



A HARVEST FOR PEACE

The significance of olives to the Palestinian communities

- The olive groves are hundreds of years old and have been passed down through the generations. They represent the deep connection between the Palestinian people and their land.
- Harvesting is a job for all the family – young and old work, talk and laugh together.
- Unemployment is high, and the sale of olives can provide a welcome addition to the family's income.

Sources:

United Nations. *The Olive Harvest in the West Bank and Gaza*. October 2008

ICRC. *Harvesting olives in the West Bank: not as simple as it sounds*. Nov 2009

United Nations OCHA oPt. *Olive Harvest Factsheet 2011*

The Palestinian Olive Harvest – some facts and figures.

- Up to 100,000 families rely on olive farming for at least part of their income.
- The olive harvest follows a two-year cycle, with a bumper crop occurring every second year. 2012 should be one of these peak years.
- Around 45% of agricultural land in the West Bank and Gaza is devoted to an estimated 100 million olive trees.
- There are around 270 licensed commercial olive presses in the West Bank.
- Approximately 93% of the olives are turned into oil, with the remainder for eating or for making soap.

Why is the olive harvest under threat?

- The West Bank Barrier separates some farmers from their own land. Olive trees need a lot of tending throughout the year, so this restricted access not only makes the harvest difficult, but also prevents farmers carrying out routine tasks such as pruning, fertilising and pest control, with a resulting reduction in yields.
- Some Israeli settlers are hostile to the Palestinians. Farmers whose olive groves are near Israeli settlements have faced crop theft, tree uprooting, harassment and even physical attack. The fear of attack is another factor keeping farmers away from their land.
- Between January and September 2011, more than 7,500 olive trees were uprooted or burnt by settlers.
- Farmers in some areas now have to apply for permits to travel to their land. In 2010, 40% of the permit applications were rejected.



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Is there hope for the harvest?

YES!

- Israeli peace activists, under the umbrella group The Olive Harvest Coalition, volunteer each year to accompany Palestinians to areas of potential conflict. As well as helping with the manual labour, they act as human shields and visible examples of tolerance.
- International volunteers, from organisations such as Zaytoun and The Olive Co-operative also go to help with the harvest – their presence reduces the risk of attacks and expresses solidarity with the Palestinians.
- The olive harvest therefore involves Muslims, Jews, Christians and people of other faiths or none. This co-operation in the most difficult of circumstances provides hope that the situation will improve.

Useful websites

www.zaytoun.org – Zaytoun Fair Trade olive oil

www.theoliveharvest.com – The Olive Harvest - a film made by Israelis and Palestinians together

www.olivecoop.com – The Olive Co-operative - supporting people working for a just peace

www.rhr.org.il – Rabbis for Human Rights

www.olivesforhope.com – personal website of campaigner Cathryn Young

How does BibleLands help?

BibleLands has more than 150 years of experience of the Middle East, its people and the changing needs of the region. We work in partnership with the region's small Christian population to provide community development programmes, healthcare and education for people living in poverty – regardless of their race or religion.

We support schools with a strong emphasis on peace education, aiming to bring up a new generation of citizens who realise that violence is not the answer.