

Report by the visitors

Introduction by Siham

We are a group that came from a place that lacks freedom and security, from a place where the Zionist occupation has ravaged and broken and destroyed the dreams of children and youth before they even began.

We are a Palestinian group that has suffered from the loss of human rights that the world lives and enjoys.

We are a Palestinian group that has given some of our children and youth the opportunity to leave their city, camp or town for the first time in their lives from the cage of occupation to the world of freedom to see what life is like outside the restrictions of occupation within the Beyond the Barriers project that aims to enable youth from Palestine to exchange experiences with youth in Britain and to raise awareness of their stolen rights in Palestine.

Our group of seven Palestinian teenagers from the occupied West Bank and from more than one area in Palestine had the opportunity to visit more than one area in Britain. The Palestinian youth tour included visits to places such as Pendlehell, Lincolnshire, Bradford, Blackburn, Derby, Birmingham, Cornwall and finally London. Among the visits was a visit to the city of Birmingham as part of a carefully planned program by the project officials, Mrs. Nandita Dowson and Mr. Abdul Wahab Al-Sabah.

Of course, in every location we meet people who open their hearts to us before their homes with all love, offering us love, support and smiles and walking with us at every stage supporting Palestine. We see them in every location and at every event raising the Palestinian flag and chanting with us for the freedom of Palestine. All love and respect to all the people who surrounded us with their love and who are still in contact with us and participate with us in the demonstrations in which they support Palestine.

Introduction by Abed

About the second youth visit to Britain in the Beyond the Checkpoints project.

Throughout the visit, our youth and their leaders remarked on the love, affection and positive atmosphere they experienced. From the point of our arrival at the airport, the reception was wonderful. On the way north, we stopped in Cambridge, where the group was invited to eat by friends, then went to Pendle, Bradford, Blackburn, Derby, Birmingham, Cornwall and different locations in London (Camden, Islington, Hackney and Ilford). Everywhere organisations extended love and appreciation to our youth and we met people who had helped the project by volunteering money, time and effort in preparation and running the visit. They met all the needs of the visitors with all friendliness although so many things were needed, but everyone was cooperative and giving in an unprecedented way in the north, center and south. All love and appreciation to everyone who contributed to the success and presentation of this exceptional visit and helped to bring it out in the best possible way.

Pendle by Lama

Pendle was a really lovely town.

It was the first time in my life that I went in a boat and went on the water. It was a really lovely feeling.

And of course I won't forget when we went to Pendle Hill and climbed to the top and hail came and attacked us and we went back running to the bus!

And at the end of the day we went to an event in a youth centre and there we got to know lots of good people. I won't forget them ever in the whole of my life.

It was the first time in my life that I held a mike and talked about my problems. That was a feeling as if I was a bird imprisoned in a cage and I escaped from my cage.

And of course I am going to miss you, all of you in Pendle, and every town that we visited.

Thank you all and thank you for the present that you gave us! And the last thing, I hope that this journey returns because it was really beautiful! It changed our characters completely and we loved the people who were in the video when the cold of Pendle fell on us...

And thank you all! We love you.

Bradford by Ameer

Alslamalekm good evening everyone

I am Ameer .

In Bradford we went to many places

The car show was one of the largest in all of England

When we went to the axe-throwing place, it was the best part of the day.

I learned something new in my life such as bowling.

And the activity of the night was the first time in my life that I spoke in front of so many people like this

And it was sweet too

They were sweet days that no one in our group could forget. Thank you and I love you all.

Bradford by Ahmed

Alslamalekum!

I am Ahmed I miss you all guys, how are you all doing?! I hope all of you now are good.

Bradford days were beautiful. I don't forget when we went to Cha Cha Chai Grill They were nice people, especially the owner of the restaurant, who was nice to us.

And of course, we do not forget the Peace Museum. It was a very wonderful museum. I remember when I wrote my letter and Muj hung it on the wall instead of me.

