

Bustan Qaraaqa  
Permaculture Farm and Guesthouse  
Wadi Hanna Saad  
Beit Sahour  
Bethlehem  
West Bank  
Palestine



January 28<sup>th</sup> 2010

Dear friends,

As the New Year gets underway, the drought has finally broken and life-giving rain is casting its blessing once more over the parched hills of Palestine. As the landscape begins to transform before our eyes into the verdant green paradise of the Palestinian spring, we can finally begin the long-delayed planting season, which looks set to be a time of frenetic activity here at Bustan Qaraaqa. But before we plunge headlong into this chaos, we would like to take a moment to update you on the developments of the past few months and to reflect on the year passed.

Assuredly it has been a year of extremes, from the devastating storms of early January that [tore down the Egyptian border fence](#), to the [furnace-like heat of July and August](#), to the miserable drought that persisted throughout the autumn season, with one of the driest Novembers in living memory. [According to a recent report by the Israeli Meteorological Service](#), 2010 was the hottest year on record, with the fewest rainy days (although when rain did fall, it did so with uncharacteristic violence, promoting soil erosion and flash flooding).

The consequences of this unusual weather pattern were driven home with spectacular force as the dry conditions created a tinder box in the pine-forested Carmel region of Israel. One ill-advised fire in an illegal rubbish-dump near the Druze town of Isfiya sparked the [worst forest fire in Israel's history](#) in early December. The fire raged for 4 days before it could be controlled; burning approximately 4 million trees across 10000 acres of forested hillsides, and killing over 40 people in a tragic accident where a bus was trapped by fallen trees across the road and became engulfed in flames (click [here](#) to see images of the fire and its aftermath).



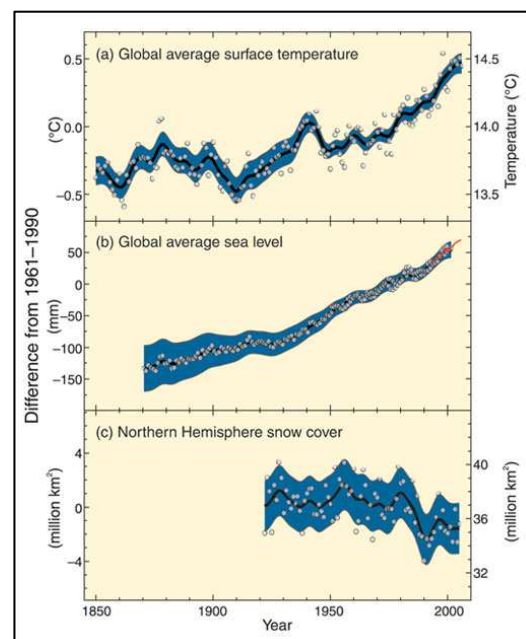
*Left: Negev floods at Nahal Ha'Besor in January 2010; Right: Carmel fire near Beit Oren, Israel, December 2011 (by Uriel Sinai, Getty Images)*

Firefighters from around the world united to control the blaze, including a team of 21 Palestinians (who were later [denied entry to the Honour Ceremony](#) in a classic beaurocratic gaffe by Israel's Occupation forces and administrators). The flames were eventually quenched when a Boeing 747 Supertanker from the USA joined the fray, and as the embers smouldered, merciful rain fell at last on the smoking ruins of the forest.

Just days later, the [entire region was hammered by storms](#); with wind speeds along the coast topping 100 kilometres per hour, heavy snow in the Golan Heights and wild sandstorms in the southerly regions of the country, including Bethlehem and Hebron. The storm caused considerable damage to fishing boats and buildings throughout the East Mediterranean region. A Moldovan cargo ship sank off the Israeli coast, a factory collapsed in Alexandria killing 3 people and a woman was killed in the Lebanese town of Tripoli when a tree fell on her car. Bustan Qaraaqa also took some damage as the compost toilet roof was ripped off, several fruit trees were damaged and heavy clay planting containers were picked up and tossed off wall-tops by the ferocious, dust-laden wind.

