

Hassan, Munib and Qusai



Schoolboys from Hebron

Hassan (11), Munib (11) and Qusai (10) go to Cordoba School in the Palestinian city of Hebron.

The boys enjoy being at school. Munib says he loves learning and his favourite subject is English, but Hassan says he prefers Arabic. But for these boys, and the other boys and girls at Cordoba School, the journey to school is hard.

“Despite struggling and feeling unsafe, we still want to come to school.”

Qusai

“I want to use my learning and education to stand against settlements and free Palestine.”

Hassan

“We walk in small groups with our friends. When we see settlers we want to turn back and go home.”

Qusai

The school run

Cordoba Primary School is in a part of town controlled by the Israeli army, and 500 Israelis have built five settlements there. Ecumenical companions (EAs) from around the world go with children on their way to school because Palestinians can be attacked by settlers. Every day the children pass through checkpoints controlled by soldiers, sometimes being searched.

148 pupils – girls and boys – go to Cordoba Primary School, but attendance is affected by danger and fear. The fear of violence can also mean poor levels of concentration and lower marks in class.



Walking to school past soldiers.
Photo: EAPPI/I.T



Children going to school greet EAs.
Photo: EAPPI/H.G

The school has been vandalised, and teachers and children have had problems with settler violence. Since 2007 settlers have tried to burn down the school twice and have uprooted trees that the students had planted in front of the school. Once, a 12-year-old settler child tried to attack a Palestinian student of the same age with a knife at the bottom of the school stairs. EAs have seen settlers verbally abusing the children. Usually, the Israeli army does nothing to stop this.

“An EA helped me when I was being questioned by a soldier.”

Hassan

About Hebron

Located in the south of the West Bank, Hebron is home to over 250,000 Palestinians.

Depending on whom you ask, it is called Hebron, Hevron or Al-Khalil. All these names link to the idea of friendship in Hebrew and Arabic. There has been violence here for nearly a century. The old city of Hebron is important to Jews, Muslims and Christians because Abraham and his family are believed to be buried there in ancient caves.

The city today is divided into two zones: H1 and H2. 40,000 Palestinians, about a sixth of the population, live in H2, which is controlled by the Israeli army. There are also 500 Israeli settlers who moved into H2 believing they have the right to live there, and thousands more further out. Settlements like this are illegal under international law, but 1,500 Israeli soldiers protect it.



The right to education

Because Israel is in control of the West Bank as the 'occupying power', it is supposed to make sure Palestinian children can still get to school safely, but this doesn't always happen.

"We will not leave the school", promises Nora the headteacher, but in 2015 the area around the school was declared a 'closed military zone'. This meant that ecumenical accompaniers (EAs) couldn't enter to help the children get to school for several months.

Meanwhile, Palestinians say violence from settlers has got worse.



The headteacher of Cordoba School, Nora Nasser.
Photo: EAPPI/H.G



Settlers protected by soldiers walking to synagogue on the 'prayer road'. Photo: EAPPI/Reme