

Interview

«The Uprising is the Focus of our Lives»

In August, *Democratic Palestine* interviewed Masoud Othman Zaiter who was expelled from Palestine by the Zionist authorities on January 1, 1989, together with 12 other Palestinians.



Masoud Othman Zaiter was born in Haifa, Palestine. His family was expelled from their home in 1948, when the state of Israel was founded. Afterwards he lived in Nablus, married and had six children. He began by telling us about his youth:

Due to my father's illness, I had to go to work after graduating from high school, rather than continuing my education. I was arrested the first time in 1962 by the Jordanian authorities, while I was still a teenager; I remained in prison until 1966, due to my nationalist activities. In 1968, after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, i.e., the rest of Palestine, I was arrested by the Israeli authorities, because of my anti-occupation activities. This time I spent nine years in prison. During my imprisonment, my family suffered the worst conditions. My daughter was born and raised in my absence, and my father became very ill. My release, after nine years, meant the continuation of my struggle.

In 1985, at the time of the escalated iron fist policy, I was put under administrative detention for six months. I was put under administrative detention once more in 1987, and again in 1988, before being expelled on January 1st.

What are the roots of the popular committees?

The popular committees existed in the towns, villages and camps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip before the uprising. They were basically formed to develop the work of the Palestinian political and mass organizations and trade unions. These committees were revitalized during the uprising. There are popular committees for relief, agriculture, education, support to families, health, popular resistance, etc., in addition to the strike forces. They are now the broadest framework in the occupied territories, not being limited to any one organization or area.

These committees are the main instrument for confronting the occupation on all levels, politically and organizationally, based on the United National Leadership's program. The leadership's calls are distributed everywhere by the popular committees the same day they are issued. The committees' main task is building popular authority by breaking all links with the occupation authorities - severing ties with the civil administration, boycotting Israeli goods, etc. Let's take, for example, the merchants' committee in Nablus. Its task is to circulate the United National Leadership's instructions among the merchants, to stress the boycott of Israeli goods for which there are local alternatives, to control prices and supervise the merchants' commitment to the leadership's decisions.

The relief committee, as another example, works to provide foodstuffs to besieged areas. All committees work together to achieve social solidarity and cooperation. The neighborhood committees follow up on landlords to make sure they are committed to the United National Leadership's order to lower rents by 25%. I am proud to mention that all the landlords of Palestine's West Bank and Gaza Strip have been very committed to these orders. Another example of the functions of the popular committees is preparing everything needed for special days of confrontation against the occupation authorities, called by the United National Leadership, such as gathering stones, erecting barricades, etc.

How do you view the intifada from outside, since your expulsion?

I feel confident and optimistic. I have faith in our people's potentials, especially since the uprising has become the focus of our thinking and lives inside and outside of Palestine.

The uprising has been exposed to many political schemes, in addition to the continuous repression aimed at aborting it. Its continuation and expansion has elicited international support, confused the US administration, put the Israeli government in a precarious position and increased the contradictions in the Israeli camp. For all these reasons, the occupation intensified the use of its old-new methods of divide and rule. It has issued false statements in the name of the United National Leadership in an attempt to confuse the masses and abort the uprising. It has spread rumors aimed at creating division in the ranks of the PLO and the masses. The unity and comprehensiveness of the uprising is the main source of its power. So the occupation tried to exploit any political difference among the Palestinian organizations. For example, during the last PNC session, the ►