

## PARTNER PLAN

# John McCulloch - Israel March 2019

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Picture by artists Mohammed Amous



### **Caring Across the Divides Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI)**

*It is never too late to be who you might have been. (George Eliot)*

*If we are to have peace on earth...our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective. (Martin*

*Luther King)*

Rev Kate McDonald, Dr Annette McCulloch and myself (John McCulloch) had the privilege of meeting with Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI), which is one of the Church of Scotland's partners here in Israel. Following that visit, Annette has begun volunteering with PHRI's mobile clinic, which treats Palestinians in the West Bank & Gaza who have no access to medical care. What follows is a brief introduction to PHRI, and a first-hand account from Annette about her experiences as one of the doctors volunteering with their mobile clinic.

In a context where the prospects for a just resolution to the injustice of military Occupation seems as remote as it has ever been, the signs of hope I see out here, come from groups who are working tirelessly at the grassroots level, to reach out across the socio-political, ideological and religious lines, which have scarred this land for so long.



One such group is Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI), which since 1988, has been reaching out across the divides, to not only bring healthcare to those who have little or no access to medical facilities across the Palestinian Territories; but also advocating for an end to the Israeli

Occupation, and calling for a solution based on social justice and equal rights for all. To have Jews and Israeli's who are trying to change the situation from within is of such importance, and it is crucial that we do all we can to support and stand in solidarity with them, given the crucial work that they do.

*The principles of human rights, medical ethics, and social justice are at the core of our worldview. It is our position that the medical community is sometimes complicit—passively or actively—in oppressive practices that undermine equality and health. Furthermore, PHRI*

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*views the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian Territory as a root cause of multiple human rights violations including the right to health and actively advocates for its end. Thus, in all of our work, we refuse to accept policies that increase inequality and structural violence and seek to establish an alternative that cultivates true equality and solidarity.*  
(Quotation from PHRI website: <https://www.phr.org.il/en/about/>)

If justice and peace are ever to have a chance of taking root in this conflicted land, it will be in large measure because of people and organisations on the ground, who are prepared to reach out across the divisions, reminding us that our common humanity means that we must never dehumanise the other, but see them through the eyes of dignity. We cannot sit silently by, intimidated by the structural injustice that continues to blight the lives of so many, but must do all we can to work and advocate for a better world. PHRI are a great example of this.

## **PHRI Mobile Outreach Clinics** (Dr Annette McCulloch)



In January, I was part of PHRI outreach clinic team that went into the northern province of Tulkarem in the West Bank last month, to a village called Saida. PHRI organise weekly outreach clinics, and this particular one was 'Women's Day', which takes a team of all-female health professionals to meet the needs of women in areas where there is little or no healthcare. A bus picks up the team from Jerusalem and transports them to the location of the clinics. The Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian and international doctors and other health professionals talked together on the journey to the Outreach clinic about how we would organise ourselves when we arrived at our destination. United in our common quest for

better healthcare for a marginalised community, we shared stories and experiences and I found out that one of the Jewish doctors had been taking part in these outreach clinics for the past 20 years.

3,000 people live in Saida village where there is a GP who visits only twice a week. There is no medical cover for the villagers by the Palestinian Authority's medical insurance. The village council has asked for a medical centre but this is not likely to happen due to funding issues.



We provided medical care to 130 women who attended the mobile clinic, many of whom had chronic untreated conditions, one of which was a child who was insulin-dependent diabetic who was not receiving any ongoing supervision of her condition and having to cope with drawing up and injecting herself with insulin in old-fashioned style syringes (highly dangerous and susceptible to mistakes).

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I wrote referrals for a couple of women with highly complex conditions who would not have been able to see a specialist without a GP referral. We were able to give medication and provide psychological support to a community who have been very badly affected by the Israeli occupation. There are frequent house-raids, arrests and imprisonment of young people in this Area C village.



For many West Bank Palestinians, the only Israelis that they meet are Settlers and IDF soldiers. For them to meet health professionals who are volunteering their time and skills to help them is a reminder that any hope here is going to come when people reach out across the divides and care about the suffering of the other. The team worked with great energy and compassion.

There will be an ongoing outreach in this area as well as advocacy work to improve the access to healthcare for the village.

It is a project that is delivering high quality care to the most vulnerable communities, showing solidarity and practical support. I will be volunteering regularly with them during my time here.



PLEASE VISIT PHYSICIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHT'S ISRAEL'S (PHRI) WEBSITE, WHERE YOU CAN FIND UPDATED REPORTS AND VIDEO LINKS ABOUT THE WORK THEY DO. PLEASE MAKE YOUR CONTACTS AND NETWORKS AWARE OF THEIR IMPORTANT WORK, AS YOU TOO CAN BE AN ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE: <https://www.phr.org.il/en/>

With best wishes

John McCulloch