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National Resistance and the Struggle for Demands in the Palestinian Arab Workers' Association

Six weeks after the murder of martyr Sami Taha, the General Assembly of the United Nations took the decision to partition Palestine (Resolution 181 on 29 November 1947).

The Arab peoples refused the partition plan and demonstrations broke out all over the Arab world. The Palestinians rushed to all the other Arab countries to buy weapons that were left over from the Second World War; some of them even travelled to the Libyan Desert for this purpose.

The Palestinian Workers Association's Role

The branches of the Palestinian Arab Workers Association, its union councils and the regional and local unions played an important role in organising resistance and mobilising the masses. Moreover, they formed field leaderships on the ground in various areas of Palestine to carry out consciousness raising, organisational and resistance tasks. Some of the tasks taken up by the union leaders throughout the Palestinian arena were as follows:

The formation of a leadership on the ground to defend the city of Haifa. Its nucleus was the sports movement affiliated to the Association. It was led by the unionist Saeed al-Khamra, who was secretary of the municipality workers and employees' union, and his deputy – Abdel Rahman Mirsal. They were assisted by a number of unionists from the military camps along with soldiers released from conscription, who had some knowledge of military combat techniques and the use of weapons.

The formation of a leadership in the field to defend Lod Airport was led by the distinguished unionist – 'Abed Rabbo Abu Musharraf, secretary of the Lod union council. He was martyred along with a number of his comrades while defending the airport, after the British forces withdrew. Other members of this leadership were Darwish Shiha, his deputy and the unionist Ibrahim

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Dghaites, who was one of the rail union leaders in Lod. Meanwhile, the Jewish forces were preparing to occupy the airport.

The formation of a field leadership in Tulkarem

The responsible officer was the union leader Shakib Dallal, who was secretary of the Association in Tulkarem. This leadership along with large numbers of workers joined the Inqath (Rescue) Army which had been formed by the Arab League.

The field leadership formed in the Galilee consisted of leaders of the Association's branches and those of the tobacco plantation cooperatives' unions – some of the leaders were: Husni al-Saleh, 'Uthman Fuad (from Tarshiha), Shukri al-Shoufani (from Mi'lia), Elias Yanni (from al-Bassa) and Jiries Qaysar Sama'an (from Sihmata).

A field leadership was formed in Nablus and led by the unionist Husni Saleh al Hanash, deputy secretary of the Association's branch in the city. He was also elected as secretary of the national committee and its officer for civil defense and security.

The framework for a leadership was formed in Jaffa under the leadership of Ahmad Yamani, secretary of the Union's council, who became an (ex-officio) member of the national committee in Jaffa.

Mahmoud Isa, the prominent trade-unionist in Jaffa was one of the leaders of this organisation; he was also the secretary of the regional union of post office workers in Jaffa. He led groups of fighters in Jaffa himself, and in al-Manshiyya area against Zionist gangs in Tel-Aviv alongside the trade-unionists Nicola Fashkho and Elias 'Amireh.

The field leadership for the workers of the petrol companies in Haifa was led by the prominent trade-unionist Fayez Faddah, secretary of the oil refinery workers union in Haifa, with the help of the trade-unionist Nimer Hussein. This field leadership played an effective role in the battle which took place between the Arab and Jewish workers in the company and which resulted in the death of 47 Jewish engineers and technicians amongst whom was a Jewish officer.

Thus many union leaders took part in leading the popular movement against the racist Zionist incursions.

Administrative Sphere and the National Organisation

The Popular Committee in Sahnata Village

The Central Committee in the Galilee District

The Administrative Sphere and the National Organisation During 1948

Before the British mandate came to an end in Palestine on the 15th of May 1948, the Zionist enemy, (with the complicity of the British mandate authorities) occupied Haifa on the 21st of April 1948. Additionally, they occupied Tiberius on the 15th of April, Safad on the 12th of May, and Akka on the day after the mandate ended i.e. on the 16th of May 1948. I had returned a few days earlier to my village, Sehmata, in order to be with my family in these dire times, especially given that my union commitments had ended and I had already made sure that the Association's archives would be moved from Acre to Majd El Kroum.

