

**Message by Desmond Tutu on behalf of The Elders
On the Occasion of the Fifth Annual Bil'in Conference on Popular Resistance,
21-23 of April 2010**

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Elders, I send warm greetings to all of you attending the Bil'in Fifth Annual Conference on Popular Resistance. We are sorry that we could not be with you in person but we want you to know that we are very much with you in spirit.

During our visit to Bil'in last August, many of the Elders saw first-hand the incredible actions the residents of Bil'in -- together with committed Israeli and international activists-- are taking to resist the Wall and settlements. For five years now, you have continued your struggle against the de-facto annexation of more than 50 per cent of Bil'in's farmlands and the construction of the Wall that separates the village from the burgeoning Modi'in Illit settlement. The weekly non-violent demonstrations in Bil'in have become an international symbol of the Palestinian popular struggle against occupation and separation. And rightly so. Together with the progressive political actions employed in other villages in the West Bank, you are showing the world that ordinary people can help bring about positive change through non-violent resistance.

The Elders join you in celebrating the victory achieved at the Israeli High Court of Justice which has now resulted in the beginning stages of the Wall moving to its new location -- a move that will return over 600,000 square metres to the village. While we welcome this important success, we recognize that the new wall will, however, continue to cut the village off from approximately 25 per cent of its land, on which the illegal Israeli settlement Modi'in Illit stands. Bil'in's popular struggle must continue until ALL of the village's land and its olive trees are returned to its people.

Efforts to stifle the demonstrations will not serve the cause of peace. The recent Israeli military order declaring a large area around the Wall in Bil'in a closed military zone every Friday for the coming six months is clearly a blatant attempt to prevent Israelis and internationals from standing in solidarity with their Palestinian partners for peace. It is also a direct attack on freedom of speech, the right to demonstrate, and every person's right to resist policies that violate international law and common notions of morality. We urge the Israeli authorities to cancel this order and to allow the protests to continue peacefully.

When we were in Bil'in we were able to visit the memorial site of Bassem Abu Rahma who was killed while peacefully demonstrating at the Wall. Despite the demands of his family, his supporters and his lawyers, the Israeli Military Advocate General has decided not to open a military investigation into the possibility that his death was caused by the illegal use of a high velocity tear gas canister. We are deeply troubled by this recent decision and call on the Israeli military authorities to reconsider this verdict and investigate the circumstances of Bassem's death.

We continue to also be deeply concerned about the ongoing detention of Adib Abu Rahma and Abdullah Abu Rahma. These two Bil'in residents, who regularly attended the demonstrations and consistently practiced non-violence, remain in custody awaiting trial, after nearly 10 and 4 months, respectively. We call on the Israeli authorities to release them until such time as a fair trial is held, considering all the evidence.

We want to tell you that we are with you. Don't give up. The spirit of those that fight for freedom and justice cannot be broken. Peace is possible. We look forward to the day when we will celebrate freedom and security for Palestinians and Israelis and there are no longer any walls.

God bless you.

[ENDS]