



*FES Resident Representative Knut Dethlefsen
welcomes ASF Volunteers*

Jerusalem. June 19th, 2007. The FES guided 25 young volunteers currently serving in Israel through a day of meetings and tours in Jerusalem emphasizing the reality of Palestinian living conditions.

Volunteers from Germany organized through *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (ASF)* have spent the past several months in Israel performing community service work assisting school children, the elderly and Holocaust survivors. The ASF program is guided by the principle of reconciliation across nationality, generation and religion. Sixty years after the Nazi-era volunteers, usually fresh from high school, assume civil service roles to reconcile the injustice of the past and lay the foundations for a peaceful future. Israel is only one of 13 countries hosting volunteers.

Beyond service work, the ASF program seeks to imbue its participants with a broader understanding of the countries in which they work. The day sponsored by the FES supplemented the volunteer experience with visits to NGOs working the Palestinian Territories and meetings with Palestinian political actors.



*The Separation
Barrier*

At the International Committee of the Red Cross in Jerusalem the volunteers watched a film documenting real Palestinian children as journeyed unaccompanied for hours on Red Cross buses to visit imprisoned parents in Israeli jails. Facilitation of family visits is only one of many ICRC programs in the region and highlights the realities of life in Palestine as much as the real work of the Red Cross.

Following conversations in the ICRC, the volunteers viewed the Israeli separation barrier and the Qalandiya checkpoint. Programs in Ramallah in the West Bank were originally planned for the group but due to the unpredictable security situation and the political gridlock the volunteers remained in Jerusalem rather than entering the West Bank- a development telling of the

situation as a whole. While some students expressed disappointment with the mobility restriction they showed understanding.

In the afternoon the students met with Nimalah Kharoufa and Adeb Saleem, youth members of the Fatah movement.



*Nimahla Kharoufa
of Youth Fatah*

"I am interested in you as a person and your experience. How did the people around you react when you decided to be politically active?" Inquired one young ASF volunteer of Nimahla on her role as a woman within a Palestinian political movement

"It was hard at first, being the only woman in a meeting" Nimahla reported. She then recounted her story of dissatisfaction with the all male student government at her university which was attended by well over 60% women.

Difficult questions surfaced in the last meeting with Dr. Khaled Saifi of the democratic, alternative and reform driven party *Al-Mubadara*, who presented power point slides of the evolution of the borders of the Palestinian Territories. ASF volunteers sought answers on the willingness and effectiveness of diverse parties to the conflict to negotiate a lasting peace settlement. This, at the end of the day, seemed to be the most significant outstanding question.