

WAKE UP!! SNAKES ALIVE WE'VE GOT A CONVOY...

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TAKING IT ALL IN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS AS UK AID CONVOY REACHES GAZA

Last Saturday afternoon the first of the 110-vehicle convoy from the UK entered Gaza after a three-week, 6,000-mile journey through Europe and north Africa. Just before the four 7.5 ton trucks, four transit vans, an ambulance and jeep entered the besieged territory, a shell fired by an Israeli tank exploded a few hundred metres away.

Most of the over 5,000 injured during the Israeli bombardment struggle to get medical care due to the Israeli-Egyptian siege. According to the UN, 43% of the injured were wounded by shrapnel, with spinal cord injuries common. Hospital staff say they are struggling to provide medical care with intermittent electricity supplies and shortages of items like wheelchairs and medication as well as the more sophisticated equipment needed for patients with paralysis.

Fifteen hospitals out of a total of 27, and 41 primary health care clinics out of 118 in Gaza were damaged during the war, according to the World Health Organisation, and about half the ambulance fleet was damaged or destroyed. Patients die daily through lack of medical treatment in Gaza and Israel/Egypt's refusal to let them leave.

Convoy organiser Abdul Aziz says that the medical supplies they were carrying were handed over to Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa, as well as the keys to several vehicles. He describes conditions in the hospital as "desperate", saying that a British doctor working at the hospital reckoned that people were dying for the lack of medicines that would cost £10.

On Sunday, the rest of the vehicles carrying medical aid worth \$1.4m were let in by the Egyptian authorities, while those with non-medical aid like clothes, toys, generators, a boat and a fire engine had to enter Gaza through an Israeli-controlled crossing.

Saair Yildirim, a driver from Bristol acknowledged the reception in Gaza had been "tremendous", but was shocked to see the wreckage of ambulances destroyed by Israeli fire.

And the journey itself had not been an easy one. Despite meeting cheering crowds in the other north African countries, the Egyptian authorities had prevented any show of support for the convoy, tightly managing it's progress.

Herded through the country with police and soldiers practically every 50 metres, the convoy was then kept in the Sinai town of Al Arish for two days during which time it was attacked by the police and unknown thugs.

According to convoy member Yvonne Ridley, "hundreds of riot squad officers, wearing visors, carrying shields and batons tumbled in to one of the two car parks in a large town centre compound in the port of al Arish and set about the unarmed peace activists". Later, as night fell, "suddenly the area was plunged into darkness by a power cut which coincided with brick, bottle and stone attacks on the convoy by youths. Seconds before the lights

went out some convoy members saw a couple of unidentified men scrawling anti-Hamas slogans on the lorries. The lights remained out for some minutes, during which time the vicious attack was unleashed. The whole proceedings failed to warrant one single Egyptian police officer swinging his baton into action. Those who had wielded their sticks with such a passion before, stood impassively by and watched the onslaught."

Such treatment can only be expected from a regime that routinely quashes any sign of support for their Palestinian neighbours. Magdi Hussein, secretary-general of Egypt's banned Socialist Labor Party, was recently sentenced to two years prison by a military court for 'infiltrating' into the Gaza Strip, while two other activists received a year each for the same 'crime'. The US-puppet Mubarak regime had efficiently fulfilled their masters' orders to discredit the democratically elected Hamas government in crude attacks on the solidarity convoy.

After eventually making it to their final destination, the stark reality of post-war Gaza struck the convoy members immediately. According to one, Naveed, "Reality hit home. The very reason we embarked on this journey was there in front of our naked eyes. Seeing the destruction on the TV on our nice cosy sofas at home is one thing, but to see it in real life is another. Each hole in a building, each burnt vehicle, each pile of rubble has its own story to tell, about how a Palestinian life was lost, how a Palestinian child became an orphan, how a mother became childless, how a wife became a widow. Today we will hear these stories so that we may report back to the world."

