

The Somerville Divestment Project (SDP) partners with Bourj Al Shamali Palestinian Refugee Camp, 2006

SDP has formed a relationship with one the most destitute of the Palestinian refugee camps - **Bourj Al Shamali**, in southern Lebanon - and is educating people about the camp and the plight of its refugees. SDP hopes to eventually include Somerville residents in this partnership.

Bourj Al Shamali lies east of the coastal Lebanese city of Tyre. Seven thousand survivors of the 1948 uprooting of Palestinians constituted the original population on this land, "rented" in 1956—for 99 years—by the UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). Today, more than 20 thousand refugees live on ½ square mile – roughly twice the density of Somerville, without its triple deckers! [For more about the camp, visit www.burjalshamali.net.]

The refugees of Bourj Al Shamali come from 27 destroyed villages in what is now Israel (see map on back). The majority come from two villages in the Safad region, *Zouk Foukani* and *Zouk Tahtani* (Upper and Lower Zouk).

SDP organizers have talked with **Mahmoud Aljoma**, director of the camp's **Beit-Atfal-Assumoud Center** for children. The center was created in 1983 for homeless orphans whose parents perished in the *Tal El Zaatar* Massacre of 1976. Today, supported by private monthly donations, the center hosts art, theatre, sports programs and other activities for all the children.

Mr. Aljoma describes a crisis of economic hardship, social problems, and despair.

- The population density is suffocating; there is no space available for a playground or a park.
- Only 60% of the work force is employed, mostly as temporary workers in nearby farm land without any medical or social services guaranteed to them. Men are paid an average of \$6.5 /day and women \$4/day for their labors.
- Not until 2005 were Palestinians born in Lebanon allowed to work in many private sector jobs, which were limited to Lebanese nationals.
- 3000 refugees in Lebanon have no official identification documents (either lost, destroyed or unrecognized), a situation that restricts them from access to healthcare, education and jobs. Since they have no access to official medical institutions, children born to these individuals will also have the same status.



Mr. Aljoma tells us that Bourj Al Shamali is one of the most impoverished camps, where most residents still live in tin shacks that are extremely hot in the summer and that suffer water leakage from the rusted roofs in the cold winters. Building materials are not allowed in the camp and these refugees are not allowed to purchase land in Lebanon.

The hard economic situation is causing malnutrition among children, mal-education and a general state of hopelessness. There is only one high school in Southern Lebanon for almost 100 thousand refugees—and it is not accessible by foot from the camp. Most students don't enroll—both for lack of funds for transportation and lack of hope of finding a job when they graduate.

Mr. Aljoma relates an almost comical medical situation where one doctor responds to all the medical needs of the camp, usually prescribing the same medicine for cancer as for asthma. This year for two months there was a severe shortage of medicine for blood pressure and diabetes, during which time 600 registered patients with these illnesses suffered severe complications. There were 70 cases of thalassemia and the sick suffered the pain and consequences without any care at all from UNRWA.

Bourj Al Shamali refugees are deprived of their dignity and rights and are humiliated everyday by the world's negligence of their plight. SDP hopes to make a difference. You can help!

Map shows location of 418 Palestinian villages destroyed and depopulated by the Israeli Occupation of 1948.

Numbers below identify on the map the destroyed villages from which the refugees of **Bourj Al Shamali** come from; () w/o a number means that the village still exists, but some of its inhabitants fled and became refugees:

- Zouk Tahtani(8) Zouk Foukani(2)
- Naami(16) Dayshoom(36) Qaytiyeh(15)
- Saasaa(53) Farah(48) Jaaouneh(80)
- Shaab() Shafa Amr() Safourieh(121)
- Loubieh(117) Miar() Absiyeh()
- Sanbariyeh(3) Khisas(7) Sohmata(61)
- Maalool(136) Nahaf() Aablin()
- Alma(49) Khalsah(418) Dowarah()
- Salha(37) Malkieh(28) Mansourah(102)
- Huseinieh(51).

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