

Bustan Qaraaqa,
Wadi Hanna Saad,
Beit Sahour,
Bethlehem,
West Bank,
Palestinian Territories
www.bustanqaraaqa.org



January 2010

Dear friends,

As rain lashes into the wadi, and lightning is splitting the sky asunder, I have finally found the opportunity to update you on what has been going on at Bustan Qaraaqa over the past few months, and to wish you all the very best for the New Year. At the moment, we are in the midst of some much needed, although fairly violent, rainfall that comes after a month of drought and unseasonably hot weather. The storms have already caused [seven deaths in Israel and Egypt](#) and [destroyed hundreds of homes in Gaza](#), as well as flooding agricultural lands in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, causing millions of shekels worth of damage.



This extreme weather seems to be somewhat of a piece with events around the world this winter: storms of this violence are scarcely common in this region, and rainfall in the Negev desert over the past few days is the highest on record according to a report by Israel's Haaretz newspaper ([click here to see story](#)). It is a reminder (if we needed one) of the necessity to develop sustainable ways of living and climate change adaptation strategies, even (or especially) in this conflict ravaged region.

Bustan Qaraaqa has not escaped the storms unscathed either, as the force of water pouring into it off the road has cracked one of the walls of our newly built cistern, shedding 90 000 litres of water into the surrounding soil (it seems that the damage is fairly superficial, and we should be able to mend it fairly quickly once it stops raining!).

The political outlook at the moment is about as ominous and turbulent as the weather. The past few months have seen an increase in [Israeli settler attacks](#)

[on Palestinians](#), in what the settlers have termed a 'price-tag' campaign: responding to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's [10 month partial freeze on settlements](#). This settlement freeze did not include East Jerusalem, [where tensions continue to run high in areas such as Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan](#) due to house demolitions, evictions and the growth of Jewish settler communities.

As with the rain, it is not all bad, as Palestinian, international and Israeli activists have mobilised around these issues, with [unprecedented numbers of Israeli activists taking to the streets](#) in defence of their Palestinian neighbours. However, the police response has been harsh, with [over 70 protesters arrested over the past few weeks](#). This strategy is in line with Israeli policy towards West Bank demonstrations (such as [Bil'in](#) and [Nil'in](#)), where there have been [increasing numbers of arrests](#) of demonstrators and organizers both at demonstrations and in 'night-raids' on organizers' homes. In addition, the Israeli army have been [using live ammunition at demonstrations](#) with growing frequency.



The latest move in what seems to be a sinister trend aimed at silencing dissent and removing 'witnesses' to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories, has been the denial of entry to international NGO workers and journalists based in the West Bank. Many such people had been out of the country over Christmas and were refused entry at Ben Gurion airport when they attempted to return to their homes and jobs. Among the 'casualties' of this policy were our dear friends Jared Malsin (chief editor of the [Maan News English Desk](#)) and Faith Rowold (Public Relations officer of [Dar Annadwa](#)) who had been on holiday in Prague. Faith was immediately deported to Prague, whereas Jared spent a week in detention attempting to contest his case on grounds of 'freedom of the press' before he too was put on a plane and flown out ([read story here](#)).



Jared and Faith, like many internationals, were living and working in the Palestinian Territories on Israeli tourist visas, being unable to obtain work permits from Israeli authorities. They were deported for 'refusing to cooperate' during their interrogation at Ben Gurion airport; yet they were

placed in this position by Israeli authorities themselves who would not give them the necessary visas to pursue their legitimate work and have a long history of refusing entry to people admitting to connections with Palestinian organisations or individuals. Recently, Israel has stopped issuing work permits to all West Bank based NGOs including Oxfam, Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders and Handicap International, forcing all foreign employees to rely on tourist visas ([see story here](#)) and placing them in a very precarious position.

Against this backdrop of uncertainty and violence, the Bustan Qaraaqa project has been going remarkably well. We suffered a severe shock in October as Bustan Qaraaqa team members Roman and Dan were [denied entry](#) to Israel at the Sinai border whilst attempting to renew their tourist visas. Added to the departure of project co-founders Steve and Rania, who have moved to the UK with their young son, our team was abruptly slashed from seven to three; and slashed again to just two as Tom submitted to pressure from his family to take a long overdue and well-earned break in Yorkshire for eight weeks.

That left Alice and Lyra to manage the guesthouse, farm and community projects over Christmas and New Year. Luckily (as always seems to happen in these crises), help was at hand in the form of Cara and Sophia, both of whom decided to put down roots at the farm for a few months. With the help of Emory and Josh (who both stayed for a month), and an array of shorter term volunteers, this team managed to keep up a cracking pace of work, building on and expanding existing projects as well as starting a few new ones.

Back in October, we began a cooperation with [Juzoor](#), a Jerusalem based organization working for health and social development in the Palestinian community there. Juzoor brought a total of 140 school children to Bustan Qaraaqa in a series of six tree planting workshops throughout November – a perfectly timed initiative, coinciding almost exactly with the beginning of the tree-planting season.