In the face of this state of affairs, whereby the Zionist enemy took control of the main cities of the Galilee, the villages started to require certain types of self referencing and administration in order to guarantee their needs for basic supplies, which were mainly found in the cities. So the villagers formed popular committees including village mayors and notables in order to cope.

Formation of the Local committee to reinvigorate villages (Sahmata)

In light of the organisational experience I had gained in the Palestinian Arab Worker Association, I communicated with the already established village notable committee, headed by Mr. Ali Al Abed Qaddura, and some of its members were: the mayor (Mukhtar) Ali Saleh Qaddura, Mayor Said Al Abed Musa, Mayor Jiries Qaysar Sam'aan, Sheikh Shhadeh al-Jishie, Sheikh Mustafa Abd al-Wahhab, Ahmad Hasan Murrah and Jamil al-Haj 'abd al-Rahim Qaddura. I talked to them about the idea of forming a committee for the youth so that it could carry out tasks that members of the adult committee could not achieve. I suggested we call it the local committee for reinvigorating Sahmata and the notables agreed. I started to reach out to the youth and within days the first meeting was held in the village schoolyard. A large number of youth attended and some persons were chosen as members of the committee (I can still remember some names – Mahmoud Yousef Qaddura, Sam'aan Qaysar, Ahmad Said Al Abed Musa, Ahmad Al Haj, Hashem Qaddura, Younis Yahya al Jishshi, Ahmad Mohammad 'Asqoul, Faris Hasan Qaddura, Mahmoud Tawfiq Qaddura and myself). The members of the committee chose me to be the secretary. Thus, as I was given this task, I created simple internal by laws for the committee including the following:

Location: the committee's location is the village of Sehmata within the Accra district.

The Purpose of the committee:

- To work on improving the educational, health and transportation situation within the village, to improve housing conditions and help residents by improving economic and agricultural conditions.
- To organise the relationship with the Rescue Army.
- To form groups to guard the village.
- To attempt through the Palestinian rescue army officials to make contact with responsible parties in south Lebanon in order to import foodstuffs and other amenities.

Membership of the committee:

- All youths in the village who want to join the committee will be accepted as members.
- All full members or subscribers form the general assembly of the committee.

Administration of the committee:

The committee will be managed and its activities supervised by an administrative board whose members are elected from members of the general assembly.

Committee budget: the committee's finances were as follows:

- Monthly subscription fees from members of the general assembly will be ten piastres, and they can be raised by a decision by the general assembly.
- Donations made by the villagers.
- Taxes levied by the administrative board, to be collected from shop owners and butchers.

Meetings of the general assembly and the administrative board:

- The general assembly will meet once every fortnight.
- The meetings of the administrative board shall be continuous and its members shall meet daily to follow up on tasks.

Meeting with the commander of the third brigade of the Arab Liberation Army

After the committee was formed and the administrative board was elected and the internal bylaws approved, the administrative board met with Colonel Mahdi Saleh (Iraqi) commander of the third brigade of the Arab Liberation Army, which had its forces in the village of Tarsheeha.

When the meeting was held and the idea was put forward, we explained what we had already achieved and he approved of our idea. He then said he would set up a meeting for us with Brigadier Said Shehab, the General Commander of the Forces who was about to visit the area soon. He also mentioned that if Brigadier Shehab did not have enough time (or if he was unable to come, then he Col. Saleh, would present the idea and tell us about the agreement with him).

About a week after our meeting with Col. Mahdi Saleh, he called us to his headquarters in Tarsheeha and handed us the following communiqué:

The Arab Liberation Army

The Second Brigade

Order Issued by the Northern Front's Leadership to the Villages in the Galilee District and their Local Inhabitants

As the current unfortunate situation, alongside the abnormal circumstances in our country have resulted in chaos among our people and the dispersed refugees; and since this unfortunate situation is increasing our countrymen's misfortunes, and in order to secure our people's lives, security and properties, and enable them to face the enemy and destroy it, God willing, we have decided the following:

Each village in the Galilee has to elect a local committee from amongst its inhabitants who are honest, loyal to their country and efficient. These elections will be held under the supervision of the intelligence department of the third brigade.

