

two dead bodies were removed.» Samples of the spray, which formed a reddish powder on the walls of the room, were sent to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for analysis. Hiddlestone thought the agent was «a sort of nerve gas» (quoted in Alofs, op. cit., p. 45).

Israel's indiscriminate use of these various poisonous gases against the Palestinian population in the occupied territories is a form of chemical warfare. Indeed, Ben Alofs maintains that, «The criminal use of harassing agents, being essentially chemical warfare agents, is a violation of the Geneva Conventions and the Protocol of Geneva on chemical warfare. As such, public or state prosecutors in charge of prosecuting war crimes should investigate whether there is sufficient ground to file charges against Israeli military personnel who are directly responsible, and against the authorities who have political responsibility...» (Alofs, op. cit., p. 51).

Injury that is much more difficult to quantify and analyze is the psychological effect of Israeli violence on the Palestinian population. There is hardly a family in the occupied territories that has been left untouched by the violence in one form or another. At the beginning of the intifada, a Gazan psychologist reported a substantial decrease in cases of anxiety and depression, and related this to the new feelings of empowerment brought by the uprising. But as the brutality of the occupation forces has increased with time, the psychological toll is being felt among the population, particularly children.

PHR reported that such violence derails normal adolescent development, «already distorted by profound feelings of futurelessness, by the prospect of menial employment, even for the highly educated, and by a sense of loss of national identity.» The closing of schools has massively interfered with necessary education and job training, thus making future prospects for thousands of Palestinians even more bleak. When the time comes, readjusting to «normal» life - one without pitched street battles with soldiers, detention and curfews - will certainly prove difficult for many.

For the thousands of small children whose parents are unable to protect them and who have repeatedly witnessed scenes of violence, often against their own family members, the consequences may be profound and long-term, according to PHR. «[They] are at risk of chronic anxiety and irritability, childhood depression, sleeplessness and nightmares, and disturbances of maturation.» The consequences for chil-

dren who have been direct victims of this violence are even more disturbing. PHR maintains that for the children who are witnessing or directly experiencing this violence, «there can be lifelong effects, distorting the perceptions of a whole generation, with consequences not only for their own lives but for the political future and the lives of a next generation as well.» This point was vividly illustrated in a vignette relayed by a West Bank Palestinian to a group of peacenik Israelis: «While walking with my two-year-old son, an army jeep slowly drove past and a soldier in the back began staring at us. I noticed that my son was staring directly back at the soldier, not blinking even for an instant. After a few moments of this, the soldier became visibly nervous and fidgety as my son continued to stare at him. The soldier suddenly burst out singing - whether to distract himself or my son, I'm not sure. You all had better make peace with me now before you're forced to make peace with my son later.»

Negative effects notwithstanding, clearly the Palestinians are willing to suffer the consequences of Israeli violence to achieve their political goals. Indeed, the psychological consequences of giving up and reverting back to the situation under occupation before the intifada would be far more intolerable.

The international response

Several international organizations have responded to the medical crisis in the occupied territories, including UNRWA, the ICRC and Amnesty International (AI). The responses have ranged from detailed reports condemning the extensive use of force and misuse of tear gas by the Israeli army issued by AI, to direct material aid. The latter has included the transfer of ambulances to the Palestinian Red Crescent by the ICRC and proposed support by UNRWA for an extension of Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza. Most recently, the European Community announced in July that it was contributing \$2.3 million for physiotherapy, basic health care and to train medical staff in the occupied territories. Material aid in this form meets rather than by-passes the commitment to self-reliance that is at the heart of the intifada by supporting existing Palestinian institutions.

UNRWA, in addition, has taken steps to transform its medical services - normally geared towards out-patient and mother-and-child care - to deal with the thousands of seriously injured casualties of the uprising. Clinic hours have been extended, extra medical personnel hired, medical

A Palestinian Red Crescent team in the West Bank

-George Azar

