



# THE BROKEN RIFLE

Newsletter of War Resisters' International

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## 15 May 2003: International Conscientious Objectors' Day Special Focus on Objectors in Israel and on Nonviolent Resistance to the Occupation of Palestine



Vigil opposite Military Prison No 6

[www.yesh-gvul.org](http://www.yesh-gvul.org)

### War Resistance in Israel – An Overview

Sergeiy Sandler

Israeli society is extremely militarised. Children in kindergartens may stage a military parade at their end of the year party. A few years later, they are likely to study some of their regular curricular subjects with teachers who are conscripts in military uniform. The head teacher of the high school where they study later in life might well be a medium-ranked military officer, who recently retired from career service. That officer's commanders have probably been appointed senior managers in the public or private sector of the economy. Generals, if they seek a political career, become cabinet ministers, and later on can assume quite naturally the position of Prime Minister.

In a militarised society, such as Israel, conscription is a central instrument of political power and a major issue on the political agen-

da. Social inequalities are reproduced, reinforced and often created by the conscription policy of the army. Thus, members of the Palestinian minority among Israeli citizens are not called up to military service, and this fact is then used as an excuse for official and unofficial discrimination against them in all spheres of life. For instance, when an employer is looking for a worker "with military service completed", this would be a code name for "Arabs not wanted". Some small groups within the Palestinian minority (notably the Druze community) are conscripted nevertheless, following the old maxim 'divide and conquer'.

Within the Jewish ethnic majority, the military reinforces social inequality between the genders and between the social classes. Although most Jewish women are drafted, they are required to serve a shorter term of military service (20–21 months, as opposed to 3 years for men) and are given functions within the mil-

### Editorial

This issue of *The Broken Rifle* focuses on War Resisters' International's campaign in support of Israeli conscientious objectors and refusers, and non-violent resistance to the occupation of the Palestinian Territories.

For some years now War Resisters' International has cooperated with several of Israel's CO and refusenik groups. Recently, the number of COs – both selective refusers and draft resisters – increased sharply. In response, the Israeli authorities increased their repression of conscientious objectors: extended imprisonment and court-martials of COs, potentially leading to longer prison terms.

All this makes international support ever more important, including protest letters, solidarity actions, and an international campaign. This issue of *The Broken Rifle* provides information and background material for campaigning. WRI's website provides even more material. Please use it – Israel's COs need our support!

#### Andreas Speck

CO Campaign Worker at the WRI office, London

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**Yesh Gvul:****Adopting a refusenik**

Yesh Gvul have found over the years that an effective way of supporting jailed refuseniks, is by having them adopted by support groups from outside of Israel.

Whenever a refusenik is jailed, support groups are alerted, sparking a broad range of activities. Emails, letters and phone calls go out to the refusenik's family and to the jail where he is held; the adoption group exerts political pressure with protests to the nearest Israeli diplomatic mission, while conducting extensive actions within its own community. The adoption group also offers material assistance, raising funds to help the refusenik's dependants.

**Practical Steps***Moral Support*

As soon as the group declares its willingness to adopt a prisoner, a complete kit goes out including personal information – age, occupation, marital status (and hopefully a picture), phone and mail contacts, details of family members that request contact, and recommendations by the refusenik's counselor in Israel about how to provide support. Such calls are of enormous help at a time of great stress.

*Political Action*

**Protests in support of the prisoner** and calling for his/her release at the nearest Israeli mission, tied in with pressure on local media/politicians etc. with the intention of bringing pressure on the IDF and the Israeli government.

*Financial support*

Reservists called in for active duty get their civilian salary replaced by Israeli National Insurance. Needless to say, refuseniks who are jailed are denied this support. Keren Yesh Gvul (the Yesh Gvul Fund) provides refuseniks requesting financial assistance with approximately \$750 US for a month in prison. Groups can help out by raising this money and making out a check to the order of: "Keren Yesh Gvul", to be mailed to: PO Box 6953, Jerusalem 91068, ISRAEL

Details for Yesh Gvul see p3



Shministim (High School seniors) activists burn their draft papers.

[www.shministim.org](http://www.shministim.org)

itary that are deemed unimportant. This is reflected in women's social status and in their marginalisation in the public sphere (for instance, women make up less than 10% of the Israeli parliament). Opinions of generals on public matters are considered authoritative. Opinions of women are considered irrelevant. Working-class Jewish men are usually assigned to technical and logistic functions within the military, so that, like women and Druze soldiers and unlike other Jewish men, they are later unable to convert their military service into considerable social benefits.

