

Basil

Olive trees

Ecumenical companions met Basil Adara beside a felled olive tree. For Basil this is a familiar experience. The trees belong to the residents of At-Tuwani, a village in the South Hebron Hills. Israeli settlers often come onto their land and vandalise it by chopping down trees.

Basil has lived all his life under occupation, and has lifelong experience of nonviolent resistance. He was born in At-Tuwani in 1996, the second of six children. Nearby settlements have caused the villagers of At-Tuwani many problems.

In Area C, which comprises 60 per cent of the West Bank, Israeli military authorities control all aspects of daily life. This includes At-Tuwani.

Basil remembers particularly bad settler violence in the early 2000s. This was around the time of the Second Intifada but also coincided with the establishment of Havat Ma'on, the nearby settlement.

The people of At-Tuwani live mainly from the land, grazing flocks of sheep and goats, keeping chickens, and tending olive trees. Basil remembers how difficult it was then for villagers to go onto their own land. Settlers attacked them, shot sheep and donkeys, and poisoned wells. His mother established a women's cooperative, operating from her house. By weaving and embroidery the women were able to add to the family income.

When Basil was two, they decided to build a small primary school without permission from Israeli authorities. They knew that very few Palestinians are granted building permits.

The Israeli army threatened to demolish the building and to arrest anyone working on it. But the villagers built quickly, with women and children spending days in the unfinished building to conceal the activity.

Unusually for an Area C village, building is now permitted in At-Tuwani. Although it is not entirely clear how this happened, it seems that it was the result of campaigning.



Basil faces intimidation from a settler in At-Tuwani.
Photo: EAPPI/EA Penny

In 2010 Basil had an early experience of activism when the village came together to campaign for the school to be expanded to include secondary education.

Another struggle Basil remembers concerned electricity. Palestinian villages are not allowed to connect to the Israeli system, which serves settlements only. Most have solar panels and/or wind turbines. At-Tuwani, however, is close enough to connect to a Palestinian town. But the first pole carrying the cables into Area C was immediately demolished by the army. At once the village united: women and children blocked the road to prevent the army from entering to demolish more poles.

Basil recently graduated with a law degree from Hebron University and plans to become a lawyer. Meanwhile, he is very active in the protection of At-Tuwani.

Settlement – a place where Jewish Israelis live in Palestinian Territory (see the Israeli settlers case study)

Second Intifada – Palestinian uprising in 2000