



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"You can't say you are for a two-state solution while continuing to build," Ofran says, reasoning in the same vein as the child of the Talmudic story. The dynamic young activist's job is to act as a brake upon settlement expansion. She regularly travels the West Bank, documenting illegal construction and outposts, and reporting on these activities to the Israeli public. Her work often brings her into nasty confrontations with fellow Jews who regard her as an enemy. But she persists, because she believes ending the settlement project is critical to Israel's survival as a democratic Jewish state.

Granddaughter of the famous Israeli philosopher and religious scholar Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Ofran comes by her gadfly role honestly. Leibowitz was one of the first among his people to speak out against "Greater Israel" and influenced Ofran to pursue her Peace Now path.

Though soft-spoken and unassuming, Ofran, 34, has no trouble facing down hostile settlers and countering chutzpah with chutzpah as she photographs the latest building sites. She is regarded as Israel's premier source on settlement expansion, sought after by journalists, politicians, and academics. And though she no longer lives according to religious law, her

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

A I hope that Abbas will find the formula to restart negotiations, because it is very harmful for the peace camp in Israel if the Palestinians are not ready to restart negotiations with Israel after Israel did make some change in its policy towards settlements. The Netanyahu government is very stable and this is an advantage for the peace camp, because Netanyahu has Kadima as an alternative all the time -- and the right wing in the government knows this. Because of this, he can go a very long way towards the Palestinians without having his coalition even start to break apart.

Q On another note, there has been mention of negotiations between Israel and Syria. How has the Netanyahu government handled relations with Damascus?

A I think that Netanyahu is not enthusiastic to start negotiations with Syria, at least according to the things that are being published. It's for sure that the Syrian President is not going to do anything towards peace if he will not know that eventually he will get the same agreement that Egypt got with Israel. Netanyahu is not ready to pay this price, or to even make some

Orthodox upbringing allows her to debate religious settlers in their own language, quoting Talmud to show that the Occupation runs counter to Jewish values.

It also runs counter to Israel's self-interest, she maintains. Israel must seek a two-state solution or it will be a land in which Arabs – with or without civil rights – will form the majority. "If I wanted to live as part of a Jewish minority, I may as well come to Canada," Ofran says, with a bitter smile.

As she cruised through her busy agenda in Canada, Ofran proved herself to be the kind of young leader the world needs: bright, confident, dynamic, hardworking, good-humoured and warm-hearted. She is a clear-eyed realist, yet still an optimist in a cynical world. Asked how she maintains that outlook despite all the setbacks the peace movement has faced, Ofran answers that it is her mission to remain hopeful.

"I want to live in Israel," she says. "I love Israel. If I feel there is no chance to change things or to move forward, I will not be able to stay there. So I have to find a way. It is like the saying, 'I believe with absolute faith the Messiah will come, and even though he delays, I believe.' To me this means that, no matter the obstacles, you have to keep on."

hints that he is ready to pay the price, and this is why we are in deadlock. With Syria, when there will be a prime minister that is ready to pay the price, all he needs is to reach out to the Syrian President directly or indirectly and then the negotiations could start. But without a clear-cut decision by the Israeli prime minister about the future of the Golan Heights, I doubt if we'll see negotiations between Syria and Israel.

Q Israel lately appears to be making less threatening noises towards Iran over its nuclear program. Is this because Israel's leadership is hoping that the protest movement in Tehran will succeed in overthrowing the current regime?

A I don't think so. I think that Israel is still very concerned about what is going on in Iran. There is a big attempt not to make the Iranian atomic bomb an Israeli-Iranian issue but a global issue. Every time that Israel is speaking about this issue, on the one hand you get support and you get awareness on the issue, but on the other hand you make it an Israeli-Iranian issue, and this is not the goal. The goal is to show the world that an Iranian bomb can affect everyone in the world and not just Israel.

PEACEMATTERS

Publications Agreement Number - 1750011

CURRENT AFFAIRS FROM CANADIAN FRIENDS OF PEACE NOW



Winter 2010

Settlement Watch Leader Proves to be Tireless Activist

BY GABRIELLA GOLIGER, CFPN OTTAWA

Hagit Ofran, Director of Peace Now's flagship program Settlement Watch, visited Canada at the end of October 2009 to drum up support for her views after participating in the inaugural J Street conference - a historic gathering of dovish Jews - in Washington, D.C. She gave public talks in Montreal and Ottawa as well as private information sessions to influential opinion-makers. These included officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs, a member of the Canada-Israel Committee, Bob Rae, foreign affairs critic for the Liberal Party, and Paul Dewar, foreign affairs critic for the New Democrats.



Ofran likes to quote a Talmudic parable that encapsulates for her the travesty of the settlement enterprise. A rabbi is trespassing upon a farmer's field of grain, trampling down stalks as he goes. A little girl protests that he is disturbing the field. "But, look, it is a path I walk on," the rabbi counters. "But it is you who have created this destructive path," the child cries.

