



# Workmates Norway-Palestine

Workers change the world

العالم يغيرون العمال



To the international Trade Union Movement:

## Project New Unions:

# Solidarity activity for local unions

What it's about, why do it, and how to do it.

## What...

This little leaflet is made to introduce you to the work of the Norwegian solidarity organization Palestine Committee, Trade Union Section, and to share our ideas of practical solidarity work, with the Trade Union Confederation PFNTU (the Palestinian New Federation of Trade Unions), or New Unions, from now on NU for short.

Before, during and after a trade union solidarity visit to Palestine, we experience that Norwegian trade union comrades want to do something more in solidarity with Palestinian comrades. Even if you come home "on fire", it is not so easy to know what to do, where to start and how to grab on to the matters. To find out more about how to run active solidarity work, the result was the Trade Union project with NU. After four years of discussions, visits, reporting and communication, we've got some ideas on how we can develop a partnership on trade union level - "workers to workers" cooperation. These thoughts we would like to convey to others.

### More to read: See this articles on our web-site:

<http://palestinakomiteen.no/faglig-arbeid/workmates-international/>

#### [Workmates International Invitation](#)

Join us in the NU project  
About Palestine Committee Trade Union Section/Workmates  
About NU  
How to contribute  
NU account information

#### [May 1 Message By The New Unions \(PFNTU\)](#)

Message to the International Trade Union movement May 1. 2016  
More about NU and the recent situation in Palestine

#### [New Unions recognized as General Trade Union](#)

About the celebration of NU's official recognition as trade union federation by the Palestinian Authorities , March 19. 2016

#### [Workmates – guidance to the group leader](#)

How to make Trade Union solidarity visits to Palestine

## Brief history and background

We are members of Palestine Committee of Norway, a solidarity organization founded in 1969. You can read about the organization here: <http://palestinakomiteen.no/join-the-palestine-committee-of-norway/http://palestinakomiteen.no/join-the-palestine-committee-of-norway/>

But we are also trade unionists, with membership in different unions in the LO, the main trade union confederation in Norway. In 2006 some of us wanted to establish special effort to build Palestine solidarity inside the trade union movement, and we founded Palestine Committee Trade Union Section. What we want is to build it from the bottom and upwards, so we reached out to our relatively big network of workers and regular members, and to leaders in the lower levels of local unions. We must also admit that we belong to the leftist side in the LO organization. After a short time we found that the best way to achieve this aims



was to bring regular rank and file members to Palestine to see for themselves, and we began arranging trade union solidarity visits. We found that this was a very wise decision.

We started with very little knowledge and a few contacts in Palestine, and from this we developed by and by. We had this clear thought in mind that we wanted the visits to have a distinct trade unionist profile, for Norwegian workers to meet their Palestinian workmates. We met with PGFTU in several cities (Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, internationally wide known as “the” trade union in Palestine, affiliated with the Palestinian Authorities and Fatah). But it was not until we by chance met New Unions at the Workers Crossing in Tulkarem in 2012 that we really felt we had found something solid and substantial. The experience from early morning at Workers Crossing in Tulkarem was indescribable and unbelievable, and made a great impact.

Since then we have developed the contact. We have met the NU in Palestine several times, we have discussed the cooperation between us, and we have worked out a platform for the project and signed a cooperation agreement. These documents are attached, **see pages 8 and 9**.

We also formed the project group Workmates Norway – Palestine, as a sub-group, to especially work out and handle the project.

As a solidarity organization we do not have a lot of money. Our principle is to be independent and not receive financing from any authority. This means we have limited resources - this project has just about an economy on zero, and we are applying the trade unions for financial contributions. This money we use for covering the expenses for our tour leaders, amongst other things.

#### **More about us here:**

Annual report 2012: <http://palestinakomiteen.no/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/annual-report-2012.pdf>

Annual report 2013: <http://palestinakomiteen.no/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/annual-report-2013.pdf>

## **Why...**

### **1. Solidarity: Reciprocity and recognition of common interests**

The labor movement has had international solidarity on the agenda since the modern working class was born, not of compassion but of necessity. International solidarity has always been one of the mainstays of the labor movement, and it has always understood the importance of internationalism. Without cross-border cooperation the labor movement had not reached the strength it has today. In the solidarity concept lies the values of reciprocity and recognition of common interests. It has a basis other than humanitarian assistance, which is an expression of unequal dignity, where some have and provides and others receive the humanitarian contributions on the donors' terms. Emergencies are based on inequality and suffering. Solidarity is based on the common ground in the fight against a common enemy. International solidarity is taking its shape from how capitalism develops, but the content is the same. It is essential that trade unions have international solidarity on the agenda also in the future. The future is not just about our own welfare but that the working class still have a common interest to stand together against the alienation of the global economy.