While extreme weather events are to be expected to some extent as a normal feature of the natural world, [2010 has been a special year globally](#). Living as we do in a community of volunteers from all over the world, we are often acutely aware of what is happening in far-away places – and even if we were not, many of this year's natural disasters were significant enough to attract the attention of the international media; with [heavy flooding in the Phillipines](#) in the beginning of the year, [wildfires and drought in Russia](#) in the summer while [Pakistan was hit by the most severe floods in the history of the country](#), drought across the Middle East in the autumn while Europe and North America shivered in unseasonably cold weather and snow-storms, and now as we begin 2011, the [Australian state of Queensland is underwater](#) and [mudslides in Brazil](#) have killed more than 40 people after heavy rainfall.

Little scientific doubt remains over the fact that the climate is shifting; with [multi-decade patterns](#) indicating an increase in the scale and frequency of extreme weather events and a rising average temperature globally. Little doubt remains that human activities over the last century have played a significant role in this climatic destabilisation, or that human activities continue to promote biodiversity loss at an alarming rate that is eroding the ability of the worlds' ecosystems to adapt to the changing climate. The only serious questions that remain concern what we are going to do about this: whether we will continue to endorse and perpetuate eco-destruction by maintaining the status quo (the corporate-consumer-military-industrial complex); or whether we have the creativity and the imagination to radically



Graph from International Panel on Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report

overhaul our societies, from our personal behaviour to the economic and political systems we participate in.

Unfortunately the over-arching political outlook in Palestine is not exactly rosy at the moment. 2010 has been a year of failed negotiations, [postponed Palestinian elections](#), accelerated Israeli [settlement expansion](#) and [apartheid wall construction](#) with associated [land confiscation and property destruction](#), escalating [Israeli attacks on Palestinian water infrastructure](#), continuing violence by both Israeli military forces and settlers against Palestinian civilians, continuing [siege](#) and [airstrikes](#) in Gaza (despite some improvements following the events of the Freedom Flotilla), and stifled development.



*Left: The Wall around Bethlehem; Middle: Israeli bulldozer at work constructing the Wall; Right: Height comparison, people at the Wall*

2011 started tragically with the [death of Jawaher Abu Rahmah](#) at Bil'in weekly protest against the Wall and Settlements. The 36 year old female protester died in hospital in Ramallah on January 1<sup>st</sup> after being subjected to intense tear gas inhalation. Her brother, Bassem, was killed in April 2009 after being shot in the chest with a high velocity tear-gas canister, also at Bil'in weekly protest. Other Occupation-related deaths this year include [65 year-old Amr Qawasmeh](#), shot to death as he lay in his bed in Hebron by soldiers who entered his house 'by mistake'; [21 year-old Ahmed Maslamani](#) who approached a checkpoint holding a coke can and failed to stop when ordered; [28 year-old Jalal Al-Masri](#) who failed to slow down for a flying checkpoint; [25 year-old Khaldoun Sammudi](#) who approached a checkpoint holding a suspicious object and shouting "Allahu Akbar" and his friend, [24 year-old Salem Omar As-Sammudi](#) who attacked a checkpoint with an automatic rifle days later and was shot dead in an exchange of fire.

In the meantime, a significant proportion of international funding to the Palestinian Authority is being invested in arming and training 'security forces' to quell any 'unauthorised' Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and support for the Hamas movement (the infamous '[Dayton Brigades](#)'), building prisons to contain the detainees, and giving enormous 'backhanders' in the form of business deals and 'development funding' to the cooperative (and unelected) Fatah elite and their associated acolytes. The current ratio of police to civilians in Palestine (1:80) is one of the highest in the world, and UNDP is funding 52 prisons (more prisons than schools according to [a recent report](#)).

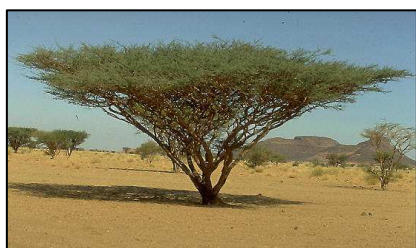


Recently, [leaked documents obtained by Al Jazeera](#) have revealed an intimate level of covert co-operation between Israeli security forces and the Palestinian Authority, and that the Palestinian Negotiating Team have offered Israel confidential concessions on sensitive issues such as the right of return of refugees and the status of illegal Jewish settlements that many Palestinians would never accept. Apparently even these desperate offers were not enough for Israel, leading many analysts to conclude the [‘the peace process is dead’](#).

