

## **Witness by an Ecumenical Accompanier who spent 3 months in Palestine on behalf of the United Church of Canada**

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is a program of the World Council of Churches. Churches, including the United Church of Canada, send volunteers to spend 3 months in Palestine monitoring, documenting and attempting to prevent human rights abuses.

Israeli soldiers arresting young people, mostly boys, is a recurring problem experienced by Palestinian families. It begins when the children, especially boys, turn 12 years of age.

Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCIP) is a partner of the United Church that works to address this issue.

Photo of arrest



Photo of another arrest



DCIP reports that each year the Israeli military detains and prosecutes around 700 Palestinian children.

Azzun is a town of 10,000 people that our team visited at least twice a week. Frequent visits were scheduled because the community regularly experienced child arrests.



We visited the municipal officials and met with families whose children had been arrested.

One family described how their child of 14 was arrested earlier that morning.

- ❖ The soldiers arrived at 1 am when the family members were all asleep
- ❖ The soldiers pounded on the front door threatening to break it down if not opened
- ❖ When they entered they moved everyone, other than the boy they were after, into the living room and then soldiers and an interpreter went to the boy's bedroom
- ❖ They would not let the parents be in the bedroom while they questioned the boy
- ❖ After about half an hour they took the boy away – blindfolded and in handcuffs and leg irons, putting him in the back of a truck
- ❖ They did not tell the parents where the boy was being taken
- ❖ The next time the parents saw the boy was in the military court a day or 2 later

DCIP reports that many, if not most, of the children are arrested in this way.

By the time the parents see their son in court, there is a good chance the boy will have experienced treatment amounting to torture and may have signed a confession. Often the confession will be in Hebrew, a language the boy does not understand.

If the boy requests a trial, he will almost invariably be held in jail until the trial, up to a year later. The trial will be in a military court with an Israeli soldier judge and an Israeli soldier prosecutor. Even though the child cannot read Hebrew, he will be convicted based on the Hebrew confession he signed.

Because the results are so predictable, lawyers provided by DCIP, almost invariably plead guilty to some charge to get the child released as quickly as possible. Having the child in custody longer creates much worse consequences for the child.