And when we went to the car showroom, I was amazed at the beauty of sports cars. It was my first time seeing a Lamborghini in real life.

And throwing the axes at a target. AbdulWahab and Alaa Were Amazing at That. Alaa was the champion in the axe-throwing tournament and won the best player of the day cup.

And the most beautiful thing about that day, when we went to church and did some activities that I will never forget.

We ended our day with dinner, which was one of the best things I ate during my entire visit in Britain.

They were unforgettable days. Thank you all.

Blackburn by Abdulrahman

My experience in Blackburn.

We went to the office of Youth Action and we went to the Mayor's office and we had a tour around it. Then we went to the biggest university in Blackburn. We took a group photo. Then we went to the centre and said our prayers and we had lunch and we played with virtual reality headsets.

And then after enjoying that we went to a party where they welcomed us in a beautiful way.

After the great party we went to a restaurant and had supper. All thanks to them

Derby by Alaa

The visit to Derby on the day of the fifteenth was interesting. We visited Derby Theatre with our friend Linda. She introduced us to the theatre teacher with her young students. We had some introducing activities to break the ice and a brief knowledge about the theatre.

Then, we went to an event to meet Palestinians who live in Derby. It was nice to meet our people and talked about our mutual issues and concerns. Then we had dinner and sweets at the end.

We went then to sleep for two nights in our friend's house 'Dave' the Wiseman. The man who believes that we have a gift which is the mind to read and think and then he has the wisdom to search for the truth and the fact. At his house, we felt like we were at home.

On the 16th, we went to visit the local primary school with Father Julian. A group of young kids was showing us around the school and our young kids were surprised by the services that were provided for the students. At the end of looking around the school, we had to meet all the kids in the school hall and then very good questions came from these kids. It was too important for them to understand what is going on in this world and the teacher Rachael was very welcoming to give us a space with our kids to meet them.

Then we wrote the kids' names in Arabic which they were happy to see, and gifts were distributed from the school to our young kids. We left the school with beautiful smiles on the faces of these kids chasing us at the schoolyard waving goodbye.

Afterward, we went to the Derby Theatre. We had a lunch there and then we went to have a tour inside the theatre. It was very interesting to see it due to not having one in Palestine and it carries a very fundamental message for the audience. What I noticed it is much respected that there is a performance in which all ages can participate. A space for people to express their feelings. Then, we had some activities with the theatre teacher and her students. We had so much fun and they were so kind.

We kept moving to visit the Museum of Making which was famous for producing silk 300 years ago. Now it shows the old history and the new innovation of the city via these years. We finished the visit by going to the Derby Cathedral church which relates to the 16th century. We went up to the tower and we had a very informative talk about its history and the tones of the bell. The fathers were kind and patient with us.

Finally, we went to the evening event where we had very Palestinian food, it was woow so good and I had to have dinner twice for its taste. While we were eating, we were enjoying talking to our friends and introducing ourselves to each other.

Then Nandita and Abed made a speech and we 'the leaders' and the kids had the chance to introduce ourselves. The host and the guests were so kind and we saw the love and the solidarity in their eyes.

It was a nice ending to our day in Derby with people full of love and kindness to go back to sleep in my brother's house Dav and to leave the next day his house with beautiful memories we had together and with other friends like the theatre teacher and our friend Linda.

Birmingham by Maria

Birmingham is the second biggest city in Britain after London, and has some very important famous attractions. You're lucky if you get the chance to go there – it's easy to see lots of special tourist sites and hotspots and entertainment spots in the town. Also there are several big shops and markets and big schools which are really great. Our journey in Birmingham was really lovely, getting to know their lives and their schools and students.

During our visit we went to a school – its organisation was great, its students were wonderful and it was a great visit. Also we went to the Central Mosque – we had a great visit to the mosque which was fantastic, ilhamdullah. Finally we went to Brindley Place, one of the most beautiful and biggest office block. It was the first time in my life that I saw a place like that.