With a US administration that appears unable or unwilling to reign in what is arguably the most right-wing Israeli government in the 63 year history of the state, it seems we may expect more of the same dynamics of colonisation, environmental destruction and human rights abuse as this year spins on. Within Israel itself, [thousands of protesters have rallied in Tel Aviv](#) to protest what they see as an ‘attack on Israeli democracy and civil society’, as the government persists in probing the funding of left-wing NGOs, in particular those who helped to pass information about Israeli war crimes in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead to the Goldstone Inquiry.

In the face of this blatant, establishment-sponsored injustice, the urgency of taking practical grassroots action for positive change is only heightened. The need to forge an international community of engaged citizens that transcends political borders and ethnic prejudices, and actively creates alternatives to the prevailing paradigms of elitism, militarism and environmental destruction is stronger than ever. The good news is that this is already happening, and we can all be part of the action.

At Bustan Qaraaqa for the past few months we have been gearing up for what looks set to be our busiest season yet. After the olive harvest in October, we began work on restocking the tree nursery, collecting and planting seeds of an array of native trees including Carob, Acacia, Christ’s Thorn, Palestinian Oak and Pistacia, as well as a few useful exotics such as Mesquite, Leucaena, Spondia and Albizia. The nursery now contains over 1000 grown saplings of 44 different species, with about 200 germinated seedlings coming up.



*Left: Acacia raddiana; Middle: Ceratonia siliqua (Carob); Right: Pistacia palaestina*

Since the rain failed to appear in the autumn, we forbore to plant any food crops at the farm, instead filling our time with field visits in preparation for the planting season, educational workshops, community projects and teaching a course in environmental studies at Al Quds University in Abu Dis (Alice and Tom were lucky enough to get official 1 year work visas through this connection, lifting a huge weight off our minds). Since we were also very light on volunteers during this period, this shift in focus worked very well for the project – although what we lacked in volunteer quantity we made up for in quality, with really excellent contributions to the project from everyone who worked with us this autumn – so thanks for that all you good people – you know who you are :)

However, the low numbers of volunteers presented us with a different problem, which was funding. At some point in November, we literally didn't have money for food, much less transport to get to our various field projects, much less rent for the site. With a mounting stack of unpaid utility bills for such frivolous luxuries as water, cooking gas, electricity and internet, we turned to you our network to save us – and you did not let us down! We have been truly overwhelmed by the response to our SOS email, and for the past 3 months and the next 2, the cost of the Bustan Qaraaqa project beyond the money we can raise in volunteer revenue has been entirely bank-rolled by our grassroots network – it's really your project now, and we hope you will be pleased with our efforts :)

So let us give you a brief run-down of the past few months' activities and what is in store for the coming season:

In October we travelled to the Bedouin village of Qasr As-Sir in the Negev desert to participate in a mud-building workshop and start the design and construction of a compost toilet, in cooperation with our partner organisation [Bustan](#). We hope to continue our association with Bustan (so similar to us not only in name but in vision) over the coming year, with multiple opportunities to share techniques and experience, and hopefully to cooperate in organising permaculture workshops with Bedouin communities in Israel.



*Left: Mixing mud and straw render; Middle: The new khan at Qasr As-Sir; Right: The beginnings of a new compost toilet (#4 by Bustan Qaraaqa). Thanks to Allison for these pictures!*

Throughout October, Phil and Lorena, the Bustan Qaraaqa fish-folk, were busy networking and organising to implement a number of green-water aquaculture projects in Artas community (a small farming village on the outskirts of Bethlehem), building on their experimental work at Bustan Qaraaqa during the summer. With the help of the ever-active Awad Abu Swai, they were able to connect with six farmers willing to try their hand at the fine art of fish farming.