Solidarity must have a sustained attention to human dignity and a plan of action where trade union and democratic rights are threatened. Solidarity is a guardian of the humanity in our societies and human dignity. The trade unions must defend and stand up as guarantor of important social values and human rights. Trade unions must represent alternative values, as opposed to capital limitless exploitation of the means of production. It must stand for a policy that contributes to the development of the exploited masses of the world, national and social liberation, against oppression and slavery. Solidarity arises when workers meet like-minded on an equal basis and both parties acknowledge equality. In the world political scene the Palestine conflict is one of the main solidarity projects to engage in.

**Our slogan: Solidarity is supporting the struggle – not the suffering!**

### **Prerequisites and content of the NU project**

- We must respect the conditions that exist for workers in an occupied country. It is not obvious that the way we think of union work on can apply to them and be transferred to their reality. Probably it is completely

different.

- We must not act like “we know best”, and inflict our thinking and union practice, but our contributions must be on their terms.
- It is important that the entire project is based on reciprocity. This is the meaning of the solidarity concept.
- We must make it absolutely clear to them that this is a dialectical process, where we do not promise them a finished package, and what we can achieve in our country depends on what they present to us. It will take time to develop it. We cannot create expectations among them that this project will solve all their problems.
- We must build on the plans they have themselves, and help ensure that they get them carried out, so they themselves can fight the battles they need to fight.

## **2. Give NU the international recognition they are fighting for and deserve**

In international contexts NU naturally is totally overshadowed by PGFTU in terms of solidarity and contact with the International Trade Union Movement. Unlike PGFTU, receiving recognition and billions of dollars from all over the world, it falls nothing at NU. But NU consider themselves as bearers of a Palestinian labor tradition stretching back to the early 1900s. Palestine have a one hundred-year long labor tradition, in 1936 they conducted one of the longest general strikes in history. They aim to become a member of international professional organizations.

The solidarity project with NU will be a pioneering project, which adds further grounds for international recognition and support. Therefore it is of great importance that what we do in our country will be successful. We represent their window to the world. If they are to succeed in their struggle, they must preserve the fighting spirit and hope, and we must give it to them and show them that they are not alone.

## **How...**

**This is what they need:**

- **First and foremost international recognition.**
- **Awareness that someone else knows and cares about them. Send greetings and photos!**
- **Being part of the International Trade Union Movement**
- **Knowledge, inspiration, examples, learn from others.**
- **Financial support**

**A good start: Bring the topic forwards and take up the discussions.**

### **Visit and meet them in Palestine, “workers meet workers”.**

Our program has this heading «Workers meet workers». NU is organized in most branches. In 2015 they have local unions in agriculture and land work, food processing, building, textile industry, public services and civic activities, transportation, mechanical workshops, and for fishermen in Gaza.

We have developed our solidarity visits since 2007. We have by now established a couple of very good partners and invaluable friends - fixers, tourist guides and interpreters, with whom we cooperate in the planning process and the implementation when we are in Palestine. The first days we use for political topics, such as experience the wall, the check points, refugee camps, areas A, B and C, Israeli colonies (settlements), roads cutting through Palestinian land, settler violence and land theft, ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem, and so forth. We travel around West Bank, to Hebron, Nablus, Ramallah, villages...

The last days we use for Trade Union matters. This includes meetings with Palestinian workmates, to learn more about working conditions and conditions for union work in an occupied country, to understand the possibilities for wage employment and labor rights. We visit workplaces and workers crossings for workers who have to work in Israel, we meet Palestinian workers in Settlements, we meet union activists who organize to fight both against racism, discrimination and inhumanity, and for working class rights in occupied Palestine, activists who also strikes against Israeli employers. If we can manage, we will meet Palestinian Histadrut union representatives in the “1948-area” across the Green Line from Tulkarem, to visit Palestinians on jobs in Israel.

### **Most important: Meet NU**

Become familiar with the union leaders and representatives, learn about their policy, organization and tasks. Discuss the differences and similarities between your country and Palestine. Discuss the possibility of a joint project in accordance with NU-project platform (**see pages 8 and 9**) and cooperation agreement. **You will be very well recieved.**



We make out a detailed program and we make appointments with NU through our friends and travel operators in Ramallah. NU's main office is in Tulkarem.

The visits are usually lasting about 10 days.

For more details see our cookbook [Workmates – guidance to the group leader](#)

### **About language barrier.**

One of the first challenges we had to overcome was the language barrier. Our mastery of Arabic is relatively non-existent, and they speak poorly English. The president in NU, Muhammed Blady, might understand some English, but he is definitely not speaking the language. In all our meetings we are dependent on interpretations. So we had to figure out a way of communication between us. For some time we found a solution, but at the time being this issue is unsolved. But we are working on it. We have our ways around it, and if you want contact you can do so by contacting us.

