

Palestinian leader's visit to Haringey

The visit of Issam Faroun to Haringey, November 22nd to November 30th was a great success, both in terms of practical solidarity—money was raised and handicrafts sold—and by raising the issue of Palestine and getting word around about the realities of life under Israeli occupation and behind the wall.

Some key moments of the visit included:

Wightman Road Mosque Issam led Friday prayers at the Mosque and was very well received. Abdool Ali, the leader of the Mosque committee, suggested that we put forward a proposal for the twinning with a mosque in Aizaria. Issam suggested a mosque near him and was very positive about this.

Twinning Conference This took place in Friends' House, Euston, London, on the weekend of Issam's visit. There were workshops on strengthening educational links, women's links and trade union links. It was proposed that twinning groups bring over one or more Palestinian women for a week's tour centering on International Women's Day in March.

Public meeting This was held at Park View Academy in Tottenham and was led off by leading peace activist Bruce Kent. There was an enthusiastic audience.

Visit to Civic Centre Issam got a warm reception from the Mayor of Haringey, Sheik Thompson. He fought a courageous fight to have the visit. Unfortunately not so many Councillors raised their heads above the parapet. Our supporters are Sheik himself, Isidoros Diakkides and Bob Harris. Jonathan Bloc and John Oakes were around.

We met Yasemin Brett, an Enfield councillor, at Sheik Thompson's reception. She is keen to do something in Enfield.

Cathy O'Leary Community Centre Visit Issam relished this visit to a local community centre situated near the Spurs football club. He got a great reception.

St Ignatius meeting This was a meeting for a diverse range of faith groups from Quakers to Catholics, and was not only a well attended and lively event but one that laid the basis for further solidarity work in this area.

Lobby of Parliament This was a lobby of Parliament organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Issam was able to tell local Haringey MP Lynne Featherstone all about the dire situation in Aizaria. He also met Tony Benn and Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn.

College of North East London The University and College Union issued the following statement about Issam's visit:

Issam Faraoun, the mayor of Aizaria (also known by its biblical name of Bethany), in Palestine, brought a message of hope and a request for support to the College of North East London (CoNEL) at the Annual General Meeting of the teachers' Union, UCU, last Wednesday, 29th November.

UCU is supporting a borough-wide twinning initiative between the town of Aizaria and Haringey. As part of his visit, Issam met with the college principal, Paul Head, to discuss the practical support that the college could give to the mayor's community, in particular its schools and colleges.

Issam felt that a modern college like CoNEL could provide teachers in Aizaria with skills and knowledge about the latest teaching methods and use of IT, and potentially develop the training that teachers in Aizaria lack. There were also discussions about making connections through the British Council with an Israeli school that may want to build links with Palestinian students.

UCU branch Chair Penny Charles stated that "it is important for a trade union to demonstrate its commitment to

solidarity. It is particularly important that a teaching union should support colleagues facing the terrible circumstances in Palestine.”

Hornsey School for GirlsThis visit followed a lesson, the previous week with a class of citizenship students where the students discussed how they would feel if part of their borough was isolated behind an 8 metre concrete wall, cutting them off from their school, hospital, work and shops. The lesson went very well and this enthused the students to start to think about the reality of the occupation for Palestinians and write some questions to ask the mayor when he visited. Issam met with the Head Teacher, Andy Yarrow, Eleni Karaoli, their international links co-ordinator and other teachers. Hornsey Girls suggested inviting a teacher over from Aizaria to shadow classes at the end of this academic year and this is being pursued. A project to link Hornsey Girls with the Aizaria Secondary Girls’ School via the internet is well under way and the UCU branch at the College of North London has committed to funding the internet connection in Aizaria.

ColindaleIssam also visited Grove Park Special School in Colindale where he had been invited to address the assembly. He was warmly welcomed by the Head Teacher, Kay Johnson and the Deputy and Assistant Heads. There is a desire at the school to twin with the Rose of Jerusalem Charitable Foundation in Aizaria which is a rehabilitation centre for children and young people with disabilities in Aizaria.

MediaIssam’s visit was on the front page on the Morning Star a daily national labour movement focused paper. He was also interviewed on Beirut based TV, ANB, for an hour going out across the Middle East. Here he took part in a discussion at Press TV (Iranian). He was also interviewed by Press TV, Turkish TV and a Turkish reporter at the Civic Centre and was a guest on BBC Radio 5, George Galloway's radio show and on Greek Radio.

Trade UnionsThe local Trades Council—the umbrella organisation for trade unionists across Haringey, presented a commemorative plate to Issam at the farewell meal on the last Thursday of his visit.