

# DREAM DEFENDERS, BLACK LIVES MATTER & FERGUSON REPS TAKE HISTORIC TRIP TO PALESTINE



By #TeamEBONY | January 9, 2015

**Representatives at the forefront of the movements for Black lives and racial justice** have taken a historic trip to Palestine this week to connect with activists living under Israeli occupation.

Black journalists, artists and organizers representing Ferguson, Black Lives Matter, Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), and more have joined the Dream Defenders for a 10-day trip to the occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel.

The trip comes after a year of highly-publicized repression in Ferguson, the Gaza Strip, and West Bank including East Jerusalem, as well as solidarity between these places.

Ahmad Abuznaid, Dream Defenders' legal and policy director and a co-organizer of the delegation, said that the goal of the trip was to make connections.

“The goals were primarily to allow for the group members to experience and see first hand the occupation, ethnic cleansing and brutality Israel has levied against Palestinians, but also to build real relationships with those on the ground leading the fight for liberation,” wrote Abuznaid. “In the spirit of Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael and many others, we thought the connections between the African American leadership of the movement in the US and those on the ground in Palestine needed to be reestablished and fortified.”

Abuznaid said the trip represented a chance to bring the power of Black organizing to Palestine.

“As a Palestinian who has learned a great deal about struggle, movement, militancy and liberation from African Americans in the US, I dreamt of the day where I could bring that power back to my people in Palestine. This trip is a part of that process.”

Over the past week, the delegation has met with refugees, Afro-Palestinians, a family that was kicked out of their house by settlers in East Jerusalem, and organizations representing Palestinian political prisoners, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS).

Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors said apartheid is what immediately struck her about what she saw on the ground.

**“This is an apartheid state. We can’t deny that and if we do deny it we are a part of the Zionist violence.”** There are two different systems here in occupied Palestine. Two completely different systems. Folks are unable to go to parts of their own country. Folks are barred from their own country.”

Charlene Carruthers, national director of BYP100 said what immediately struck her was the capacity for violence, even when it’s not immediately noticeable to foreigners.

One such example is in the narrative projected against Palestinians. Carruthers recalled their delegation crossing paths with a tour group led by Israeli authorities.

“They were clearly receiving a completely different story about the occupation. It's deeper than just spreading lies, the false narrative is violent.”

Community organizer Cherrell Brown said she saw many parallels between state violence against Palestinians and Black Americans.

“So many parallels exist between how the US polices, incarcerates, and perpetuates violence on the black community and how the Zionist state that exists in Israel perpetuates the same on Palestinians,” Brown said.

Brown also commented that the struggles are not the same.

“This is not to say there aren't vast differences and nuances that need to always be named, but our oppressors are literally collaborating together, learning from one another – and as oppressed people we have to do the same,” she said.

For Steven Pargett, communications director for Dream Defenders, visiting the Dheisheh Refugee Camp outside of Bethlehem made these connections clearer: “A camp doesn't have to have a fence with barbed wire all around it in order to be a place where displaced people are struggling to survive.”

Pargett said that Black people in the United States are also displaced refugees.

“Our refugee camps are lower income communities and project buildings all around the country that many would not be living in had we not been taken into slavery generations ago. Rather than having the Israeli Defense occupation in our hoods, we have the occupation of police officers who often prove to have little disregard for our lives, being that they are not from these communities,” Pargett wrote.

Hip-hop was a unifying force for the delegation, Pargett said, commenting that Palestinians have been inspired by hip-hop in the US and use it as a tool to amplify their own voices.

St. Louis-based rapper and activist Tef Poe said his experience in the camps connecting through hip-hop was the best day of his life.

“A refugee camp with a bunch of people fighting for their lives and using hip hop to lift their spirits and spark the minds of the children and break down gender barriers between young girls and boys,” Tef posted to Facebook. “I spent a day with these ppl .. Most amazing day of my life. Thanks be to the Most the struggle is beautiful.”

**This trip is another chapter in the recent history of Black-Palestinian solidarity.** In November, a group of 10 Palestinian student activists visited Ferguson and St. Louis, meeting with people organizing in the streets. A month later, upon their return, the students hosted a series of events at their university in the West Bank to raise awareness with the Black struggle and stand in solidarity. Dream Defenders unanimously passed a resolution to support the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement in this interval.

Moving forward, delegates expressed a desire for Black and American action in support of Palestine.

“I believe the Black Lives Matter movement can benefit greatly by learning about struggles outside of the U.S., but particularly the Palestinian struggle,” said Patrisse Cullors. “I want this trip to be an example for how Black folks and Arab communities can be in better solidarity with one another.”

Cherrell Brown sees joint action as a way to global freedom.

“I want us to take back things we can do in the now, as Americans, to raise awareness and action around Palestinian liberation. I want us to reimagine what society could and will look like when we've dismantled this white-supremacist patriarchal and capitalist society. I want us to do it together. I want to bring back these conversations and stories in hopes that it will help add to this global struggle to get free.”

The full list of delegates includes five Dream Defenders (Phillip Agnew, Ciara Taylor, Steven Pargett, Sherika Shaw, Ahmad Abuznaid), Tef Poe and Tara Thompson (Ferguson/Hands Up United), journalist Marc Lamont Hill, Cherrell Brown and Carmen Perez (Justice League NYC), Charlene Carruthers (Black Youth Project), poet and artist Aja Monet, Patrisse Cullors (Black Lives Matter), and Maytha Alhassen, a USC PhD student. Catch up with the delegation and follow their last few days using #DDPalestine on Twitter and Instagram.