To illustrate the point further, all observant Jewish women as well as Druze and Jewish men engaged in religious studies, are exempted from military service. In the case of Jewish men (i.e. the privileged group), this issue has become a focus of one of the most heated public debates in Israel in the last decade.

What this somewhat lengthy introduction aims to show is that, in Israel, the military is the focus of political power, its policies are hardly questioned publicly, and conscription is a major political issue. In these conditions, war resistance of all kinds has special political importance. It is no surprise that, since the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000, while the radical opposition to Israel's policies and crimes in the Occupied Territories has been largely silenced, organised groups of war resisters have repeatedly managed to break through into the Israeli mainstream media and onto the political agenda.

As mentioned above, conscription policy forms and reinforces social divides in Israeli society. Accordingly, war resisters in Israel form a very wide social and political diversity. A basic overview of this diversity is useful in understanding this important social and political movement of resistance in Israel.

To begin with, refusal to perform military service varies in scope and ideological motivation. Some objectors are motivated by considerations having to do specifically with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and with the occupation of Palestine, while others, e.g. pacifists and anarchists, emphasise broader moral and political concerns. (Not that any sharp border can be

drawn between these two groups. Often enough it is only a matter of stressing one moment or another in an objector's overall stance.) Some object to performing military service of all kinds, while others only refuse to perform military service in the Occupied Territories.

Objectors are also a diverse group in terms of social characteristics. Some of them are young people in their teens, refusing to be enlisted, while others are in their 20s, 30s or 40s, refusing to perform reserves service. Many come from middle-class families, but there are also objectors from working-class families, including a notable group of immigrants from the former USSR. Some have a family history of activity in the radical left, while many others encounter a hostile attitude by their parents and other relatives (and it sometimes happens that young objectors eventually involve their initially hostile parents in active support of the objectors and of their cause).

An important group within the objectors' movement is that of women objectors. Jewish women in Israel are drafted. To the best of our knowledge, Israel is at present the only country where mandatory conscription for women exists. Correspondingly, there is an active and large movement of women draft resisters in Israel, the only one of its kind in the world. Israeli conscription legislation is also anomalous in that a conscientious objector status is recognised for women only. This fact sets women objectors as a distinct group apart from their male counterparts.

Another group of special interest is that of Druze objectors. As mentioned earlier, Druze men, unlike other Palestinian Israelis, are drafted into the army. Since 1956, when the decision to draft Druze men was made by the Israeli government, there has existed a movement of Druze draft resisters. Druze objectors usually emphasise their refusal to fight an ethnic war against their own people. They have often been kept behind bars for considerably longer than other objectors.

Since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000, the number of declared objectors has grown dramatically. A trickle of



individuals has grown into the thousands. Roughly two hundred objectors have so far been imprisoned, some of them repeatedly (for up to eight times in a row). Two organised groups of objectors – the Letter of the High School Seniors (Shministim) and Courage to Refuse – made collective declarations of objection and have generated intense and heated debate in Israeli society and in the mainstream media. Within Israel's radical left, among those opposing the occupation of Palestine and the Israeli army's actions in the territories it occupies, the movement of objectors has now assumed a central and prominent status.

But in a way, this politicised movement of declared objectors is only the tip of an iceberg. Draft statistics indicates that, over the last decade, there has been a sharp increase in the number of people who are not conscripted or are discharged prematurely from military service. It is common knowledge that most of these people in fact initiate their discharge. They form what we call grey objection. Some of these grey objectors are officially discharged on grounds of poor health (usually poor mental health). Others spend time in military prison until they are discharged on grounds of 'incompatibility'. Many women obtain an exemption by claiming (often falsely) that they are obser-

vant religious Jews. Together with the Palestinian minority (who are not called up, although eligible by law to perform military service), these grey objectors amount to a small majority (roughly 55–57%) of their age group among Israeli citizens.