### **Invite representatives of NU to your country**

A good objective may be that one union can adopt a Palestinian branch. Let them meet as many workmates as possible. Teach them about how your trade unions works. Let them be inspired by how your unions are organized and working, on legislation, agreements and collective systems, working environment and health.

- One thing they need help and examples about is how to build from below, organizing in the workplace, the establishment of clubs or local worker committees - when it is possible. Often there are major practical obstacles for them. This may be an area for fruitful dialogue, which can also sharpen our own consciousness and practice.

- Invite Palestinian workers, union representatives and leaders to your country, also for them to tell us about their own situation. Be aware of what we can learn from the Palestinian trade union comrades. They have a grass-root approach we can benefit from, and they also have unique strike experience under unusually difficult conditions. They deserve great respect for conducting union work under occupation.

Note: All costs for an invitation, travel, accomodations and food must be covered by the host.

### **About financial support**

The project involves an element of financial support. We want to link funding and financial support to other solidarity work. We do not aim to finance NU with funding from the our trade unions. NU is also

understanding this very well, and they agree. They are independent, they are opponents of corruption, they will not be clients.

In principle, they need money for "everything". They finance themselves with a small membership fee, which they will increase as they become better known by the workers and have gained more results. But we will not primarily contribute with money. We will also contribute our knowledge and experience, and we are working to develop joint learning arenas between unionists. NU will learn from us and wants inspiration in their own struggle.

We are of the opinion that we should help them to help themselves, as a solidarity project is meant to be. We want to give them an economic basis, so they can get under way in resolving some issues, for so on their own feet be ready to provide an economy from which it is possible to operate an active working union.

### **If financial support is uncomplicated for you, they need money for**

- Training courses. Each training course cost them about 3 000 dollars.
- Support to open local offices.
- Support for organizational travels inside West Bank.
- Funding of a person in charge of international contact, dedicated and approved by NU and authorized to communicate in English with other countries' trade unions.
- Support for developing womens' projects, organized by NU's Womens Department
- Printing of recruiting leaflets and other written material to hand out on workplaces and other occations.



### **Support for education and training.**

NU is growing steadily, and as the organization expands they also gain many unskilled new members and leaders. They have a strong need for the education and training of new and old officers and boards, and training of supervisors, who will have responsibility for education in the organization. In 2015 they completed 4 ground courses with support from Norway. In content the courses are equivalent to what we know from our own country, with themes ranging from the international labor movement's history, through existing legislation and occupational health, to the management of organizations, communication and outreach of trade union-political activities.

The training courses costs NU approximately 2 700 euros or 3 000 dollars each.

We receive receipts and accounting for all monies they receive.

### **Cost for organization travels.**

Muhammad Blady, NU's president, should preferably be able to travel around and follow up the various local unions as they build up, but he has no means to do it. His honorary is unpaid and he needs such things as petrol, which is very expensive, and insurance on his car. If anyone wants to finance that kind of work travels, the money will of couse be managed by the union, they do not go into his pocket for his personal use, it will be recognized accounting and followed up.

An estimated amount is around 1 000 dollars per. month.



### **Other methods: Collect support among union members with campaigns like this:**

- "Support a representative on course – 120 dollars per participant – splice on the cost for a participant, 60 dollars"
- Draw solidarity memberships, sell NU membership cards in the unions – 60 dollars each.

### **No recipe**

We do not pretend here that we serve a well-functioning model of how a trade union solidarity work can be implemented. But one thing that is certain is that there are many hidden dangers. Nevertheless, we believe that any action like this is invaluable, for both parties, for ourselves and our Palestinian comrades, especially in the situation we now are facing, where Palestinians feel they have been forgotten by the world. It is now they need international support - to endure.

So we'll put stone upon stone, and learn as we go.

Good luck!

### **From a conversation with Muhammad Blady January 2013**

What they want to learn from Norway

- They will have concrete examples, both locally and nationally that the necessity and benefit of a fight (strike victories etc).
- How unions struggled to change the laws (such as a Working Environment Act)
- Specific information on the trade union movement in Norway today and how it is built. How many unions are there in Norway? How is it organized? Is it an umbrella or confederation? What is the relationship and reckoning between leadership and grassroots?
- Decisions and crucial steps in Norwegian history - a crossroads in history, the prosecution with imprisonment, murder etc. And how it influenced the thinking.

They want inspiration, and something that can arouse enthusiasm and hope. They want contact with us and our experiences to propagandize the workers that it is possible to make a difference, but it takes time, effort and long struggle. It is not impossible (just watch the rest of the world), but then they can not give up.

Let's give them hope.

Join us – just do it.