Artas community is lucky enough to have a productive fresh-water spring in the village (too contaminated with nitrates for drinking but fine for irrigation), and farmers share this resource by channelling it, for an agreed number of hours per

week, via an ancient (and recently rehabilitated) distribution system into large, cement-lined storage pools. Thus the infrastructure for low stocking density, green-water fish farming is already in place. All that remained to do was to find a supplier of suitable fish.

We chose to use carp for these projects, since they are more cold-tolerant than the tilapia we stocked the Bustan Qaraaqa system with in the summer (although so far so good with their over-wintering this season). With the help of the good people at [Aquaculture without Frontiers](#), we were able to connect with some Israeli researchers doing breeding experiments with carp species, and they agreed to give us their surplus stock for free.

Thus in November, we were ready to enact the main event of the season: the Great Fishy Freedom Flotilla, driving a convoy of vehicles up to Dor research station (south of Haifa) to collect around 200 piscine passengers (quite big ones!) and deliver them to their new homes in the cisterns of Artas. We have to thank two Chrises for their help with this venture: Rosevear and Somerville – without their additional vehicles we would never have pulled it off.



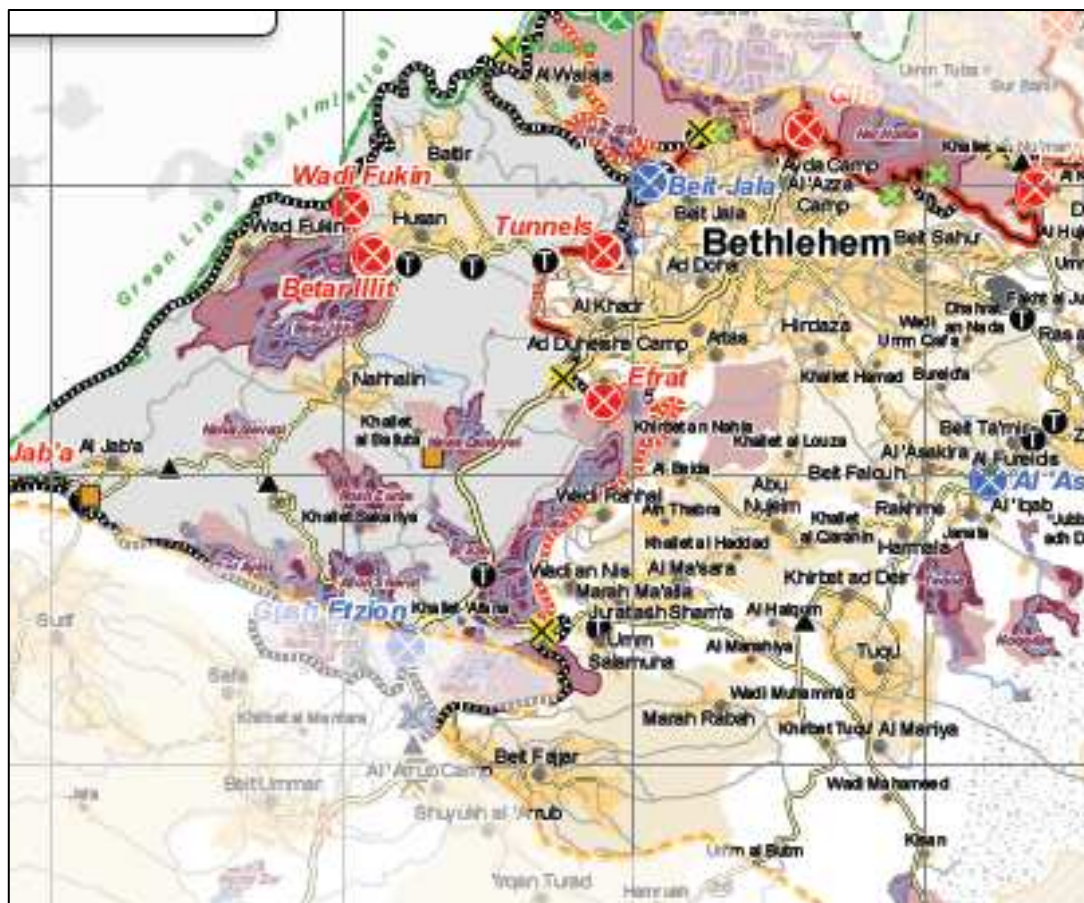
*Left: Packing fish into plastic-lined boxes filled with oxygen at Dor research station; Top right: The Brute (now gracing Bustan Qaraaqa cistern, kindly donated by Dor research station); Bottom right: Releasing fish into Artas cistern*