In the end all thanks and appreciation to the people who made this lovely visit possible.

Birmingham by Siham

Details about the youth visit to Birmingham.

Our day in Birmingham started with school visits, where our children visited a children's and youth school, and had the opportunity to meet students, exchange experiences and participate in some activities. This was an opportunity for them to gain experience and see the differences between schools. Each visit to one of the schools included comparisons in terms of the school's size, playgrounds, variety of playgrounds, discipline, order and cleanliness.

Continued visit to Birmingham Central Mosque, where the group toured the mosque, learned about the mosque's sections, and also taught Tajweed and Quran recitation. They also provided us with lunch, many thanks to them. This visit provided an opportunity to get to know the Muslim community in Birmingham and promote cultural exchange.

The beautiful visit to the Birmingham Central Library was distinguished by the beauty of the external building, which indicates the magnificence of the construction and creative engineering, and its internal beauty and organization, which includes countless books arranged in a way that captivates the eye. The tour included a visit to a games complex where we enjoyed bowling, and the youth enjoyed other games in the complex, which added fun and vitality to the tour for them and an experience of games they played for the first time.

We concluded the tour with a visit to the Mahdi Association, where the people welcomed us with warmth and love. At first, a presentation was given by CADFA, and then our Palestinian youth presented their stories, experiences and the events taking place in their area. We ended the tour with the Palestinian Dabka, which added a beautiful atmosphere full of joy and chants for the freedom of Palestine.

Cornwall by Abed

was asked to write about the visit to Cornwall which took place in the middle of the project after several . days spent in the north and central England. From preparation for the project, reaching the Cornwall in the far southwest of England seemed a challenge, as the distance by bus from Birmingham is over five hours. However, due to the amazing nature of the countryside and the ability of our dear friend Richard MacSween, we did not feel the difficulty of the road. In the evening we arrived in one of the most beautiful places on this coast – Newport - where some of our young people had their first encounter with the Atlantic Ocean -before heading to our host in a village overlooking the ocean called Morgan Porth.

The visit to Cornwall was an integral part of our project but when I arrived, I felt that I - the Palestinian group leader -had arrived at an island of safety and rest. The impression I had formed on my first visit to the area last July was that I was on vacation or on retreat, and indeed this is what happened. As soon as we arrived at our hosts that evening, I began to feel comfortable and relaxed, and this feeling was increased by the warmth of the reception and the kindness of the faces as well as the beauty of the place. Of course, places have a great impact on their inhabitants. Everyone and everything around us pushed us to end our exhaustion and relax and prepared us for a fantastic holiday in a heavenly place.

Our programme in Cornwall combined the enjoyment of the place, the generosity of its people, and the seriousness of the mission and work. It was a completely different environment from the places that the visitors experienced in the early days of the project. Here in Cornwall, the majority were indigenous people and tourists and there were worries that there would be no interest in what was happening in Palestine. However, from the first meeting in the Fish Factory youth centre in Penryn, we were received with all friendliness and met friends who had great knowledge of what was happening in Palestine. Our youth worked with the members of the center with all friendliness and interest. The same was true in a skateboarding session in Falmouth. Many local youth joined in and surrounded our Palestinian youth from Palestine with all love and cooperation. I began to form a different impression than I had at the beginning, fears disappeared and we worked once again in a friendly environment that overcame all worries about racism. There were many tours, whether in Truro or Falmouth or even in the beautiful village where we stayed and whose church bells rang to welcome us and our visit

We went to many different magical places which included surprises such as (in Falmouth) an invitation to a boat trip on the sea – a journey of freedom that left a wonderful impression on everyone. It was a great

happiness that our youth were able to go into the water in the ocean. The locals gave justified warnings but there was no way the young people could resist – most youth from Palestine had not been able to go into the sea before.

We also had a striking morning walk in one of the villages, arriving at an old church whose bells rang to celebrate our arrival. There was a warm reception in the church for the people, where we were happy to meet many of the loved ones in this wonderful village.