The Right to Elections and How They Will Be Organised:

Each village with a population of less than 500 has the right to elect three members; those with a population of more than one thousand can elect five and those with more than 1500 can elect seven members.

All those who are 18 and above have the right to participate in the elections.

The village mayor (Mukhtar) or mayors shall be considered additional members of the local committee, until further notice.

Local Committees' Remit:

The local committees shall initially be given the following remit: preservation of security, properties and the health of the villagers and collection of fees and taxes, in addition to the ability to impose simple fines and other rules prescribed later on by the Central Committee.

These elections should take place within a period of no more than two weeks from this date.

The Central Committee and its Method of Election:

After forming the local committees in the villages each committee will come to attend a meeting in Tarsheeha accompanied by the documents and certificates proving that they were properly elected. These documents will be presented to the District Commander. Then the local committees, in agreement with the District Commander, will decide on the place and time for holding a meeting for the local councils to elect a Central Council composed of; a head, a deputy, a secretary and four members.

Powers and Rights of the Central Committee:

This elected Central Committee will be granted the same powers and rights as those previously given to the courts, such as the magistrate and other courts. It also has the authority to look into criminal cases and human rights issues with some necessary alterations (placed by the major general and represented to the Central Committee).

Serious criminal cases such as murder, conspiracy against the nation's security, treason, or impediment of military operations and everything that may benefit the enemy: after verification by the central committee, such cases shall be immediately presented to the Major General and accordingly he will present a report stating which procedures are most appropriate.

The formation of a police force: It should be taken into consideration that the civil police force shall be reconstituted in each village and that it shall correspond with the Central Police Headquarters, which shall be located next to the Central Committee and the Major General's Headquarters in Tarsheeha, in order to keep the peace and maintain security, and to help local committees in the governorate to carry out their duties.

Signature: Commander of the Arab Liberation
Army in the North

Third Brigade

Colonel: Mahdi Saleh

Formation of the Local Committees:

I distributed the Committee's internal bylaws and the Commander's letter to the committees in the Galilee villages and in light of that the village inhabitants of the northern upper Galilee that were under the command of the Third Brigade agreed among themselves to form local committees. They prepared the necessary documents and presented them to the District Commander. It was also agreed that the place and time for holding the local committees' conference should be set so that the Central Committee could be formed as follows:

Location: al-Ramah village

Date: 25.6.1948

The Local Committees Conference and Formation of the Central Committee

The local committees' conference was held in al-Ramah - Akka district, on the 25th of June 1948. The people who had assembled chose the pastor Ya'qoub Hanna from al-Ramah as Head of the conference and I was chosen as rapporteur. I spoke at the conference and presented a speech, which was very well received by the audience. In it I mentioned the importance of organisation and presented the experience of the Palestinian Arab Workers' Association and what had been achieved due to the workers' unity and organisation, notably the building of trade unions and initiation of programmes and our efforts and experience in implementing the programmes. A number of the members of the conference, some of whom were experienced union leaders, whether they were branch members or the regional unions and cooperative societies that had been established in some of the villages.... Amongst them I remember Elias Yanni (al-Bassa), Uthman Fuad (Tarsheeha), Jiries Qaysar (Sahmata), Saeed Saleh (Sha'ab), Mas'ood al-Qays (Mi'ilia).

The speakers emphasised the importance of cooperation among the committees, unified work and organisation, the formation of armed groups and their training, so that they could protect their villages from the

continuous Zionist incursions, which took place under the nose of the British mandate forces before the end of the Mandate...at the end of the meeting, those attending decided that:

1. The conference should be considered the General Assembly of the local committees and a general framework, which meets following an invitation by the secretary of the Central Committee, who will be elected by its members.
2. The Central Committee should be formed of 12 members chosen by those attending the conference and should especially include the secretaries of the local committees who were:

The pastor Ya'acub Hanna (al-Ramah), Husni Salim Saleh, 'Uthman Fuad (Tarsheeha)Ma'ad al-Qays (Mi'ilia), Youser Kamal (al-Bqei'a), Mahmoud Ibrahim Ma'rouf (Deir al-Qasi), Elias Yanni(al-Bassa), Muhammad Saeed Abdel Rahim (Nahaf), Kamel Salim (Majd el-Kroum), Falah Ali Falah (Kufr Sami'), Saeed Saleh (Sha'ab), and Ahmad Hussein al-Yamani (Sihmata).

