



Social Media

A Fight with Sticks and Stones

Courtesy of www.Facebook.com/PalestinianChristians

I'm writing as a representative of the 12 administrators of the "Palestinian Christians" social media page from all over the world (Palestine, Jordan, Chile, Australia, Lebanon, United States, and United Kingdom) who have been working day and night to make our campaign a success. There are many others who are not even page administrators whose efforts have proved invaluable.

We started this journey back in 2004 as a small Yahoo group in order to raise our voice against the Israeli occupation and to spread the word about Christian-related news in Palestine. Social media provides a means of independence and privileged communication that is free of censorship and the rough hands of content editors.

The voice of Palestinian Christians has long been lost in the midst of the clashing forces of world media. We do not have a proper voice that speaks for our issues, concerns, and joys. The international media is mostly controlled by politicians and lobbyists who produce reports,



Photo courtesy of friendsofsabeel.org.uk

materials, and articles that use Israeli terms and promote Israeli propaganda. Why are we so concerned about this?

Being Palestinian, we cannot let Israel try to use us as a political card for its own gain. We believe that Palestinians are Palestinians no matter what religion we follow. We are born as Palestinians first; the Arabic words of this land are the first words we learn. It's the soil of Palestine on which we first walk as children before we start our quest to find our own image of God, whether we are Christians, Muslims, Jews, or Samaritans. Through our social media page we try to spread the joy of Easter and Christmas from all over Palestine. I remember the many hours I have spent – and I look forward to the hours I will spend in the future – collecting photos from all the various Christian denominations around historical Palestine.

We never try to camouflage the Palestinian plight or bury our heads in the sand. There are two main issues of concern (among many others) that we always try to report swiftly and accurately.

First, whenever there is colonisation and occupation, you will always find some people who identify with the occupying forces for personal and financial gain. It cannot be denied that some Christians across the green line have decided to join the Israeli army due to family pressure, poor economic conditions, or psychological issues. The Israelis tend to use this to create tension between the native inhabitants of the land. They want us to be afraid of each other.

We stand against the propaganda and use social media to reveal the real face of the Israeli occupation – persecutors of Palestinian Christians and accomplices in vandalising our holy sites. We ask the Christians who





Gaza - A church and a mosque that have shared a wall for hundreds of years Photo Credit Ruqaya Izzidien.

receive notices from the Israeli army to burn such notices and even capture this on camera for the world to see. We also show the concurrent vandalism and targeting of our holy places by Jewish gangs as a reminder for anyone who still questions the situation of Palestinian Christians.

In addition, social media enables us to join with our Palestinian brothers and sisters on Facebook to spread the word about Days of Return. These events are designed to remind the original inhabitants of destroyed Palestinian villages of their real roots, and also to inform all Palestinians about these villages. Palestinian villages such as Iqrit and Bir'im were depopulated and destroyed during the *Nakba* (Palestinian catastrophe). We realised after posting photos of the ruins that many Palestinians were not even aware that these villages ever existed. We hope that the gatherings associated with these social events will create a constant reminder about the right of return for all Palestinian refugees.

They never teach us about this in our schools. The Israelis use our ignorance to implement their grand plan to Judaise all of Palestine. We are left with few resources and mainly independent channels such as social media to raise awareness and call for action.

After ten years of working on the page, I've started to learn few tips and tricks of the social media trade.

A Chinese proverb says: "A picture is worth a thousand words." This has proven very true in our social posts; one picture receives more attention and *Likes* than ten full-length articles. Whenever readers are presented with an article they tend only to read the headlines and ignore the text. It's often controversy that stirs up people more than the seriousness and urgency of the news or the post in question.

Although we sometimes use Twitter, our main focus is Facebook, which has proved to be a rewarding medium for our efforts. We hope to upgrade our social media work to include our own website and mailing list in the near future.

Our priority must be to encourage and educate our people about the reality of their lost history, culture, and heritage. We want to promote the genuine democratic values of freedom, equality, religious choices, and modernisation. Our national – rather than religious – identity is our main concern. That's why the word "Palestinian" comes before the word "Christian" in our page title.

As one of the sole means to promote our rights, social media use is proof of our lack of resources in front of the rich and powerful media apparatus of the Zionists. Yet we Palestinians have always used sticks and stones to defend our land, and we shall continue to do the same with the sticks and stones of social media.