The story symbolizes for Ofran the twisted thinking that allows settlers and their government backers - often highly principled people in other aspects of life - to rationalize the theft of Palestinian land. Illegal outposts become faits accomplis.

An old Ottoman law on uncultivated fields is used to justify seizures of Palestinian property (even though it was Israelis who prevented the Palestinians from tending their crops in the first place). And, while paying lip service to a settlement freeze, the Netanyahu government has authorized thousands of new units to be built in the West Bank on the grounds that the permits for them were "pre-existing."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish Follows The Path of Light over Darkness

BY JACQUELINE SWARTZ, CFPN TORONTO

After months of preparation and some unpredictable twists and turns, Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish spoke on November 17, 2009 at an event initiated by CFPN and held at Beth Tzedec synagogue. A diversity of co-sponsors included Canadian Jewish Congress, Canadian Association of Jews and Muslims, New Israel Fund, Hillel and others.



The Gaza obstetrician and researcher, who has worked in several Israeli hospitals, is currently Associate Professor at the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health. In addition, he continues to bring his words of reconciliation to synagogues around Toronto and in the U.S. Even before he spoke, introduced by Israel Consul General Amir Gissin, he was greeted with a standing ovation by an overflow audience. CBC News was there to tape part of the event, shown the following evening.

Dr. Abuelaish's message focuses on finding new paths to peace between Israelis and Palestinians, creating bridges rather than walls. "Our enemy is ignorance of each other," he said. "We must get rid of blaming, and stop using 'I am/you are' divisions".

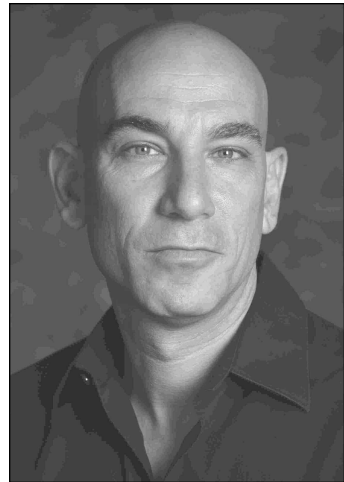
Condemning violence, no matter where it comes from, Dr. Abuelaish spoke of his spiritual convictions and his physician's take on healing the underlying disease, not just the symptom.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Please note that Canadian Friends of Peace Now has a new address and phone number. We would appreciate your changing the address on any donor cards / envelopes so these may still be used. Also, we ask you to send an email to: info@peacenowcanada.org so we can add you to our e-mail distribution list.

119 - 660 Eglinton Ave. E. Suite 517 Toronto, ON, M4G 2K2
PH 416-322-5559 1-866-405-5387 FX 416-322-5587

Aluf Benn of Ha'aretz Speaks On Israel in the Obama World



Aluf Benn, the respected diplomatic editor and columnist of the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, was the guest speaker following the erev Shabbat service on November 27, 2009 at Temple Emanu-El. The Canada-Israel Committee, CFPN and the Temple co-sponsored the event as part of Benn's speaking tour in Montreal and Toronto. Rabbi Deborah Landsberg introduced him.

Benn's topic was "Israel in the Obama World," a presentation on the outlook for a resumption of final-status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians with the prodding of the Obama Administration. Benn's comments came just two days after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced a 10-month freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank.

While many peaceniks believe the construction freeze was a tactical move by the Israeli Cabinet to relieve U.S. pressure, Benn suggested that Netanyahu may be more peace-minded than is generally believed. Based on conversations with the PM, the journalist said he is convinced that Netanyahu wants to be remembered in history for more than "just saying no to the Palestinians." In particular, said Benn, he may be open to an interim agreement with the Palestinians that would resolve the fate of the West Bank but leave for later the questions of Jerusalem and the refugees' 'right of return'.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Gaza physician was voicing his message long before his beliefs were tested in the crucible of unthinkable tragedy. In January 2009, three of his daughters and a niece were killed by Israeli shells during the bombardment of Gaza.

Dr. Abuelaish's response was to follow what he sees as the path of light over the path of darkness. "It is better to choose life than to live with hatred or be consumed with revenge. As a doctor, I see that revenge and hatred lead to disease." His daughters, he said, were killed by those who see only violence as a solution.

Israeli Extremists Threaten Barak, Oppenheimer

Israeli extremists opposed to the settlement freeze have made threats - deemed credible by Israeli authorities - on the life of Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak. Also, an arrested Jewish terrorist reportedly told Israeli investigators that he wanted to kill Peace Now Director General Yariv Oppenheimer.

Israeli security officials have beefed up Barak's personal security detail and doubled the number of security guards that escort him. Barak was not the only Israeli official to have security around him tightened recently. Procedures to protect Israeli Police Commissioner Dudi Cohen were put into place after Cohen received a death threat. Israeli police believe that the threat was made by extreme right-wing activists, who oppose the construction freeze in West Bank settlements and the police commissioner's comments criticizing settler rioters.