3. Tarsheeha should be the headquarters of the Central Committee.
4. The committee should devise an action programme according to the discussions held within the conference and work hard to implement it.
5. The Central Committee should be given the task of visiting Lebanon as soon as possible, in order to discuss the organisation of relations between the Galilee and the governorate of southern Lebanon in Saida; i.e. between the local committees, the Central Committee and the authorities in southern Lebanon, in order to import foodstuffs and other needs and to facilitate peoples' entry into and exit from Lebanon.
6. The Central Committee's delegation sent to Lebanon was given the task of meeting with the governor in Saida in order to make contact with the "Permanent Palestine Office" which was formed in Lebanon and consisted of Dr Salim Idrees, Mr. Hasan Bahhisli, Kamal Jaber, Hussein al-'Tweini, Dr. Bishara Dahhan, Dr. Saad Allah al-Khalil, 'Imad Saleh... and others.
7. The Central Committee was given the task of communicating with the Rescue Army's leadership as they had arrived in the area.

Meeting of the Central Committee

After the conference was over the members of the Central Committee who had been elected to the local committees' conference held on the 30th of June 1948 in Tarsheeha, which was attended by the Commander of the Arab Liberation Army in the area – Col. Mahdi Salah (Iraqi), discussed the situation of the local committees and placed their tasks and the framework of their relations with the military forces on the one hand and with the secretariat of the Central Committee on the other, and they took the following decisions:

1. To form a number of branch committees that could carry out tasks that were set by the Central Committee.
2. Each member of the Central Committee was given the responsibility for a branch committee such as the military committee, the Health Committee, the judicial committee and the General Communications Committee.
3. Ahmad al-Yamani was appointed the secretary of the Central Committee, and he held the responsibility for following up on the local and branch committees, in addition to communicating with each military leader, signing correspondence and identity cards issued by the committee.
4. The Central Committee shall hold its ordinary meetings every Thursday.
5. A. The Central Committee shall present a monthly report to the local committees and the military leadership of the area.
B. The Central Committee shall present a copy of its decisions to the military leader in Tarsheeha...Col. Mahdi Saleh.
6. The Central Committee has its Headquarters in the building of Tarsheeha Municipality.
7. The local committees present monthly reports, which are discussed by the Central Committee, which accordingly takes decisions.

Positive Relations between the Central Committee and the Arab Liberation Army

Col. Mahdi Saleh took up the role of liaison officer between the leadership of the Arab Liberation Army, which had entered the Galilee district, and the Central Committee, and he offered all possible assistance to facilitate the committee's work.

A Letter Expressing Gratitude to the Village of Sihmata

Since the local committee of our village has granted me the honour of representing it through the post of secretary and after having gained the confidence of the local committees' conference and being elected as secretary of the Central Committee of the Galilee District...I issued the following statement to the inhabitants of the village in the name of the local committee.

To the residents of our beloved village Samhata:

Dear brothers and sisters,

The local committee that you have assigned the honor of representing you to the military and civil authorities in the area extends to you its gratitude and thanks for this responsibility. This committee will spare no effort so as to fulfill your expectations. We also hope that god blesses us to serve our town our nation and the Umma.

As every person that works is bound to make mistakes, I ask in the name of the committee, that every one of you submit any criticism you might have of the committee's actions. The committee will happily accept all such criticisms with an open heart. The committee is also pleased to accept all individual or group complaints, hoping that the whole village cooperates to achieve the public good that we all seek.

We hope that god blesses you and us, peace be upon you.

Your son and your brother, secretary of your committee.

Ahmad 30/6/1948

The Fall of Nazareth

The forces of the Arab Liberation Army collapsed after al-Shajara battles, and the fall of Shafa Amro and Safouria. The Zionist forces were able to achieve victory in the al-Nazareth battle, thus displacing the residents – as was consistent with their objective to depopulate the area of its Arab inhabitants and to expel them towards Lebanon, carrying nothing except their children and some luggage.