It is difficult to list the various motives behind grey objection. Some of these grey objectors are in fact motivated politically and ideologically, but they opt for the easier way to get out of the army and do not declare these motives in public. Others avoid military service because their family relies on their income from work for livelihood. Others still wish to pursue academic studies or build a career, and feel military service is a waste of time. Many would indeed say that they just don't feel like going to the army. But whatever explanation grey objectors give to their refusal to serve in the army, this refusal in fact carries great political importance. In the highly militarised Israeli society, not going to the army means voting with one's feet, voting against the continued militarisation of Israeli society and against the power structure that this militarisation creates.

Thus, in many ways, the diverse movement of objectors in Israel plays a pivotal role in resisting war in one of the most heated war zones on earth today.

## War Resisters' International statement on recognising the right to conscientious objection Support to Israeli conscientious objectors is needed

*War Resisters' International Executive, 23 February 2003*

The Executive Committee of War Resisters' International, the 81-year-old international network of pacifist organisations with 90 affiliates in 45 countries, expressed its grave concern about the situation of conscientious objectors to military service in Israel during its Executive meeting in London this weekend. In light of the increased punishment of Israeli conscientious objectors, the Executive Committee calls on the Israeli government to recognise the human right to conscientious objection. It calls on the international peace movement to support Israeli conscientious objectors, and to voice its protest against Israeli government policy on conscientious objection.

Israel does not recognise the right to conscientious objection, which is derived from Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, of which Israel is a signatory. On top of that, and in response to the increasing number of conscientious objectors who refuse to enlist in the IDF, the Israeli authorities increased sentences for draft resisters. Again in violation of international legal standards, conscientious objectors are sent to prison again and again – most recently conscientious objector Jonathan Ben-Artzi received his eighth prison term, and Dror Boimel received a seventh prison term. In a further move to break conscientious objectors, they now face court-martials, although they already spent more than 150 days in prison. A court-martial can sentence conscientious objectors to up to 3 years in prison. Jonathan Ben-Artzi and Dror Boimel will be the first.

A WRI report on conscientious objection to military service in Israel, recently submitted to the United Nations Committee on Human Rights, lists more than 180 conscientious objectors who

served prison terms for their conscientious objection between September 2001 and January 2003 – a total of more than 6,500 days in prison .

War Resisters' International calls on the Israeli government

- ♦ to recognise the right to conscientious objection, and to pass a law on conscientious objection according to the standards set out in UN Commission on Human Rights resolutions 1998/77 and 2002/45;
- ♦ to immediately release all imprisoned conscientious objectors, and to postpone call-up for all those who declare their conscientious objection to military service until a law has been introduced.

War Resisters' International urges its affiliates, other peace movement organisations, and everyone

- ♦ to voice their protest against the imprisonment of conscientious objectors in Israel by writing letters to Israeli embassies, the Israeli government, and the Israeli military;
- ♦ to support imprisoned conscientious objectors by sending letters to prisoners ;
- ♦ to take part in WRI's campaign in support of conscientious objectors in Israel, which will culminate on 15th May, International Conscientious Objectors' Day: organise protest actions, vigils, workshops, public debates on 15th May, to raise awareness about and support conscientious objectors in Israel;
- ♦ to join a WRI delegation to observe court-martials against conscientious objectors in Israel. Israel's conscientious objectors need our support.

## Ometz Le'sarev ("Courage to Refuse")

A group of reserve combat officers and soldiers whose initial refusal declaration in January 2002 generated widespread controversy throughout Israel and re-energised the peace movement.

<http://www.seruv.org/default-eng.asp>

## Yesh Gvul

The oldest and most active organisation supporting reservists who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories (known as 'selective refusal').

Yesh Gvul, PO Box 6953, Jerusalem 91068, Israel  
Telephone: +972-2-6250271  
[info@yesh-gvul.org](mailto:info@yesh-gvul.org)  
<http://www.yesh-gvul.org>

## Shministim ("High School Seniors")

Once numbering 62, the Shministim now numbers 300 high school seniors who have announced that they "refuse to be soldiers for occupation."

Shministim movement  
PO Box 70094, Haifa 31700  
Israel  
[shministim@hotmail.com](mailto:shministim@hotmail.com)  
<http://www.shministim.org>

## New Profile

A feminist movement working to demilitarise Israeli society. Offers information and various forms of support to objectors of all kinds, and to anyone unwilling to serve in the Israeli army.

New Profile, P.O. Box 48005, Tel Aviv 61480, Israel  
+972-3-5160119  
[newprofile@speedy.co.il](mailto:newprofile@speedy.co.il)  
<http://www.newprofile.org/english>

## Druze Initiative Committee

Supports Druze conscientious objectors.

