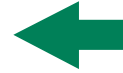


## INTERNATIONAL SERVICE MAKING CONNECTIONS

LINKING DEVELOPMENT WORKERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY



### *connecting with . . .* **Giorgia Brignone**

JCHR's training on human rights and democracy successfully ended its first class; it was time for the certificate award ceremony. The training is held in youth and sport clubs, and various trainers are involved to provide the youngsters with introductory education on human rights issues – such as women and children's rights. The training also covers violations that are related to the Israeli occupation and the ideas of democracy and democratic rule.

The first club in which the training was completed is called "Future Builders' Forum" and is situated in Abu Dis. As soon as Khawla – our project coordinator – and I got into the car and headed to the highway leading east of Jerusalem, I understood that the club we were going to was situated in the Abu Dis "West Bank" side. Abu Dis is one of the Jerusalem Palestinian neighbourhoods which are cut in two by the Israeli "Separation Wall". Even though the Wall is meant to secure Israelis from attacks against Israeli civilians, dividing them from Palestinians of the West Bank, in many areas of Jerusalem, the Wall is actually dividing Palestinian from Palestinian, family from family, preventing access to schools, workplaces and hospitals. This is

why, to get to Abu Dis "West Bank side", you have to drive for a good 40 minutes around Jerusalem, whereas before the Wall, it would take you about 15 minutes to cross the city and get to Abu Dis.



The club is situated in a one storey house, with some front yard and kindergarten's games on the right side. About 100 meters further down the road, the eye inevitably stops on the 9-meter high "Separation Wall". No more landscape beyond that point, just grey concrete.

The kids – though it is probably not fair to call them kids – are waiting for us in the garden, and on the stairs leading inside. We are late. We hurry inside and let the ceremony start. Since most of them speak little English, Khawla is in charge of the speech, to which I become a passive but attentive listener. She starts by asking them what they learned through this course. Some of them reply they learned about "women and children's rights", about "democracy", and someone else tells us he learned that he "has rights".

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The next question is what they are going to do with the ideas they have been taught during the course, and everyone raises their hands. A kid in the corner tells everyone he wants to "defend children and women's right!" a declaration of intent that is encouraged by Khawla with something that in English would sound like "Yes!! We're all with you on this!"

But the one I will not forget is the first kid that shouted – and unfortunately was shut up because he did not wait for his turn – he wanted to defend the country. He made me smile with pride. This was, after all, the purpose of our training – to give Palestinian teenagers an understanding of about their rights and how to defend them, themselves *and* their country, despite the situation.



At the end of the ceremony, Khawla introduces me to the manager of the centre: Dina, a girl in her twenties and a University student who works on a voluntary basis, and together with other volunteers, keeps the centre running. There is a kindergarten during the mornings and various other activities for older children and teenagers in the afternoons.

Dina asks me where I am from and whether I like the country. I tell her yes, but she looks at me with an amazed disbelief in her eyes. So I tell her I like

the Palestinians, but I have problems with the Israeli occupation and its policies against the Palestinians. She smiles at me and asks me why we are teaching them about human rights when they to go out of the centre and the first thing they have to see is the Wall. All I can reply to her is "This is exactly why we teach you about human rights!"

Sadly enough, for a Palestinian in this country, human rights education means recognising all the areas in which your rights are being violated. No wonder that every single Palestinian I tell what I do for a living, says to me "Human rights? There are no human rights here!"

### **Giorgia Brignone**

Human Rights Officer at the Jerusalem Centre for Human Rights (JCHR)  
East Jerusalem, 28 October 2004

*Photos: Giorgia at IS Preparation Week (IS/Betty East); children climbing through an opening in the Wall that has since been closed up ( Jos Koster/PENGON/Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign); children near the wall at Abu Dis (PENGON/Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign).*

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