

Letters to Ilse

In one group we introduced Ilse's fate to the students from Palestine and asked them to write a letter to her:

Ilse is 98 years old and lives in London. She was born in a Jewish German family. For 70 years she has lived in London. She was lucky at that time because she could flee from the Nazi terror in Germany. Members of her family and friends were not able to escape and were murdered in the KZ.

Last year Ilse heard about the project 'Vacation from War' and she was very fond of the idea. "I'm 98 years old and it is very difficult for me to walk but I can call friends and can ask them to support this unusual and wonderful reconciliation project."

Since then she stays in contact and collects money for the summer camps.

We want to document some quotations from the letters:

Dear Ilse,

This project, we took part in here in Germany, really was a vacation from war. Sometimes it was too intense and difficult to share your personal experiences facing the occupation at home. During these times I couldn't help but cry. But there were many times when we all sat together and sang our traditional songs and danced. During these times I couldn't help but laugh and feel empowered.

It is an experience that taught us that at the end of the day we are just humans, striving for a decent, safe and peaceful life, because on both sides we are tired, and the pain is too much to bear. I hope that many people will be able to enjoy such a powerful experience.

Fatma from Nablus

Dear Ilse,

I am 27 years old and live in Jericho. I always saw the Israeli soldiers like monsters but here we sat together with Israelis who served in the army. They really were nice and we understood each other and we became friends. So now if a soldier will stop me at a checkpoint and he wants to abuse me, I will tell him, that I know that there is a human hiding inside this uniform, so deal with me politely.

After years I feel that there is another life full of hope and happiness.

Samir from Jericho

Dear Ilse,

I am a Palestinian girl who lives in Jericho. To reach my college in Birzeit I have to travel 40 kilometres. My trip is a real suffering or rather a battle. The West had already reached the moon, but we have to go back to donkeys and carts to reach our college. I am one of the Palestinians who believe in peace and I think that the solution will come from the new young generation. Finally, I want to thank you for listening and reading what we wrote for you.

Reem from Jericho

Dear Ilse

After taking part in the seminar, I feel that life is worthy because one's help is needed and I feel that I got a message to show people the way which leads to peace and breaking fear and barriers between them and all people.

I have a feeling of happiness and strength.

*With love, your
brother from the
holy land*

Dear Ilse,

The most important thing for me was that I came here to bring for them a message of peace and to tell them that we are not terrorists and we are peaceful people, want to live in peace and I am happy that I have a chance doing that in Germany.

*Dana from
Bethlehem*

Please remember always: A person who works for peace can make a piece of news, but a group of people who work for peace can change history.

Soraya from Beit Jalla

Letters to Muin

In the same group we introduced Muin's fate to the students from Israel and asked them to write a letter to him:

Muin is a popular poet and singer in his area. In the year 1948 he was evacuated from his village, Iqrit, in upper Galilee. All inhabitants were evacuated by the Israeli army. The villagers were friendly and didn't participate in armed struggle against Jews. They were supposed to spend only two weeks away from their home. Since that day more than 55 years passed, and they still live as refugees near their old village. In 1948/9 they became Israeli citizens. Although the High Court for Justice decided that they should return to their houses, they couldn't because all the houses were destroyed. 25% of their land was confiscated and given to Jewish settlements. The people of Iqrit want to use a compensation fund to rebuild the village and live with their Jewish neighbours in peace and dignity.

We want to document some quotations from the letters:

Dear Muin,

I want to start this letter by apologizing for the Israeli responsibility for your suffering. I acknowledge your rights and hope our two peoples can build enough trust to end the occupation and have peace between the two countries.

If it was in the hands of the participants of this seminar, we would have had a peace agreement in our hands. I hope to welcome you some day back to your home, with the knowledge that you accept me as your neighbour.

Carmela from Israel

Dear Muin

I've always been proud of my parents for leaving everything they had, just in the name of „Zionism“ when they went to Israel in 1973. This Seminar opened my eyes in ways I can't even describe.

There is nothing in my mind that justifies suffering, justifies taking homes, tearing families apart. Nothing.

I wish all Israelis and Palestinians had a chance to spend two weeks together. Put everything aside and just live together, breathe together, feel together. Put history behind and try and fix the present.

Janelle from Israel

Dear Muin

I went through a meaningful process in the seminar. I feel that I gained new friends with whom I can continue struggling against the Israeli government. Each side in our group decided to go back to Israel/Palestine and spread the word – that peace can be done, and we can and should overcome the conspiracy to keep us apart, behind walls. I wish and plan to remain in touch with my new Palestinian friends and to turn thoughts and ideas to direct non-violent actions in the near future.

In sha'ala you will build your home in Iqrit soon.

Yonit from Israel

Dear Muin

I'm 22 years old and got out of the Israeli army about 4 month ago. After seeing the conflict in its full complexity as a soldier I understood that this situation cannot go on. I sat in Tel Aviv saying ,we must stop the occupation', but I wasn't active at all.

Those two weeks were the most amazing time of my life. Getting to know the „other side“ and the feeling of brotherhood between the Israelis and Palestinians made me realize that peace between these two painful nations is reachable.

When I read your story I knew that the refugees' problems must be solved and can be solved. I hope you understand that the Israeli public will not agree to the return of all refugees and that in order to make peace the Palestinians will have to accept the idea that only part of them will come while others will be compensated in other ways. I think that the basic platform peace is built on is trust. And trust is what we are building here in Germany

Yohav from Israel