

Zochrot Annual Report 2004

Background on Zochrot

Zochrot's purpose is to involve the Jewish public in Israel in remembering and talking about the Nakba. The memory of the Nakba is an alternative memory that opposes the hegemonic Zionist narrative of history. The Nakba is the catastrophe experienced by the Palestinians in 1948 — the destruction of their villages, the expulsion and killing — but it is also an integral part of the history of the Jews who live here. It is a history that has been silenced and almost completely erased from the physical landscape of the country. Zochrot supports the right of return of the Palestinian refugees which is the personal, civil right of all uprooted people who were expelled from their homes. The right of return is also a collective right that was recognized by international law, particularly by U.N. Resolution 194 of December 1948, which has been re-approved tens of times since then.



Posting the Palestinian street name "Al Bourj" beside the current names "Ma'aleh Ha'shichrur" and "Shivat Zion" in Haifa.

Zochrot conducts various activities to these ends: touring and posting signs at destroyed villages; printing study materials and testimonies about the Nakba

in Hebrew and Arabic; conducting seminars with teachers and students; operating an internet site that contains a wealth of information about the Nakba in Hebrew, including a database of maps; participating in legal struggles; and hosting encounters between uprooted Palestinians and Jews residing on their lands. The common denominator of all these projects is for Jews in Israel to learn about the Nakba, to reveal and cope with the history that has been obscured, and to take responsibility for what happened in 1948. This goal is based on the understanding that the Nakba and its ongoing consequences are an inextricable part of our lives. Zochrot also aspires to create a space in which the voices of Palestinian women who experienced the Nakba will receive significant attention.

Summary of 2004

The year 2004 was a turning point for Zochrot. Zochrot expanded its activities, and awareness of Zochrot increased in Israel and around the world. Today it appears that Zochrot's place among the spectrum of NGOs in Israel is firmly established. It is important to note that Zochrot's many activities during this year were carried out almost exclusively on a volunteer basis, by tens of activists. In the middle of 2004 a group of Haifa Zochrot activists was established, paralleling the veteran Zochrot group that had started in Tel Aviv. This has increased Zochrot's ability to carry out different activities and to be exposed to different communities. Toward the end of the year Eitan Bronstein began working as Director of the organization at a half-time position.

Activities

Zochrot carried out 20 public events in 2004, including tours of villages and cities, lectures, and demonstrations. A total of 1,650 people participated in these events, primarily Jews (about 70% according to our estimate). Nine tours were carried out to sites destroyed in 1948; signs were posted during the tours, and for most tours special booklets were produced in Hebrew and Arabic. Nine educational events were carried out, such as lectures on different topics. Likewise, Zochrot carried out the "First Procession of Return in Tel



Refugee from al-Lajjun holding a booklet on his village by Zochrot.

Aviv," from Jammassin to Sumeil, to observe Nakba Day, and participated in the Procession of Return of ADRID (the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in Israel) to Indur. Five booklets were produced in Hebrew and Arabic on Ijlil, Jalame, Haifa, Ramleh, and al-Lajjun; a bus card for line 194 (named after the U.N. resolution) was produced for Zochrot travelers to different villages; and a special booklet was produced to commemorate the Nakba on the eve of Israeli Independence Day.

In addition to these, Zochrot carried out 22 activities for 660 participants from specific groups to which it was invited. Schools, international groups, NGO activists in Israel and students were exposed to the Nakba and to the activities of Zochrot on this subject.

Another special activity was a series of encounters that took place between 6 Palestinians uprooted from the village of Bir'em and 7 Jewish members of Kibbutz Baram, which is situated on some of the lands of the village. In the framework of this project three weekend encounters were held, during which participants learned the story of the expulsion of Bir'em and discussed ways of resolving the problem. At the conclusion of the encounter the Jews accepted the uprooted Palestinians' claim for a return to their village, including the return of refugees from the diaspora, and for rebuilding their village on all the available lands of Bir'em. For the first time members of Baram also visited the Bir'em annual camp and expressed solidarity with their struggle for return.

Another unique activity that Zochrot began in 2004 was to submit two oppositions to building plans endangering Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948. One building plan was in the *moshav* [cooperative settlement] of Ya'ad, which landholdings were expanded into the center of the village Mi'ar. Zochrot strengthened the local organization of 12 Ya'ad residents who themselves submitted an opposition to the plan. With the help of Zochrot a connection was also made between the residents of Ya'ad and the uprooted Palestinians of Mi'ar, who cooperated to convince state and *moshav* institutions not to build on the destroyed village center. A similar opposition was submitted by Zochrot regarding a building plan that would destroy the remains of the village of Lifta, signed by 147 supporters in Israel and worldwide. This type of opposition to a

building plan, based on the memory of the Palestinian Nakba, is the first of its kind in Israel.