Druze Initiative Committee for Conscientious Objection  
PO Box 8, Shfar'am 20200, Israel



*Israel is the only country with conscription for women. Shani Werner, a woman activist with the Shministim and with New Profile, takes a look at women's draft resistance.*

## Women's Objection to Military Service in Israel

Shani Werner

Israel is the only country in the world that practises conscription for women. It is thus also the only country in the world where women's draft resistance exists. We do not know the exact extent of this movement, because many of the young women choose to undergo this procedure on their own (and therefore we do not know of them). Additionally, the army refrains from making such data known to the public.

Unlike men who declare their refusal to enlist and are sent to a military prison, women's objection to serve on grounds of conscience is officially recognised by the state. Such women are entitled to exemption, provided they convince a military commission popularly known as 'the conscience committee' that their objection is indeed sincere.

The right to receive a release on grounds of conscience is one of the most well kept secrets of the Israeli army. Most of the conscription candidates are not aware of this right to refuse. The IDF does not readily disseminate information on how to realise this right. A negligible mention of this subject – if any – appears among the preparatory information sent to candidates for conscription. Women who inquire about this at conscription centers are often told "there is no such thing".

The process required of the women who do see the 'conscientious committee', is not simple. The 'conscience committee' treats young women objectors arbitrarily and inconsistently. In some cases, their interview is short and trivial, in others it is pointedly humiliating and seriously intimidating. Seventeen-year-old girls have to face a committee which is usually comprised entirely of much older men, by themselves, without legal council or moral support. Until recently, the 'conscience committee' rejected most of the

women after their first application, and only exempted (most of) them after their second try - when they contested the decision. Many women, however, were not aware that they could appeal.

The New Profile Movement helps women COs offering a package of detailed information on this subject, composed by conscientious objector Moran Cohen and attorney Yossi Wolfson, and the movement's network of counselors who provide explanations and supportive, personal assistance. At present, more and more young women are becoming aware of this option, and most women who apply to the military commission are indeed exempted.

Although the Israeli army exempts women objectors relatively easily, in comparison to its treatment of male objectors, refusal as such is not an easy step to take. It requires every woman to confront herself, the way she was raised, and an environment that often resents her act and cannot understand it. Furthermore, the fact that women are favored over men regarding the right to refuse, results directly from women's inferior status in the army and in Israeli society at large. Women are exempt since they are unimportant, as it were not 'the real thing' – a combat soldier. Accordingly, their refusal – a personal step that is brave and not at all easy – is 'negligible', not reported by the media, invisible to the public eye.

However, the voice of the female-objectors is beginning to be heard today more than ever. In the past, some women would marry at 18 in order to avoid military service (married women are exempted from military service) while others chose to declare themselves religious (observant women are also exempt from service). A few years back, most young women didn't even know of their right to be released for reasons of conscience, and were unaware of the groups that could assist them in their course of action. Later, young women refused, but their refusal did not count and was not 'counted', not even by the refusal movements. In 2001, when the Seniors' letter, written by both female and male objectors, was published, female objectors were counted for the first time in Israel.

Today our voice is beginning to be heard. The IDF and the Israeli media still silences and marginalises the phenomenon, but more and more young women are choosing to refuse for reasons of conscience, and

receive support and assistance. The Israeli refusal movements must keep raising the voices of the female objectors as a tool for enlarging the number of objectors, and as a way of fighting the combination of chauvinism and militarism that dominates Israeli society, a society which underrates the importance of women's objection in the same way it underrates women's military service.

(Based on an article by Rela Mazali and Shani Werner)

## Druze Conscientious Objectors: Discrimination, silence, and

Andreas Speck

The situation of Druze conscientious objectors does not receive much attention - neither from the media, nor from the peace movement inside Israel, nor from abroad.

The Druze form a minority within the Arab population of Israel. When Israel introduced military service in 1949, it was supposed to be compulsory for all Arab and Palestinian men. However, it was never enforced on Palestinian citizens of Israel, partly due to the resistance by Christian and Muslim Palestinians. All Arab men get automatically exempted from military service. The situation of the Druze is different. Due to manipulation the Israeli authorities managed to coerce 16 Druze leaders into signing an agreement about compulsory military service for the Druze in 1956. Since then, Druze men are eligible for military service – Druze women, unlike Jewish Israeli women, are not.