THE STRANGLEHOLD CONTINUES

Since the end of the 22-day bombardment of Gaza in mid-January (See SchNEWS 661), Gaza has continued to be sealed from the outside world by Israel and Egypt with only humanitarian aid allowed in, as has been the case since Hamas seized power in June 2007. Factories, government buildings, schools and Gaza's biggest wheat flour mill were destroyed. Today over 90% of the people are totally dependent on UN food aid. Lacking basic materials like glass and cement Gazans have been unable to rebuild their demolished homes and infrastructure.

The Israeli military has continued to target civilians. Four Palestinian farmers have been shot by Israeli forces while working within 700m of the 'Green Line' since January 18th.

On February 14th, the Israeli navy attacked several fishing boats in Gazan territorial waters two nautical miles out from the port of Gaza city, damaging the boats and shooting 23 year-old Rafiq abu Reala. Palestinian fishermen have come under



CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For Grievous A Fence

This Wednesday's Smash EDO noise demo at the EDO/ITT factory in Brighton was a particularly noisy one and, as has gone on for years, protesters used EDO's fence as a percussion instrument. But one young muso failed to strike gold as he dragged the plastic handle from a pan down the fence in too childish a manner, sending EDO boss Paul Hills into a rage. Police quickly detained the youth, and got interested in allegedly incriminating specks of green paint on the handle. They then nicked the pan handler for criminal damage to a metal fence with a piece of plastic.

daily assaults from Israeli gunboats since Israel announced a it's 'unilateral ceasefire'. Rafiq is the third Gazan fisherman to be shot by the Israeli navy during this ceasefire. Due to such attacks fishing has almost completely stopped and contributed to malnutrition. Fish has always been a key source of protein for Gazans, especially since the siege.

On February 24th, Palestinian farmers, accompanied by international Human Rights Workers, were fired upon as they attempted to work on land around 300m from the 'Green Line'. Eva Bartlett of the International Solidarity Movement reported, "We were only in the fields for about five minutes before the Israeli forces began firing. I believe the firing was coming from four army jeeps and a hummer. The shots were coming very close, and were sniper-type shots.

"One old woman was so paralysed by fear that she couldn't move off the ground before we were finally able to accompany her out of the fields. While the majority of the farmers left the area, some say they must return to work the land later on in the day. There is great concern that the Israeli army will continue their targeting of these farmers." Later that same day, seventeen-year-old Wafa An-Najjar was shot in the leg by Israeli forces when she returned with her mother and brother to see the remains of their demolished family home.

And meanwhile, business continues as usual in the West Bank. On Wednesday an unarmed youth was shot and killed by the Israeli military near Ramallah. At a demo against the Apartheid Wall in Nilin last week Israeli forces shot four youths with a new type of live ammunition, a special low calibre bullet known as the '0.22'. All were shot in the leg and hospitalised.

In short, Israel's bloody and inhumane siege of Gaza continues and only hardens the determination of international activists, at often great personal risk, to offer help, support and the chance to tell the world what's really going on there.

For updates see

- * www.rodcxandgaza.blogspot.com
- * www.freegaza.org
- * www.vivapalestina.org
- * www.palsolidarity.org

PARTY & PROTEST updated weekly see www.schnews.org.uk/pap

ZION AND OFF

Last Sunday a group of students from Brighton locked themselves to the gates of the Israeli state-owned export company, **Carmel Agrexco**, at their distribution centre in Hayes, Middlesex. They were there to protest against Carmel's complicity in the illegal annexation of the West Bank and the repression of students (see SchNEWS 666).

Both gates were completely blocked for three hours with the police getting the ambulance service to remove one of the blockaders who was superglued. Despite police provocation and searches of all present no-one was arrested as Agrexco do not want their illegal agricultural activities on occupied Palestinian land exposed in court. See www.bigcampaign.org

* Last June a rally commemorating the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel was held in Trafalgar Square, which saw hundreds of anti-Zionist activists - many of them Jewish - showing up to demonstrate that sixty years of apartheid and ethnic cleansing is nothing to celebrate (see SchNEWS 638). Police were typically heavy handed and arrested many counter-demonstrators for spurious charges while turning a blind eye to aggression by Zionists.

