

PALESTINE FUNDRAISING SUPPER

Organised by: Norwich Stop the War Coalition,
Norwich Palestine Solidarity Campaign & the Neesa Project

This is just to advise you of the circumstances behind the cancellation of our booking for this year's Palestine Fundraising Supper at the Chapelfield Methodist Church on Saturday 26th of November.

It has been held annually since Operation Cast Lead in 2008. That conflict resulted in around 1400 Palestinian deaths, many children, and 13 Israelis (4 from friendly fire). The Supper would have been the third at this venue and the booking was confirmed in July 2016. Proceeds from previous fundraisers have been donated to Medical Aid for Palestine, Palestine Trauma Centre, and to PSC towards campaigning for justice in Palestine.

This year we invited Jackie Walker, a Jewish woman, whose partner is also Jewish. She is a life-long anti-racist campaigner and supporter of the rights of Palestinians. She is a member of Free Speech on Israel, an organization that defines itself as "a network of Labour, Green, and trade union activists (mainly Jews), who oppose attempts by pro-Israeli right wingers to brand the campaign for justice for Palestine as anti-Semitic. It is not anti-Semitic to oppose Zionism." A full statement can be found at www.freespeechonisrael.org.uk

On Thursday 24th of November we were advised that the Chapelfield Methodist Church had received emails and phone calls demanding that they cancel our event. We are led to believe that these messages came from the Board of Deputies of British Jews. We had several discussions with representatives of the Church. We also invited the local Minister to attend the supper so she could satisfy herself that nothing would be said to induce racial hatred, but this offer was declined.

The reason given for cancellation was to ensure that the Methodist Church would not be hindered in its relationship with other faith communities, particularly the Jewish community. We explained that two of our speakers were Jewish and that the Board of Deputies did not represent all Jews. It should also be recognised that while anti-Semitism is abhorrent – like all forms of racism, – false accusations of anti-Semitism are monstrous too. This attack in Norwich seems to be part of a wider campaign to attack pro-Palestinian activities.

At less than 24hrs notice, we were generously accommodated at the Friends Meeting House and, despite the challenges, the sisters of the Neesa Project were able to adapt with good humour and serve a wonderful meal to over 100 people. This was followed by several thoughtful poetry readings and an excellent contribution from Jackie Walker. Jewish peace campaigner, Quaker and Green Party Councillor Lesley Grahame was happy to give the vote of thanks for a peaceable, non-sectarian evening and much common ground across political parties. Neither Israel nor Palestine can live in peace unless both sides can do so.

Thank you to everybody who supported the 2016 Palestine Fundraising Supper.

Signed: Norwich Stop the War Campaign Committee,
 Norwich Palestine Solidarity Campaign Committee,
 Neesa Project