Meanwhile, more details have emerged about Jewish terrorist Yaakov Teitel. An Israeli-American dual national who resided in a West Bank settlement outpost before his arrest last fall, he is charged with a twelve-year spree of murder and attempted-murder of Palestinians, Christian missionaries, gay Israelis, and the attempted murder of Peace Now activist Zeev Sternhell. During his police interrogation, Teitel reportedly said that he wanted to kill Peace Now's Yariv Oppenheimer, but that he was unable to collect enough information about Oppenheimer's whereabouts before being detained by the police.

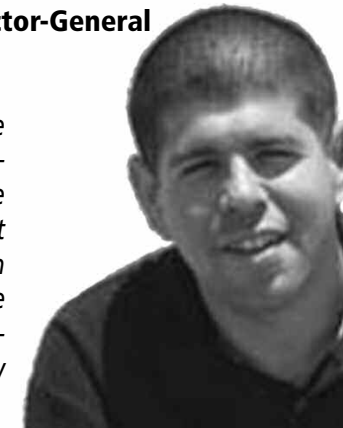
The attempted murder of Sternhell, which included circulating flyers offering a reward for the killing of Peace Now activists, prompted Israel's law enforcement authorities to provide special security arrangements for Oppenheimer.

The real solution, he added, will only come from partnership, respect - and women. "May women be heard and heeded for the sake of peace," he said. An international foundation, based on his principles, is being set up to promote education for women in the Middle East.

Dr. Abuelaish has reached people who would not usually listen. As Beth Tzedec Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl said in his closing remarks, "No matter where you are on the spectrum of opinion... we must find ways of creating peace." This, he noted was a remarkable evening; it should be just the beginning.

CFPN Q+A WITH YARIV OPPENHEIMER

Aviv Toren of CFPN Toronto interviews Yariv Oppenheimer, Director-General of Peace Now in Israel.



Q *Since the emergence of the Netanyahu coalition government, it appears that the peace process has somewhat stagnated; in your opinion how committed to the peace process has the current government been in the last few months?*

A I think that we are facing a government that has no real willingness to sign the final status agreement with the Palestinians, take down most of the settlements, and give up places in East Jerusalem. I don't think that this government can do it. And I don't think Netanyahu made his mind that he wants to be the one to be remembered as the Israeli prime minister that signed the peace treaty with the Palestinians and made all these concessions. But I still think that this government is a very strong government with a very stable coalition and for those reasons this government can go a very long way toward a better situation. I think we can go with Netanyahu some way but I don't think we can go with him to the end goal.

Q *It has been understood that prior to any serious resumption of peace talks, a settlement freeze had been demanded by the Palestinians; now that a moratorium on settlement construction has been declared, how successful can negotiations for peace be?*

A First of all, in order to be successful, they need to start. On both sides, there is a lot of skepticism of the other side and a lot of unwillingness to promote a real significant step towards peace. The current status quo is not threatening Netanyahu or Abbas, unfortunately, and for that reason they do not feel any urgency to restart negotiations. I do think that both sides should at least start talking to each other. But again, I don't think that by just freezing the settlements, then the negotia-

tions will start, and then Netanyahu and Abbas will sign a peace treaty. I doubt that this government is the one to do that.

Q *Has the settlement freeze been viewed positively or negatively amongst Israelis?*

A It depends whom you ask of course. We in the peace camp see this decision as a positive decision. First of all, the declaration on the settlements is an important one because Netanyahu declared he is going to freeze all settlement activity. This is the first time a prime minister is making such a declaration. Although on the ground the outcome of this declaration is not so dramatic, because Netanyahu allowed projects already started to continue to build. But the statement itself does make a difference, and I think the big question will be whether the settlement construction will restart eight months from now. The Israeli public views the settlement declaration not in a positive way. First of all, people feel sympathy for the settlers. Second, Israelis don't see any inroad for these kinds of decisions. They don't see the Palestinians coming to the negotiating table. They feel that Netanyahu made it as a result of international pressure and not because it is an Israeli interest.

Q *With current reports that some building construction has been ongoing in East Jerusalem despite the declaration of a settlement freeze, do Palestinians believe the moratorium on settlement construction to be a genuine gesture towards a more lasting peace?*

A I'm sure that, unofficially and not publicly, some Palestinians see it as a very positive progress; but officially the position of the Palestinians, which is understandable, is that the freeze is not a significant one because Netanyahu is still building in East Jerusalem and he gave approval to the projects that have already been started, meaning 3,000 housing units all together around the West Bank, so it is a pretty significant number. So I think the Palestinians don't see this decision as a very dramatic, positive one for them.

Q *Do you think President Abbas will yield on his demand for a settlement freeze in Jerusalem and enter peace negotiations absent such a freeze? If so, how long will the Netanyahu coalition last under the pressure of serious negotiations?*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

DONATE ONLINE! CLICK AND DONATE NOW!
www.peacenowcanada.org

**Canadian Friends of Peace Now
is always looking for volunteers.**