One 'Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods' protester was arrested that day for behaviour intended to cause intimidation alarm and distress: dyeing her hands red to symbolise the blood on the hands of the Israeli state. She was due in court yesterday (12th) and a demo was planned outside Horseferry Magistrates Court - however, the Crown Prosecution Service dropped the ridiculous charge at the last minute. See www.bigcampaign.org/index.php?page=jbig

SQUATS YER LOT

Bailiffs sneakily tried to get possession of the long lasting **RampArts** squatted social centre in east London on Thursday. Pretending to be security guards wanting to do a fire check - there had been a fire next door - upon gaining entry they then claimed to be forcibly evicting everyone and taking possession. When challenged they produced an eviction order from December 2007, which was no longer valid. The local bill appeared and the bailiffs started boarding up the windows while residents climbed back inside. After a two-hour stand off the cops retreated leaving the bailiffs and owner on their own facing the residents who now had their home back. For more see <http://therampart.wordpress.com>

A few weeks back some Brighton locals reclaimed one of the numerous empty city centre shops and set about turning into a social space, which opened with a cultural night of music, films and an art exhibition. Days later bailiffs duly arrived and issued a 24-hour eviction notice using a spurious law. Locals rallied and the next day there were no bailiffs in sight. Then last Monday cops tried to get in on false pretences claiming to be somebody's mate called 'Phil' and, when denied entry, unsuccessfully proceeded to try and kick the door in. Those inside recognised them as cops who had recently evicted another squat. See www.brightonfreespace.webs.com

With more and more empty buildings it's a squatters' market and now is the time to get on the ladder. But, as this week's skullduggery shows, it pays to make sure who you let in. This weekend in Bristol is the **National Squat Meet** but as we go to press word has come through that police are trying to evict the newly opened space. See <http://squatmeet09.wordpress.com>

ON GARDA

Veteran 'Shell to Sea' Campaigner, Maura Harrington has just been sentenced to four weeks imprisonment for supposedly assaulting a Garda in June 2007 at protests against Shell's oil project on the west coast of Ireland (See SchNEWS 643). She was also ordered to pay a €1,000 fine and €1,000 to the Garda benevolent fund (she refused to agree to the latter).

Shell to Sea spokesperson Terence Conway stated "On the 11th June 2007, at Pollathomais, in the region of 20 local people received injuries in relation to Gardaí forcing their way illegally on to private property, yet no Garda has ever been brought to justice as a result of this incident. Instead now that Shell is about to begin their works in Glengad, it seems that the state operation against the community has kicked into gear".

Last year saw a protest camp at Rosspoint, as dogged direct action helped prevent work beginning on the pipe laying before the winter lay-off. These protests included a ten day hunger strike by Maura Harrington. (See SchNEWS 647). But now work could be about to begin again soon so the campaign is building up again - for updates and further news see www.shelltosea.com

HELL-ICOPTER

A fox hunt follower's recklessness had fatal consequences this Monday after he ran into a gyrocopter being used by activists to monitor the Warwickshire fox hunt. Trevor Morse inexplicably walked onto the runway as the copter was taxiing - and into its rear propeller. Tragic, yes, but no reason for the pilot and passenger to be immediately arrested, with the pilot being remanded until March 23rd and charged with murder. The passenger was released on bail on suspicion of murder.

In contrast to this, no one has ever been charged with the murder of animal rights activists like Jill Phipps (See SchNEWS 8, 59), Mike Hill, Tom Worby and others. The double standards which deemed these murders 'accidents' sees two hunt monitors arrested for murder when an idiot wanders into their path on a runway. Even a member of the hunt, Sam Butler, said it was a "tragic fatal accident". Despite all evidence to the contrary - there is video footage of the incident - a different set of laws applies to animal rights activists.