As well as this, we started an exciting new project with our long-term partner organization, [Paidia](#). Paidia are developing a new centre in Beit Sahour from which to operate their youth development programs. We are helping them to integrate permaculture design into their development plan so that the centre can demonstrate to their program participants the possibilities for taking action to protect the environment and improve food and water security. Our first joint project in this enterprise is to build a composting toilet using green building techniques such as tyres and cob. We will eventually create rainwater catchment systems, greywater recycling, a food garden and chicken house at this site.



We also organized tree-planting days at Bustan Qaraaqa, at Abed's farm in Al Wallaja and in Um Salamoneh, on land threatened with confiscation to make way for an Israeli cemetery. Abed's situation has improved quite significantly since our last newsletter, as his lawyer has managed to secure him a blue Jerusalem ID. This means that he is now legally entitled to be present on his land, although there is still a serious threat from Israeli real-estate developers, who continue to push for his expulsion to make way for settlement expansion. This season we were able to raise enough money to

install a rainwater harvesting system at Abed's, donating 2 water tanks (thanks Imo!), and are still working on a project to create a greenhouse outside the cave.



Christmas came and went with relative ease compared to last year's mayhem (we still remember it fondly for those of you who were here – but it was definitely a one time only experience!). The guesthouse was booked up with four people over, camping on mattresses in the common room. On Christmas Eve we walked the route of the Shepherds, from the farm all the way up the mountain to Bethlehem to see the celebrations in Manger Square and join the midnight mass in the Nativity Church. On Christmas Day we had a wonderful barbeque in the sunshine, as temperatures continued to top 25°C (apparently there are some advantages to Climate Change!).

At New Year we attended a vigil in remembrance of almost 1400 Palestinians killed in Gaza this time last year, and calling for an end to the [ongoing siege](#) that continues to cripple efforts to rebuild and develop the shattered Strip. We saw in the New Year with Abed and Adil in Al Wallaja and shortly afterwards we found the newest member of the Bustan Qaraaqa team, one David Bowie (pictured right), loitering outside the house in a pile of manure one cold winter evening. And in early January we got the best Christmas present we could possibly have asked for as Tom got back into the country after several hours interrogation at Ben Gurion and we were able to draw a heartfelt sigh of relief as our team were reunited.



And so as 2010 spins on we have much to look forward to. So far this season we have planted just 200 or so of the 2000 trees we have raised in our nursery this year, and are actively seeking homes for the rest. We have made some

promising beginnings forming partnerships with Awad Abu Sway (a talented community organizer from Artas village) and Juzoor, a grassroots development organization in Jerusalem. Hopefully they will prove invaluable in helping us bring this project on. As we plant trees, we can also begin the work of restocking and hopefully expanding the nursery for next year. We are also excited to announce that in February, Alice and Tom will start jobs teaching Environmental Studies at the new English Language Honors College of Al Quds University. We are very excited about this connection, as it will give us a chance to share our ideas with a new audience as well as involving more young Palestinians in the Bustan Qaraaqa project. It also gives us a slim chance of acquiring West Bank work permits, which might ease our situations somewhat although this is by no means certain.

As ever we have many people to thank for their generosity in supporting and contributing to our work. Firstly we would like to thank Dave and Sophia – two volunteers who have contributed months of their time, piles of their money and great pools of their blood, sweat and tears slaving away at the farm. Thanks also to all the other volunteers who have helped out in the past months: Tucker, Lucinda, José, Jonathan, Carl, Cara, Blanaid, Monther, Bruno, Emory, Josh, Nadine, Mansuko, Andrew and Leah (sorry if I am forgetting anybody!) .

Secondly we would like to thank our kind sponsors Roger and Sylvia Storey, Marie Tyler, Imogen Bright and Marika Fusser, who have kept us afloat over the last few months in the absence of any major grants (or time to apply for them!) and allowed us to continue and expand our work – and to buy new water tanks for the farm (an amazing gift!). Many thanks also to Emily Shapiro and her mother and to Sam Cuthbertson for their fundraising efforts on our behalf, to Adam Haunch for his continued work developing and administering the website and to Phil and Mary Gray for running our errands in the UK and looking after our bank account. We send all our love to the absent members of our team – Steve, Roman and Nick back on the soggy island; and to Jared and Faith back in the US: we hope to see you all before too long, here or there.

To all of you we wish you joy and light in 2010, and we extend a warm invitation to visit us here at Bustan Qaraaqa,

Merry may we meet!

With love from

Alice, Lyra and Tom

the Bustan Qaraaqa team

x

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:

- A roof for our soon-to-be-built greenhouse (about £350);
- Materials to rebuild and expand the tree nursery for next year (about £250)
- Abed's greenhouse project (we need another £200-300 to finish this project)
- Logistic support for the tree planting season (vehicle hire for transporting trees) (about £15 per week)

The 'Donate' button on our website (www.bustanqaraaqa.org) is now up and running, 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 £1500, broken up as follows:

Expense	Cost (NIS)	Cost (£)
Site rent	3000	500
Utility bills	450	75
Water	600	100
Transport	600	100
Staff stipends (3 people)	1800	300
Materials	2550	425
Total	9000	1500

We can raise £500-£750 in the guesthouse, so if 100-200 people gave us £5 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.