The Druze Initiative Committee for Conscientious Objection was founded in 1972. It has four main objectives:

- an end to compulsory military service;
- opposition to confiscation of Druze land;
- no interference of the Israeli state in matters of nationality and religion;
- democracy and equal rights.

The fate of Druze conscientious objectors receives little public attention. There are dozens of Druze objectors in prison at any one time, and the Druze Initiative Committee publishes the names of those who agree to it. While most Druze who refuse to serve in the Israeli army do so for reasons of conscience, some refuse for economic or religious reasons.

The accumulated prison terms of Druze objectors of all kinds reach several thousand years. Jihad Sa'ad, secretary of the Druze Initiative Committee, said that about 40% of all Druze men refuse to serve – he himself did his



Military Prison No 6 in Atlit: Is women's draft resistance less important, because women don't go to prison? [www.shministim.org](http://www.shministim.org)



*Yesh Gvul's Peretz Kidron takes a look at selective refusal, Israel's specific invention to resist the occupation from within the military*

## The Limits of Obedience

Peretz Kidron

'Selective refusal' constitutes a significant departure from traditional forms of anti-militarist resistance as conducted by pacifists or conscientious objectors who reject outright military service or participation in military action. Selective refusal emerged in Israel in the particular circumstances of individual soldiers and reservists not opposed in principle to army service – or even to participation in fighting when that is justified as a last resort to resist aggression, if all other means have been exhausted – but who nevertheless object, on political and/or

moral grounds, to a particular assignment or campaign.

Although there had been individual cases of refuseniks previously, 'selective refusal' first arrived on the scene in significant numbers during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Hundreds of reservists who were called up to take part in the campaign refused to fight, particularly when then prime minister Menahem Begin defined it as "a war of choice" i.e. one not absolutely essential for the defence of Israel. The outbreak of the fighting prompted the formation of Yesh Gvul (There's a Border/There's a Limit) which organised active support for the refuseniks. Yesh Gvul recorded at least 168 refuseniks jailed – some repeatedly – in the course of that campaign. But the rapid growth of the selective refusal movement made commanding officers more cautious, and many refuseniks were not disciplined, instead being reassigned to other duties within Israel.

The selective refusal movement became a spearhead of the anti-war coalition, helping to rally public opinion to protest the bloody and futile campaign. In addition to galvanising anti-war activity, the refuseniks also exerted unexpectedly powerful pressure on the decision-making military and political echelons. We have it on the authority of then army commander Gen. Moshe Levy that the growth of the refusal movement, and "the fear that the numbers of refuseniks could soon rise from hundreds into thousands and tens of thousands" was one of the main grounds for the army command's recommendation in 1984 to call off the campaign.

A further wave of selective refusals came about in the first Palestinian intifada in 1987, when hundreds of soldiers refused to take part in the campaign of repression against the Palestinian population (again, the vast majority were reservists, with very few among the young conscripts doing their mandatory 3-year duty). Again, the refuseniks helped spur opposition, which ultimately contributed to the decision of the Israeli government to attend the Madrid conference, for the first time ever consenting to sit across the table from a Palestinian delegation.

The current intifada has again boosted numbers of selective refuseniks. Over 1000 soldiers, reservists and young people awaiting induction, are committed to refusal to take part in repression of the Palestinian population. Some 200 refuseniks have been jailed to date. New refusal groups have emerged, including for the first time significant numbers of young conscripts. Yesh Gvul is keeping

up its campaign of leafleting at army transportation centres, universities and high schools, in an effort to educate soldiers and reservists to refuse participation in war crimes or human rights abuses.

It is the conviction of Yesh Gvul that selective refusal is a most valuable means of opposing militarism for the paradoxical reason that resistance comes from within the army, from soldiers and officers who proclaim their willingness to undertake legitimate defensive duties and therefore cannot simply be brushed off as 'shirkers' or 'cowards'. Promotion of this form of resistance requires a lengthy and persistent educational effort, to teach soldiers to live up to their responsibility – legal, moral and political – for their actions, even when those actions are carried out under orders. It is our aim to induce soldiers to scrutinise the commands of their superiors, and when they find those commands to be "flagrantly illegal" – to refuse, even at the risk of punishment.

