a large Palestinian flag on his back and drove past and next to the bus on both sides all the way up.

Nearly there, we drove from the bus and was rigged with the banners once again when the bus arrived at Gardermoen. More friendly chat with players and managers, and one of them actually thanked us for the commitment before they went into the departure hall. We followed with our banners and walked through the whole departure hall, which was packed full of people, before we finally was stopped by the guard crews who told us to pack up and go. What we did after a successful demonstration.



December 2013

In solidarity

Palestine Committee of Norway

Trade Union Section