* For more about killed animal rights activists see www.jillphipps.org.uk

* Hunt Sabs Association <http://hsa.enviroweb.org>

TIED IN LEGAL NOTTS

Nottingham student activist **Hicham Yezza** has been sentenced to nine months imprisonment for allegedly deceiving immigration officials. Having been in England for fourteen years, after coming from Algeria, Hicham was initially caught up in a high profile arrest in June 2008 on bogus terror charges after allegedly downloading an Al Qaeda training manual off a US government site for research purposes as part of another student's PHD (See SchNEWS 634).

After having his house raided and computer taken, he was interrogated for six days, and upon getting out was immediately re-arrested for immigration inconsistencies and held for another four weeks. Prior to this arrest Hicham was a student activist at Nottingham Uni and magazine editor, and since has been speaking at conferences on global politics and peace. The offence he is being gaoled over is a matter of a 'technicality'. See <http://freehicham.co.uk>

G20-20 VISION

In the build-up to the **G20 Summit** in London April 1st-2nd (See SchNEWS 667), this Saturday (14th) the G20 Finance Ministers are holding pre-summit talks at an upmarket holiday home in West Sussex. Finance ministers and central bank governors will be choppered in to enjoy £500-a-night rooms (which even includes a comprehensive pillow menu for you to choose from - no really!).

A badly kept secret, the location is 40 miles south of London at the South Lodge Hotel, in Brighton Road, Lower Beeding, near Horsham. It won't be hard to spot, with roadblocks, armed police, and bridleways and footpaths in the area closed off, in a £6 million police operation on the scale of a Brighton Labour Party conference.

* Also, on February 28th, security at the Excel Centre in East London's Docklands had a taste of things to come when it hosts the G20 Summit next month, after anti-arms campaigners protested at The Baby Show, being held there. This protest targeted Clarion Events, who hold this and other trade shows in London, including the DSEI Arms Fair, which is happening again this September at the Excel Centre (for previous Clarion protests see SchNEWS 655) See also www.dsei.org

* There is a range of protests against the G20 Summit in London April 1st-2nd bringing together those fighting against various aspects of capitalism and climate change see www.g20meltdown.org www.climatecamp.org.uk/g20 www.fossilfoolshdayofaction.org

...and finally...

Break out the sitars and cue the europop-bhagra! Bring on the sari dancers and set the cameras to Bollywood: "We've been together for so long - trusted friends and partners... what more can I pledge to make our future strong?"

Heartfelt words indeed. Especially when crowned by a leather jacketed stud to his vulnerable looking lady friend. "I need to feel safe and sheltered - security and protection, commitment and perfection, defence and dedication. Together, forever I will hold you in my heart," she whimpers in reply.

But who are this heat warming (/vomit inducing) young couple? We can only assume they represent India herself and the swarthy charm of Israeli arms manufacturer Rafael - because this is a promotional video made by Rafael to promote themselves at the Indian defence ministry's annual air show. Ignore the cringing stereotypes, suggesting India is a helpless virgin in need of a handsome protector, just notice the flower-draped missiles casually adorning the dancefloor and we're ready for one of the most annoying choruses of all time: "Dinga dinga, dinga dinga, dinga dinga, dinga dinga dee."

And they're in all deadly earnest (no pun intended of course - but we guarantee you will want to kill somebody by the time the song ends).

This 'gem' could easily win Wired.com's new competition to find the most excruciating military promotion video - but it's not a given as every death-seller out there seems proud to display their multi-dimensional complete lack of taste.

Don't miss BAE systems grinning their way through Queen's 'Don't Stop Me Now' or the uplifting rockin' 'Defense Intelligence Agency' ad which sets new standards in irony-free corporate-style cheese. These video's are not to be missed, trust us. Judge for yourself at http://blog.wired.com/defense/iron_eagles/index.html

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