

PM: How Do U.S. Military Gifts to Israel Affect Children and Youth?

by Polly Mann

When our U.S. taxpayer money (and/or increasing our national debt) is used for foreign purposes, it *is* our responsibility to look at what is being done with it.

That's why we can't ignore the fact that the country topping the list of U.S. military handouts is Israel at \$3.8 billion annually, which is 25 percent of that nation's defense budget. Some of this sum is allocated to cover its military detention of Palestinian children. Israel's military and court detention is unique in the world in its systematic incarceration of children—specifically, Palestinian children. Children as young as 12 are taken from their beds at night by Israeli soldiers and police, bound, blindfolded, and taken to detention centers. Under Israeli military law they are denied access to lawyers during interrogation and even the youngest are denied access to their parents. This happens to around 500 to 700 children annually.

There is a light at the end of this tunnel—that is, if enough people become aware of the situation and can convince their congressional representatives to get behind it. U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum of St. Paul has introduced a bill, H.R. 4391,¹ that would prohibit U.S. assistance to Israel from being used to support the military detention, interrogation, or ill-treatment of Palestinian children in violation of international humanitarian law or the use against Palestinian children of: (1) torture, inhumane, or degrading treatment; (2) physical violence or psychological abuse; (3) incommunicado or administrative detention; (4) solitary confinement; (5) denial of parental or legal access during interrogations; or (6) force or coercion to obtain a confession.

Another sliver of hope can be found in the Refuseniks. The Israeli online *Ynet News* reported² that 63 young Israelis of conscience sent a letter to Israeli government officials declaring their refusal to enlist in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). In the letter, the draft-age youth referred to comments Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman made when Trump announced the U.S. was moving its embassy to Jerusalem, officially recognizing it as Israel's capital; Lieberman spoke of revoking the citizenship of Arab Israeli residents.

The Refuseniks wrote:

The military carries out a racist government policy that violates basic human rights and imposes one version of law for Israelis and another for Palestinians—on the same territory...An entire nation exists in the shadow of organized incitement against the Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line and we, youngsters from all walks of Israel life, refuse to believe the incitement and participate in the oppression and occupation led by the government.

One of the signees is already incarcerated in military prison after declaring his unwillingness to serve in the IDF. These Refuseniks take a stand, well aware of what their refusals will result in. They were preceded by others like them who have provided them with guidance. And yet, they are hoping to continue the momentum by asking other youths throughout Israel to reconsider enlisting in the IDF: "We will refuse to serve in the military out of a commitment to the ideals of

peace and with an awareness that we can create another (better) reality in which to live. We call on our fellow youth to ask themselves—is military service in fact working towards this reality?"

We, in the U.S., must ask ourselves: What will we do as U.S. citizens to create a better reality?

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness and regular contributor to the newsletter.

¹ H. R. 4391. 115th Congress: Promoting Human Rights by Ending Israeli Military Detention of Palestinian Children Act. www.GovTrack.us. 2017. Accessed February 12, 2018. govtrack.us/congress/bills/her4391

² "Dozens of youth sign letter refusing to serve the occupation." December 28, 2017. Ynetnews.com tinyurl.com/y7gsolmy