Phil and Lorena are now busy holding a series of follow-up workshops with the participants in this program, and if the project is a success we hope to be able to establish a breeding population of carp in the West Bank so that we can stock even more cisterns with delicious fish. For those who do not have access to pools of water, we are also working on developing more compact 'aquaponics' systems that can work with just one cubic metre of water and produce not only fish but also plant crops. Ex-Bustan Qaraaqa volunteers Chris and Kyle are already working independently on a project based in East Jerusalem to develop these systems, and



we hope to cooperate with them in the future as our project progresses (we have also to thank them for loans of money and equipment to date!).

In the meantime, Alice and Tom (the tree team) were on a mission to find homes for our friends in the Bustan Qaraaqa nursery. Their meanderings yielded dividends as operations this year will extend from a pilot project in Masafr Yatta community (south of Hebron) in cooperation with [ActionAid](#), to educational tree planting programmes in East Jerusalem schools in cooperation with [Juzoor](#), to supporting Palestinian farmers in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc in resisting land confiscation in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. We hope that we will also be able to work with the [Palestine Solidarity Project](#) to plant the Safa Valley near Beit Ummar; although the prognosis on this project is not great as two Bustan Qaraaqa volunteers have already been arrested accompanying farmers in this area in the past season, and the Israeli army have been very actively harassing the project organisers and their families.



*Map of Bethlehem area showing location of Bustan Qaraaqa (Beit Sahour), and field partners in Al Wallaja, Artas, Nahhalin, Beit Ummar and Um Salamoneh. From UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2010 closure map*

In December we were able to hold the first of our workshops with Juzoor, hosting 25 school children in a preliminary environmental education workshop at Bustan Qaraaqa, before Christmas was upon us, and with it a veritable horde of guests. This year we were happy to host over 20 people on Christmas Eve, putting the new mud-built cave dorm to good use, as well as the party cave and the sauna (for their intended uses – not as sleeping spaces!). It was a truly multi-national

gathering, with guests from every continent, so thank you to everyone who celebrated with us – for the good company and the boost to the projects' coffers :)

And so into the New Year, in a burst of activity including working at Abed's land fixing the rain-water harvesting system and planting trees (of course we are still keeping a hand in up there – you can read an update on the general situation in Al Wallaja by clicking [here](#)), tree planting in Um Salamoneh and Nahhalin, field crop planting and weekly permaculture workshops at Bustan Qaraaqa, landscaping and garden design at the Paidia education centre and a seed collection mission across the Judean Desert to the Dead Sea. The house is once more full of volunteers and we are hoping to pick up a couple of grants in the coming months to keep us in gold crowns and jewel-encrusted occasional tables.

