

Nonviolence in Palestine

by [Trudy Bush](#) in the [April 11, 2001](#) issue

A terrified boy huddles in his father's arms moments before an Israeli bullet kills him; a baby girl sits smiling in a stroller moments before a Palestinian bullet extinguishes her life. These are but two recent reports of the violence that blights life in the land where the Prince of Peace once called humanity to follow him. Yet while the news media are dominated by accounts of violence, a chorus of voices speaking for another way is gaining momentum. Both Palestinians and Israeli peace activists are demonstrating peacefully against the closure of Palestinian areas. And more and more Palestinians are urging their people to turn away from violent actions and to rely on methods of nonviolent resistance to end Israel's military occupation of Palestinian territories. Over the past few weeks, peaceful Palestinian marches and demonstrations against the occupation have been organized in Gaza, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Nablus and Jenin.

The Palestinian Christian community especially has been strong in its commitment to nonviolent resistance, though many Muslim Palestinians join them in this. And nonviolent action is already a staple of Israelis who oppose their government's harsh treatment of the Palestinians, though their efforts are almost never mentioned in the American media.

But a campaign of nonviolence costs the Palestinians far more than it does the Israeli demonstrators who support them, as recent protests make clear. When a small group of Palestinian women marched between two Israeli checkpoints, Israeli soldiers fired stun grenades and rubber bullets at them, injuring five. When a group of Palestinian protesters tried to fill in the moat the Israeli Defense Forces had dug across an essential road connecting villages to Ramallah, soldiers fired live ammunition at them, killing a 27-year-old bystander. But when 200 Jewish Israeli demonstrators tried to end the closure of a road near the Palestinian village of Rantis by tearing at the barricade with shovels and pickaxes, the army and police merely looked on. Death and injury face Palestinian protesters. The worst threat Israeli protesters face is being ignored by the media.

To free oneself from a crushing military occupation requires a difficult struggle. To persist in keeping that struggle nonviolent, and to make nonviolence effective, people need the support of a concerned international community. As they did in helping the South African people in their campaign to end apartheid, American and European churchpeople must join this nonviolent struggle to bring an end to the injustice and oppression under which Palestinians suffer.

As the Palestinians' already dire economic situation continues to worsen, they will especially need international financial support to keep clinics and schools functioning and food available to people whose livelihood has been destroyed by the closure of roads and the siege of towns and villages. Nonviolent resistance is costly—costly in its willingness to risk life and livelihood, costly in its refusal to give in to anger and hatred, costly in its demand for endurance. It can succeed only if the wider world community is willing to help pay the price.