In the public event in Truro, it was a surprise to meet a friend I had not heard from for over 14 years and to find that she had lived in Truro. I was very happy to meet her and all of our hosts in Truro. I was surprised by the diversity and number of people at the welcoming event in the village of Mawgan Porth, and the arrangements that were made for us as visitors from Palestine. We were struck by the similarity of the Cornish folk dance and the Palestinian dabke.

I think that the decision to go to Cornwall – a different place from our usual visits – was a milestone for the project. Going there in the middle of our project helped the smooth running of the project. Cornwall was like an island of contemplation and relaxation for us visitors.

Before we left Cornwall, we had a wonderful tour between the bays and the wonderful hills overlooking the ocean - a dazzling morning walk in the embrace of nature with the sound of the sea and the beauty of the weakening sun and a remarkable rest stop with our friends on a beautiful hill by the roaring ocean.

Regarding accommodation, food, safety, transport and all help, our lovely friends overwhelmed us. The diverse activities included fun, work, meeting young people and families, listening and talking to people of all backgrounds. All love and appreciation to all those in charge of our programme and everyone who welcomed us: we truly hope that we will be able to receive them one day in Palestine.

London by Mohammed Samoum

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Salamu Aleikum

London was a very beautiful city.

It was a very beautiful experience when we visited Big Ben and that was almost the most beautiful thing that we visited and I was very enthusiastic to see it. We saw some people supporting the Palestinian cause and they loved us.

And when we visited the dinosaur museum, it was really lovely when we saw lots of different things including moving models of dinosaurs, and we saw many animals of prey that have been extinct for thousands of years.

And not to forget our visit to a Palestinian family, Khalid and his mother and his wife for welcoming us in a beautiful way with delicious food and their care for us.

We also visited Parliament and saw old, beautiful archeological sites.

We played tennis and that was a great experience.

Also we visited some schools and did an art lesson.

And it was one of my dreams to go and visit the play that Arsenal play, the Emirates stadium – that was great.

And we thank everyone who welcomed us to meetings and listened to us.

And we met someone that all of us liked a lot and we called him 'Aseel' - all of us miss him. I would like to say thank you very, very much to CADFA and then you very very much to Mr Abdulwahab and Nandita for everything they gave us and I want to thank all the volunteers in these projects and then you to Sharat and Naeem and Shahid and thank you to everyone without exception.

London by Sidra

I am Sidra, 14 years old, from Palestine, Askar New Camp. When we arrived in London, the place was different from other places. We moved from the countryside to the crowded city. We had many activities. I saw the big double-decker bus, the different streets, we went to a park and walked around. We visited museums. I liked the dinosaur museum, especially the dinosaur that moved as if it was real. We also visited the Palestinian ambassador, Hussam Zomlot, who liked me, especially when I talked about the curriculum in British schools that does not talk about Palestine. I felt proud when I took a picture near him. I saw the famous Big Ben clock. I had never seen it so big before. We went to the Palestine Café, where we were served Palestinian food, especially Maqluba. We visited a school and an institution that taught us how to draw on T-shirts. I made a T-shirt for my sister to take as a gift for her, and she was very happy with it. The thing I enjoyed the most was when we visited the Emirates Stadium, and when they took us to play football. It was the first time I played football on a big field. We also played tennis. We played many games on this visit. I played it before and there are many people who welcomed us and we went to many places where we talked about Palestine. In conclusion, I would like to thank you for this beautiful visit and for going to Britain and seeing all its cities. I made many friends and my self-confidence increased and I am no longer afraid to speak in front of people. Thank you very much.

Conclusion by Siham

These tours gave our youth the freedom to express themselves about the occupation and its impact on their lives, problems and rights without fear, as they felt safe, exchanged cultures, raised awareness and youth integration. Many thanks to those who gave us this opportunity to see life from a different perspective that does not include occupation, raids, fear, poverty, destruction and death, Many thanks to those who opened their hearts to us before their homes.