Zochrot received an official authorization from the governing bodies in the occupied territories to post signs in Canada Park designating the villages of Imwas and Yalu, which were destroyed in the 1967 war. (Canada Park was established on the occupied lands with money from Canadian donors to the JNF.) The authorization was given even though the JNF, which manages the park, formerly opposed this. We hope this will create an opening for the state to reevaluate its stance toward the villages that were destroyed in 1948.

In 2004 Zochrot was invited to participate in 5 local and international conferences dealing with the Nakba and the right of return.

Media Exposure and Public Response to Zochrot

The media expressed increasing interest in Zochrot in 2004, and more than 50 articles were written locally and internationally on the organization. The peak was an article in the weekly magazine supplement of *Haaretz*, which brought immense exposure to Zochrot. The article was also published on the *Walla* internet site and received over 200 responses, most of them hostile. There is great interest in Zochrot on the part of newspapers abroad and in the Palestinians territories. During this year Zochrot also took more initiative in turning to the media.

The Zochrot internet site received many responses from the public, mostly following events that the organization had carried out and following general media exposure. About 110 letters were sent by people seeking to receive information about particular villages, to be updated on Zochrot's activities, to offer support and assistance, or to criticize the group. About 20 of these were invitations to cooperate with Zochrot on different issues. There were also many telephone responses in a similar vein. Zochrot also received tens of requests by university students for assistance in researching papers about destroyed Palestinian villages or about the organization itself. About 15 academic papers were written about Zochrot and three articles were published in academic journals.

Support for Zochrot

The parties who supported and funded Zochrot in 2004 were: The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC); Hella Langer of Germany; Entraide Protestante Suisse (EPER); Kerkinactie/Global Ministries (PKN), the Netherlands; and Oxfam Solidarity, Belgium. Significant financial support was also received from the participants of Zochrot's activities, who purchased booklets and t-shirts and contributed to cover the expenses of the events.

Zochrot is grateful to the School for Peace at Neve Shalom~Wahat al-Salaam for the support, learning, and encouragement, without which Zochrot would not have come into the world.



Tour of Haifa led by Johnny Mansour.

Directions for Development

In 2005 Zochrot will establish a Learning Center on the Nakba in Tel Aviv, which will also serve as the organization's office. The center will include a library and different visual materials for learning about and exposure to the Nakba. Likewise, lectures and seminars on the topic will be held at the center. There will be a staff of paid employees to strengthen the activities of the organization and to carry out educational programs for different groups. Zochrot also plans to establish additional local groups of volunteers who will carry out activities on the Nakba and organize tours of villages.

Personal Responses to Zochrot

From the hundreds of personal responses sent to Zochrot, we chose four to present here.

An e-mail from Dr. Massaoud Agbariyya, a refugee from al-Lajjun, following the tour of his village:

It was a great event. Thank you for all. I intend to write about the event and publish it at least locally, to let those who could not come at least know what we have observed.

I am glad to help. God bless you.

An e-mail sent by a Jewish American woman who participated in the event at al-Lajjun:

I came on your tour to al-Lajjun last week. It was an amazingly simple and simply amazing day, very moving. I think Zochrot is quickly becoming my favorite Israeli organization. The anti-occupation groups that cross to this side of the Green Line for demonstrations with Palestinians are extremely important, but there's a sense in which they don't have to challenge Zionism. You're one of the few groups I know that deals with 1948.

I would love to have a few hundred of your brochures (in English) and about 10 t-shirts sent to me in the U.S. I'll be speaking a lot when I go home, especially to Jewish audiences, and I want to be able to show them that an Israeli organization recognizes Al Nakba.

A letter from Einat Luzzati of Kibbutz Baram, on the encounters with refugees from Bir'em:

I am happy that we met, that we dared to enter places that are frightening and dangerous. I believe that we will continue to persevere, and I believe that the village of Bir'em will be rebuilt here, next to me.... The framework that Zochrot provided for the meetings... gave inspiration to the fact that there are other people who believe that we can make a change — in a stubborn, serious, realistic way.

The encounters involved deep work and alternative learning.... I am sure that I will fall and rise up over and over. But I am happy that my mind has opened and that I am changing, that I am learning and seeing things in a deeper way.... Now I am already prepared to rise again. I want to invite others to join in, not through opposition, but through empathy and neighborliness and realism.

That's it. What happened to me was that my sense of share fate, which has been beating inside me for a long time, has been strengthened. And I was rewarded to meet many wonderful people (and the facilitators too!)

From a student paper written by Noah Kram, an Israeli-American woman who volunteered with Zochrot while on a visit to Israel:

It was not an easy experience; I heard and saw things that were difficult for me. I felt angry, ashamed and frustrated but I had no doubt that I was doing something meaningful and important. My experience working with Zochrot forced me to confront the fact that my home is built on the expense of other people's homes, life and history. And this is not an easy thing to do.... My experience with Zochrot and the personal connection and relationship I had with Palestinian refugees shifted my own understanding of the 'refugee problem' and the 'right of return.' For me, being able to have conversations with myself, with Jews and Arabs and others, about the right of return is an empowering experience; I face and deal with difficult and relevant issues, rather let my fears control myself.