

‘That Child is My Child’: In Palestine as Well as in Britain

David Halpin FRCS 31st October 2023

As a boarder at Shaftesbury Grammar School 1951-58 and at age 14 I was second in proposing the motion 'law is for the lawyers'! Our new and wonderful headmaster John Brett, his face badly scarred in a tank at Normandy, was encouraging independent thinking - more vital now than ever. I quoted Bishop John Donne 1572-1631

No man is an island, Entire of itself; Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, As well as if a promontory were: As well as if a manor of thy friend's Or of thine own were.

Any man's death diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

And that is what was in the front of my mind during Christmas of 2002 when I decided to charter a ship to Gaza, a strip 25 miles by 5 miles on the eastern shore of the most beautiful Mediterranean Sea. Presently home - of sorts, to 2.3 million people. I said last week that there were 70,000 Palestinians there in WW2 - an oasis on what the Romans, earlier conquerors, called the Via Maris. In 1948, three years after the Allied forces with the crucial help of Russia - losing 25 million soldiers and civilians on the eastern front, had defeated the most evil Nazis. 250,000 Palestinians fled from Zionist weapons and terror to Gaza - by land and sea. The other 520,000 fled to Jordan, the Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and a few to Britain - and gradually all round our world. The Palestinian diaspora is about 10 million people. All these families represented 80% of the Palestinian population before the naqba – the catastrophe of 1947/8.

The Voyage of the Dove and the Dolphin was announced on January 3rd 2003 in the three front pages of the Western Morning News. 28 days later, and after racing thought and action, SS Barbara slipped its moorings from Haldon Quay in Torbay as the day faded. It was symbolic that back on that January 3rd, with so many calls coming in that we had to set up a second 'phone line, one call was from Andrea. She was the daughter of an East Devon farmer and mother of 6 children with Adli Hammad her husband. His family were refugees in Gaza, and Andrea said 'he might be able to help' since he was, as often in Gaza, but traveling freely with a British passport.

This is the film of twenty minutes of the voyage and of our fleeting four days in Palestine. My 'voice over' is all unscripted but include the words 'Warsaw ghetto'.

<https://youtu.be/CdTJG2ZswUg>

The preface - Eyes Open Gaza

The voyage of the Dove and Dolphin on MV Barbara from Torquay in the UK to Ashdod in Israel was conceived and lead by David Halpin. The crew was Danish, there were four British passengers including David and there were 50 tons of flour, cheese, vegetable oil, milk powder and olive oil in the hold. There were also a thousand pounds worth of dressings from Dr Hamami, 1.2 tons of waste carpet wool for weaving, and clothes and blankets.

This journey took place in the first two weeks of February 2003, six weeks before the illegal war on Iraq was unleashed. It was a cry for justice in Palestine, a shout against the looming war on Iraq and a demonstration of our common humanity. This film is a pastiche of TV broadcasts and amateur video recordings taken inside Gaza. It starts in darkness with the officer of the watch being interrogated from a fixed wing plane in the eastern Mediterranean.
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This cry - of so many for justice - and for international law, has gone unheeded. Know this from Defence for Children International - Palestine branch. I receive bulletins directly from its team in Ramallah - within the ineptly named 'West Bank'.

30-10-2023 The Palestinian child death toll in Gaza has climbed to 3,457, or more than 40% of the total number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in Gaza since October 7th. The total death toll in
Gaza
https://www.dci-palestine.org/40_percent_of_palestinians_killed_in_gaza_are_children.

The death toll on the 'Israeli' side from crude rockets, gunfire etc is about 1400, with soldiers among them.

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The population of south-west Britain is 5.7million and living on 9,200 square miles. The population of Israel and the 'Occupied Territories' is about 12 million, 10% of which as you have read is squeezed into Gaza. The land area is almost the same - 8000 square miles. Consider the equivalent of one million West Country people being squeezed into the garrison city of Plymouth - and then being bombed viciously - as by the Nazis in WW2. I recall a WREN officer telling me of the 'smell of death' in the ruins.

Just posted - a letter to Kevin Foster MP for Torbay, with copies to our local MPs - Messrs Stride and Morris -

<https://dhalpin.infoaction.org.uk/6-articles/palestineisrael/401-situation-in-gaza-case-ref-kf26520-mp-kevin-foster-torbay>

Many more fellow humans will be found eventually from under the rubble.

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