

Palestine Welcomes The Peace Cycle



By Laura Abraham

On 28th September 2004 the Peace Cycle arrived in Jerusalem. This amazing group of people, from all over the world, had cycled more than 2,500 miles from London to raise awareness of the occupation of Palestine. This was an epic and historic event - never before had such a group of individuals cycled such a long way to demand a just peace for Palestine. They travelled through France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Jordan, each day battling with rain, wind, heat and exhaustion, but all the while spreading their message that there can be no lasting peace in the Middle East until the occupation ends. It was their belief that ordinary people can make a difference, and they were willing to face an enormous challenge to prove it. The Peace Cyclists were from very varied backgrounds, nationalities, ages and abilities - among them were Christians, Muslims and Jews, but what united them all was their passionate belief in justice. As they crossed Europe they stopped to talk to local people and held press conferences for the media, determined to tell as many people as possible the truth - that Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem is the real obstacle to peace, and that the occupation is not only illegal but immoral. The Peace Cycle began as a simple idea - to end the cycle of violence and begin a cycle of peace - and it has captured the imagination of thousands of people across the world. The Peace Cyclists themselves have described the experience as one which has changed their lives forever - the places they have seen and the people they have met will stay with them always. We even had the honour of being received by the late President Arafat at his compound in Ramallah, and he welcomed and thanked each of us warmly. In fact, as the cyclists rode through the West Bank, the welcome from all the Palestinian people we met was warmer and more genuine than anything the cyclists had imagined. What touched us all was that everywhere we went, the most overwhelming truth we encountered among the people of Palestine was their desire for peace. Everyone we met said the same thing - they refuse to hate the people who are hurting them, because they still hope to live in peace with their neighbours. Despite the appalling suffering and injustice we witnessed in the West Bank, we also witnessed a deep yearning for peace - it was written on the faces of every Palestinian we met and it has truly inspired us - the Peace Cycle was initially going to be a once only event, but it has achieved so much that we cannot simply stop it now - the cycle has begun. There will be another Peace Cycle in 2005, and preparations for it are already being made. It will leave London in either late July or early August, and will travel once again to Jerusalem. The Peace Cycle 2005 will be even bigger and more powerful, and anyone can join us. If you want to be part of the cycle for a just peace for Palestine - to ride some of the way or all of the way, or to help organise, promote, or sponsor the event, please come and join us - you can make a difference.

www.thepeacecycle.org



Thousands of Birzeit University (BZU) students, faculty and staff welcomed the Peace Cycle on September 25, 2004. The cyclists, 22 men and women from different nationalities, started a Palestinian solidarity cycling trip from London to Palestine in the middle of August 2004. They arrived at the gates of the University at 2:00PM where they were warmly received by the University community which cheered them on with slogans and banners after patiently waiting for over an hour during which time the cyclists had been delayed at an Israeli military checkpoint near the village of Attara between Nablus and Ramallah. The students accompanied the cyclists to Kamal Nasir Hall for an official reception, which included a heart-warming performance by the University's Sanabel musical group in addition to a short speech by Ms. Riham Barghouti, Director of the Public Relations Office at BZU. Ms. Barghouti welcomed the cyclists and thanked them for their perseverance and their willingness to take a strong stand in to support of Palestinians' right to live in dignity in a free civil society. She called upon them to continue their