This strategy rests upon a concept of broad civic responsibility for an army which acts in your name. We respect the convictions of those who refuse any form of military service, but we do not find this an adequate discharge of that responsibility. The individual may assuage his/her conscience with the sense that "My hands are clean of this abomination", but the abomination will continue unless he/she takes action to halt the army's unworthy activities, whether in foreign wars or oppression of local populations. Selective refusal is such action, in that it exerts valuable and highly effective pressure from within the army.

In an innovative twist, selective refusal applies the principles of nonviolent civil disobedience, as pioneered by Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr., to that least 'civil' of all formations, the army. The distinction drawn between legitimate and non-legitimate military duties is a valuable instrument of the anti-war movement, helping to educate a public subjected to 'patriotic' brainwashing by the military and political establishment. It is our conviction that the Israeli model of selective refusal, and the educational and political campaign supporting it, can and should be applied in all armies.

### ors: ignorance

military service, but then refused his reserve duty later. One of his sons – Rabia Jihad Sa'ad, is imprisoned at present, awaiting to be court-martialed.

Several Druze conscientious objectors spent 2½ to 3 years in prison – so far unthinkable for Jewish Israeli COs. One factor is that many Druze COs don't play by the rules: while Jewish Israeli COs present themselves at the Induction base on the day when they are supposed to enlist in the army, Druze COs often don't present themselves, or present themselves much later. This often leads to court martials for desertion, and much higher sentences. Issues of education and racism combine, and the outcome is much longer imprisonment for Druze conscientious objectors.

Salman Natour, a Druze writer, emphasises that the struggle of Druze conscientious objectors cannot be seen apart from the struggle to end compulsory military service in general. He sees two main aspects in this refusal:

Political: the Druze belong to the Arab nation, and should be part of the struggle to change Israeli policy – part of the struggle for equal rights within Israel.

Moral: the Israeli state cannot recruit Druze, because they are part of the Israeli Palestinian people and cannot be part of an army that fights against themselves. But conscientious objection is also a general statement against violence and war.

The Druze Initiative Committee cooperates with the Israeli objectors' organisations. As the Druze live within Israel – and among Jews – the support from Jewish groups is very important to them.

(This article is based on discussions at a meeting in Haifa, January 2003)



## Contacts in the Palestinian Territories

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hebron.php



International Solidarity  
Movement in action in the  
Palestinian Territories.

www.palsolidarity.org

## New Hope for Palestinians? The International Solidarity Movement

Huwaida Araf

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) was founded to support and strengthen the Palestinian nonviolent resistance to Israeli occupation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Palestinian people, who have been dispossessed since 1948 – over 750,000 driven from their lands for the establishment of the Israeli state, and approximately 3 million who have been living under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 – over the years have adopted various means of struggle in an attempt to regain their homeland. The overwhelming focus of the international community has been on the Palestinian armed struggle with very little or no recognition of the more powerful and prominent nonviolent struggle of the Palestinian people, the culmination of which was expressed in the 'Intifada' – the Palestinian uprising (1987–1993). Through the years, the various means of the Palestinian popular struggle have included boycott of Israeli goods and services, rejection of Israeli military administration, neighborhood schools (when the Israeli army would shut down state Palestinian schools and universities), mass marches, strikes, withholding taxes and more.

From the beginning of the current Palestinian uprising in September of 2000, protesters taking to the streets of Ramallah, Nablus, Gaza, Jerusalem and elsewhere were responded to with brute military force, leading to over 100 Palestinian deaths within one month. The Israeli military adopted practices aimed at intimidating and punishing a people for daring to speak out against their repression. In the first few weeks of the Intifada, the protests involved all aspects of Palestinian society – civilian men, women and children. Helicopter gunships, tanks, armored personnel carriers and machine-gun carrying soldiers were used to take on the protesters. The message was clear – civilians would not be protect-

ed; Palestinian men, women and children would be shot if they came out to protest the occupation. In addition, multiplying check-points, creating roadblocks, tearing up Palestinian roads and making it 'illegal' and dangerous for Palestinians to move freely, increased Palestinian fragmentation and hampered the ability of Palestinian civilians to organise. The aforementioned, coupled with a growing sense of disillusionment and weariness, made it clear that the Palestinian people needed a new resource at their disposal in order to empower the civil-based nonviolent resistance efforts. The resources the Israeli government has at its disposal are well-known – over \$2 billion in direct military aid from the United States, another \$1 billion in direct non-military aid from the U.S., hundreds of millions of dollars in private funds, and the unquestioned diplomatic support of the only superpower in the world exercised through veto in the UN Security Council on any resolution that would compel Israel to abide by international law. Palestinians have no such resources at their disposal, other than feelings of unorganised solidarity from millions of people around the world. This feeling of solidarity, these civilians, could be realised as a resource that could enable the Palestinian people to challenge their oppressors, and indeed the international community to challenge a brutal system (the Israeli occupation), which must be ended.