**Solidarity is supporting the struggle – not the suffering!**

**Support the Palestinian liberation movement!**

**Workers change the world!**

Oslo June 2016

In solidarity

Palestine Committee of Norway, Trade Union Section /Workmates Norway-Palestine

# **Workmates Norway-Palestine**

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# workmates norway-palestine

Working people change the world

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## Platform for New Unions-project

**Workmates Norway-Palestine** is a working group under the Palestine Committee, Trade Union Section, created with the purpose to be the prime movers in a solidarity project with the Palestinian Union.

### By this we mean:

Project New Unions is to be a solidarity project, not aid or charity. It should be based on reciprocity and partnership between two equal partners. Reciprocity and solidarity means that the knowledge should go both ways. We have to recognize that there are many things we can learn from the Palestinian Trade Union comrades.

In the project we will engage not only trade unionists, but the Norwegian working people in general

### Our platform is consisting of 6 point:

#### 1. From workers - to workers

Trade union solidarity is to support working people across borders. In the project we will adapt ourselves on the rank and file in the trade union movement, both in Palestine and in Norway.

#### 2. New Unions is our partner in Palestine.

**The Palestine New Federation of Trade Union, (hereafter referred to as the New Union, NU)** is a new, independent Trade Union, which is now establishing itself as a Confederation, a General Trade Union. Their strategy is independence, from PA, the occupying power, the capitalists, all political parties. The organization is founded on the idea that both leaders and members always stand on the side of the exploited workers. They will concentrate on the Trade Union struggle, but for all Palestinians the national struggle will also be important, the struggle against the occupation and for a free Palestine. They will not be aid-dependent, but will educate itself.

3. The projects main goal is to develop collaborative projects between Palestinian and Norwegian trade unions. The project should from Union to Union - the rank and file members in Norway supports the rank and file in Palestine. It must be anchored in the Trade Union movement in Norway. Our goal is that workers' committees and lower level unions in Norway adopts the project.

4: We will develop common arenas for learning between Palestinian and Norwegian trade unionists, whether in Norway or in Palestine. We must not act like Norwegians are the ones knowing best and apply our way of thinking and trade union practices to our Palestinian comrades, but our contributions have to be on their terms.

5. Through the project we will bring information about the situation on the ground in Palestine and raise awareness of the occupation in the Trade Union movement in Norway.

#### 6. Send eyewitnesses to Palestine

The project is an extension of the work of the Palestine Committee, Trade Union Section, based on several study tours. It is a response to the strong wish all the study tour participants express when they come back home, to do something concrete and practical. We consider the NU-project as a unique offer to the Trade Union activists who want to contribute actively in the solidarity work.

**The NU-project should and must be a dialectical process, which is being developed through summary and learning**



# workmates norway-palestine

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## Cooperation agreement between Workmates Palestine-Norway and New Unions

The project "Cooperation with the New Unions" is a solidarity project with the purpose of providing this Union the place it deserves in the international Trade Union Movement.

The project will support the building and development of the New Unions. It is a trade union project, from Union to the Union, and will be anchored in the Trade Union Movement in Norway. The project should strengthen the solidarity with the Palestinians, increase awareness of the occupation, and contribute to the knowledge of working conditions for Palestinians and knowledge of the work of Palestinian Trade Unions.

The project should develop common arenas for learning and knowledge between Trade Unionists in Norway and in Palestine and strengthen the international solidarity in both countries. The project should and must be a reciprocal process that is developed through summary and learning

Both parties consider each other as equal sister-trade unions and will conduct exchanges on the basis of equality, mutual benefit and support. The project should help develop collaborative and concrete projects between Palestinian and Norwegian Trade Unions.

The parties commit each other to send reports

- from Norway about how solidarity projects are progressing and about important trade union news
- from Palestine about news from the New Unions and the Trade Union struggle in Palestine.

Contact takes place through contact persons who are authorized by the New Unions and Workmates Norway-Palestine, who can communicate by email or other means on the organizations' behalf and that have been earmarked for this task.

Whether there will be given financial support to the New Unions or any of its units, the New Union will report once a quarter about how the funds are used.

The New Unions will send Workmates Norway-Palestine receipt after each received transmission

Both parties want to send delegations to strengthen the solidarity work and to exchange experiences on Union work, by visits to workplaces, in meetings and seminars.

How often we can visit each other depends on the possibilities of the two parties.

Visit in Norway, including meals, accommodation and travel is covered by Workmates Norway-Palestine. Each delegation shall consist of a maximum of six (6) people.

The program and the themes for the delegation visit is determined in advance through mutual cooperation and agreement. The hosts are responsible for organizing the stay

This agreement is made in two copies in English and is valid from the date of signing.

**Date, signature**

**Workmates Norway-Palestine**

**New Unions**