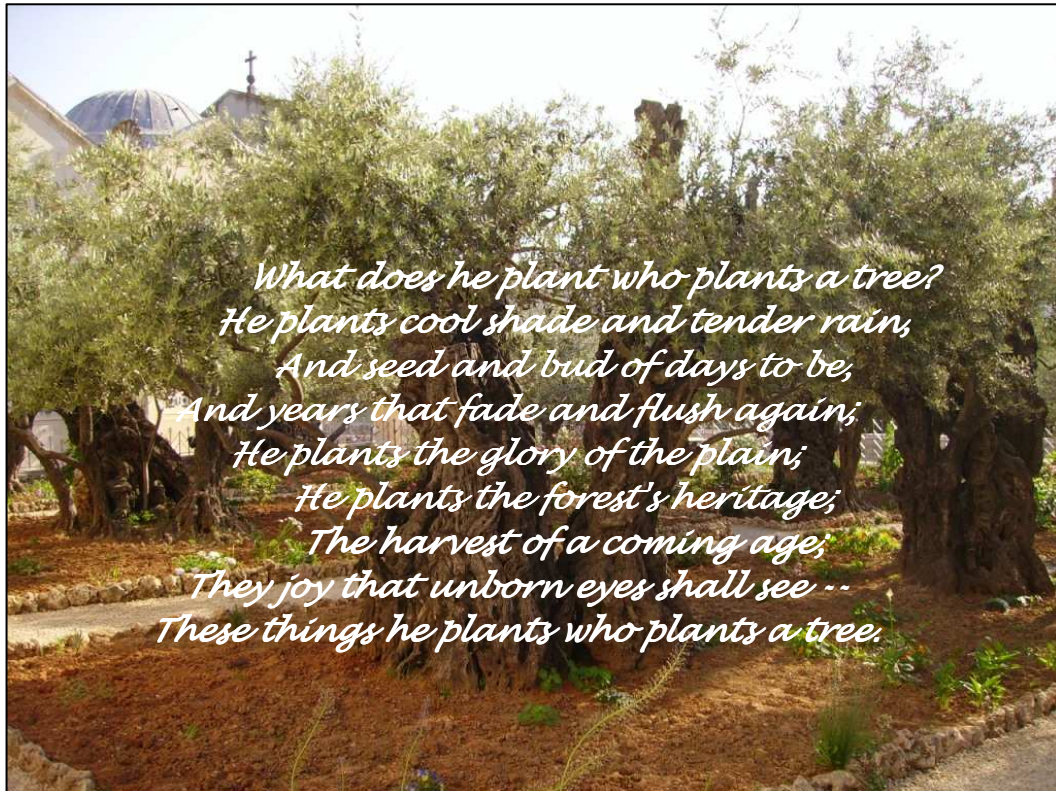
That's all from us for now. It remains only to wish you all joy and light wheresoever you may be, to thank all of our kind sponsors, volunteers and partners (really too numerous to name on this occasion) for indulging our shenanigans and making Bustan Qaraaqa possible, and to invite everyone to Palestine to plant trees with us this spring!

Merry may we meet!

With love from

Alice, Lorena, Lyra, Phil and Tom  
the Bustan Qaraaqa team

x



*Ancient Olive Tree in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jerusalem. Words by Henry Cuyler Bunner*



## Support Bustan Qaraaqa:

As a small and recently founded organisation, we rely heavily on grassroots fundraising for much of our income. Small donations can go a long way in our low budget project. Things we are currently saving up for include:

- An experimental aquaponics set-up at Bustan Qaraaqa (£400)
- Funding to pay for transport of fish and trees to our community partners (lots!)
- Computers and cameras since most of ours have been stolen at this point! :)

Our PayPal account ([info@bustanqaraaqa.org](mailto:info@bustanqaraaqa.org)) is now functional, so if you would like to support us financially, you can now do it online; or send a cheque to The Old School, Lydfords Lane, Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 4NJ.

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Have you considered becoming a regular contributor to Bustan Qaraaqa? Our monthly running costs amount to approximately £2200, broken up as follows:

Expense	Cost (NIS)	Cost (£)
Site rent	3000	565
Utility bills	450	85
Water	600	115
Transport	1600	300
Staff stipends (5 people)	3000	565
Materials	3000	565
<b>Total</b>	<b>11650</b>	<b>2195</b>

We can raise £500-£750 in the guesthouse, so if 100-200 people gave us £5-10 per month, all the project expenses would be covered and we would not have to worry about writing grant applications, instead being able to turn our full attention to the real work of creating grassroots environmental change in Palestine.

If you would like to contribute in this way, please ask your bank to set up a direct debit to our UK account:

Bank name: Lloyds TSB  
Account name: Bustan Qaraaqa  
Account number: 00052001  
Sort code: 30-93-45

For international transfers:  
SWIFT code: LOYDGB2L  
IBAN: GB30LOYD30934500052001

All contributions, however small, are gratefully received.