The Palestinians, as an occupied people, have a right, enshrined in international law\*, to resist their occupiers using armed struggle. The ISM recognises this right but at the same time believes that nonviolent resistance can be a more effective and powerful means of resistance, thus is committed to using nonviolent, direct-action methods and principles to confront and challenge the Israeli occupation forces and policies. The ISM strategy is based on addressing four key needs:

1) Protection. Palestinian civilians acting or protesting alone are often confronted with





lethal forms of violence. The Palestinian people have been so dehumanised that even their executions are blamed on them. The targeting of Palestinian children has been justified with the excuse that they “throw rocks at the soldiers” as if this somehow excuses putting bullets in their heads, and numerous Palestinian women have died at checkpoints (prevented by soldiers from passing for medical care), shot walking in their own streets and crushed to death in their own homes (when soldiers demolish their homes on top of them). No one holds Israel accountable for Palestinian deaths; the international community has failed to live up to its obligation to the Palestinian people, respect their status as ‘protected persons’ under the Fourth Geneva Conventions. The presence of international civilians, however, has provided a degree of protection for those Palestinians challenging the brutality of occupation every day. When international civilians are present, less lethal forms of violence are used.

2) Accurately portraying the struggle / Giving the Palestinians a voice. The forces arguing and/or otherwise working to maintain Israeli hold on Palestinian territory, to prolong the occupation and indeed even to expand Israeli colonisation policies, use extensive media access and resources to manipulate the facts in order to legitimise the widespread denial of basic rights to the Palestinian people. It's important to show that the Palestinian struggle is not against Israel or the Jewish people but rather a struggle against occupation, oppression and a denial of freedom. International civilians taking to the streets with Palestinians help demonstrate that the Palestinian struggle is for universal values of equality, human rights, dignity and freedom.

3) First-hand accounts. By inviting people from all over the world to come to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we are increasing witness and documentation of what is happening on the ground. Rachel Corrie, an ISM volunteer who was killed, crushed by an Israeli bulldozer on March 16, 2003 wrote, “no amount of reading, attendance at conferences, documentary viewing and word of mouth could

have prepared me for the reality of the situation here”. But we want to make sure that word-of-mouth accounts do reach people and if the mainstream mass media will not accurately portray the struggle against oppression, one by one, ISM activists will. And there will come a day, brought on by such efforts, that the world will look back and say “if only we had known...” We are working for that day to come sooner rather than later.

4) Hope. Palestinians feel abandoned by the international community. Years of asking for respect of UN Resolutions and international law have been ignored. This, combined with Israel's complete control of all travel in or out of the Palestinian territories, has created a sense of overwhelming isolation and desperation, which has stripped Palestinians of their hope for a better future. International civilians coming in to stand with the Palestinian people have broken that isolation and provided a crack of hope that people are listening. The kamikaze strategy aimed at Israeli civilians, that has been rightly condemned by the international community, is a direct result of the brutality of occupation and the desperation it fosters. If internationally recognised bodies and governments signatory to the Fourth Geneva Convention continue to shy away from direct action to support the Palestinian people's legitimate right to freedom, and only pay lip service to Palestinian human rights, the international community is sending a direct message of hopelessness to people who have suffered long enough under occupation.

A clear sense of justice, community organisation, and the ability to remain steadfast in the face of continued oppression are strengths of the Palestinian people. The ISM is committed to supporting these resistance efforts by using our voices and nonviolent direct action on the ground to confront and challenge the Israeli occupation, and to struggle for freedom long denied.

\* General Assembly resolution 37/43 affirms the right of an occupied people to resist foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle

## The Broken Rifle

*The Broken Rifle* is the newsletter of War Resisters' International, and is usually published in English, Spanish, French and German. This is issue 58, May 2003.

This issue of *The Broken Rifle* was produced by Andreas Speck, Sergei Sandler, Shani Werner, Huwaida Araf, and Peretz Kidron, with help from Alberto Estefania, Tikiri, and many others, who provided the information used in this issue.

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If you want extra copies of this issue of *The Broken Rifle*, please contact the WRI office, or download it from our website.

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### *The Broken Rifle* in other languages

The Broken Rifle is published regularly in English, Spanish, German, and French. In addition, this issue is being published in Hebrew and (hopefully) Arabic and Russian.

You can order paper copies in the language of your choice by contacting the WRI office in London. You can also download a PDF file from the WRI website as soon as it becomes available. Feel free to make your own copies.

WRI relies on volunteers for translations of *The Broken Rifle* and other materials. If you want to offer your help with translations, please contact the WRI office. Translators are always urgently needed! Thank you.



Tank with Gaza sign

[www.palsolidarity.org](http://www.palsolidarity.org)



Uri Ya'acobi on the bus that brings him to the Military Prison.

[www.shministim.org](http://www.shministim.org)

## Get involved!

### Support COs in prison: co-alerts

In many countries, prison is still the fate of conscientious objectors. Thousands of COs are still in prison – in South Korea, Israel, Finland, and many other countries. Despite many countries having introduced laws on conscientious objection, many COs still face imprisonment, either because they don't fit into the authorities' criteria, or they refuse to perform any alternative service. War Resisters' International supports conscientious objectors who are imprisoned because of their conscientious objection, or face repression by the state or state-like entities.

CO-alerts, sent out by email as soon as the WRI office receives information on the imprisonment or trial of a conscientious objector, are a powerful tool to mobilise support and protest.

CO-alerts are available by email (send a message to [majordomo@wri-irg.org](mailto:majordomo@wri-irg.org) with the text subscribe co-alert in the body of the message) or on the internet at [wri-irg.org/cgi/news.cgi](http://wri-irg.org/cgi/news.cgi).

The WRI office also needs more information on imprisoned conscientious objectors from all over the world.

Get in touch with us at:

**War Resisters' International**  
5 Caledonian Rd  
London N1 9DX  
Britain  
tel +44-20-7278 4040  
fax: +44-20-7278 0444  
email [concodoc@wri-irg.org](mailto:concodoc@wri-irg.org)  
<http://wri-irg.org/cgi/news.cgi>

## Resources on conscientious objection in Israel

There is a lot of material available on conscientious objection to military service in Israel. This is only a brief selection of materials, mostly available on the internet.

### War Resisters' International

WRI publishes material on Israel regularly. The most important WRI publications are:

- ♦ War Resisters' International: *Conscientious objection to military service in Israel: an unrecognised human right*. Report for the Human Rights Committee in relation to Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 3 February 2003
- ♦ The Broken Rifle No 53: *Prisoners for Peace 2001: Focus on Israel and the Palestinian autonomous territories*, November 2001

Available at WRI's website: <http://wri-irg.org>

### Refuser Solidarity Network

The Refuser Solidarity Network is a web-based network to mobilise international support for Israeli refusers and conscientious objectors. It has a news section, and a variety of resources. It mostly reaches out to the United States of America, but has links to other parts of the world.

<http://www.refusersolidarity.net/>

### Amnesty International

Amnesty International adopts some of the Israeli conscientious objectors as "prisoners of conscience", and sends out appeals. Amnesty International's website includes reports on human rights violations in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

<http://www.amnesty.org>

### Jews for Justice for Palestinians

A London based network of Jews working against the Occupation. Their website includes information on the situation of Israeli conscientious objectors.

<http://www.jffjp.org>

### Gush Shalom

The Gush Shalom website includes a variety of materials on the Israel-Palestine conflict, including some articles on conscientious objection. Some of the materials are available in several languages.

<http://www.gush-shalom.org>

There is much more out there. Search for yourself.

## Support War Resisters' International

Israel's conscientious objectors need our support. War Resisters' International needs your support to be able to support conscientious objectors!

- I want to take part in the CO-alert network.  
My email address is: .....
- I make a donation of £.....
- Please put me on your mailing list and keep me informed about the work of WRI.
- Please send me a sample copy of Peace News.



**Please send your donation and this form to:**

War Resisters' International  
5 Caledonian Road  
London N1 9DX  
Britain

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## Thank you for your solidarity