This situation caused panic in the hearts of the people in the villages that the Zionist forces had not reached yet.

Local committees offered displaced people from the villages what support they could provide, including food, and what temporary shelter they could secure.

Central Committee Meeting

After the collapse that occurred, the Central Committee convened, and took a series of decisions, including the following:

1. Appealing to the people to remain steadfast, and refuse to leave their villages and go to Lebanon, even if the Zionist enemy were to invade.
2. Allowing the residents to leave the village in the morning to go to their fields and olive groves to protect themselves from hostile air raids.
3. Heavily guarding the villages at night, and forming patrol groups of fighters.
4. Assigning Youssif Kamal, member of the Central Committee (also a former colonel in the Palestinian-Jordanian border forces), and other Military Commission officials to make arrangements that were compatible with the local military groups and their capabilities.

Although arrangements and instructions were given to protect the villages, the influx of displaced citizens from Nazareth, and the surrounding villages on the one hand, and the spread of news about the brutal massacres carried out by the Zionist enemy forces, killing children, indecent assaults, killing pregnant women (in Deir Yassin and other villages) on the other hand, in addition to the hostile air strikes targeting the villages every now and then, pushed some members of the local committees and the dignitaries to demand that women and children be allowed to leave the villages, while men stayed to participate in the defence of their villages.

Central Committee Insists on Steadfastness

Despite all the pressures the Central Committee was exposed to, I, and a number of fellow members insisted on the position taken by the committee, and we urged steadfastness and confrontation, and remaining in the villages, even if they were plundered, even if they killed or arrested some of its residents. We used to say (to those who requested allowing women and children to leave) “when we allow women and children to leave the villages, many men, when things get hard, will start contemplating their families' destiny, and leave the battle, allowing the Zionists to take over...”

So we distributed brief statements to the people explaining that Zionists were seeking to displace people, take possession of the land, so they could import more Jewish immigrants. Remain in your villages and do not leave them.

My Symbolic Participation in the Fight

My father purchased a "Satin gun" for six Palestinian pounds, from one of al-Sumyra villagers who passed through our village on their way to Lebanon and handed it to me. He kept for himself his old gun that he had since the great revolution of 1936. Besides carrying out the work of the Secretariat of the Central Committee, I used to help Mr. Yousif Kamal in mobilising, gathering and sending fighters to answer calls for help from the Liberation Army commanders. To encourage and motivate the fighters, I accompanied the troops that headed towards Mi'ilia village, in preparation for attacking Jiddeen castle where Zionist troops had gathered to prepare their attack on the villages in the region.

My Brother Hani Takes My Place

On the day following my arrival with the Popular Rescue troops to the Assembly center prepared by the leadership of the Liberation Army in Ma'lia village, I was surprised to see my brother Hani enter the centre without a weapon. He approached me and urged me to hand him the machine gun so he could take my place, so I returned to my main task in the Central Committee. Because of his determination and insistence on staying with us without a weapon if I do not hand him the gun, I had to comply with his request –especially given his enthusiasm, energy and willingness to sacrifice himself despite his young age, and so I returned to Tarshiha.

The Attack Intensifies, Collapse Begins

The attacks of the Zionist enemy continued, aviation bombed the villages of Ma'lia and Tarshiha. That morning I was in "Sihmata", so I headed straight to Tarshiha, to the headquarters of the Central Committee. I was accompanied by brother Faris Jamil Abdul-Latif Balsheh. Before we reached Tarshiha, Zionist aviation launched a new raid over the southern parts of the village. Nonetheless, we kept moving and entered the headquarters of the Committee. We gathered the papers, documents, reports, and statements and burned them all for fear they might fall into the hands of the enemy if they occupied the village, and discovered the Committee's Headquarters.

Meeting with Colonel Mahdi Saleh and Doctor Amin Ruwaiha:

After burning the archive of the Central Committee, I thought I should pass by the Headquarters of Colonel Mahdi Saleh to explore the military situation, and take his advice in light of his knowledge and expectations.

On the way to Colonel Mahdi's headquarters, the aviation launched another raid targeting the entrances of Tarshiha and Ma'lia, and our village as well.

Dr. Amin Ruwaiha was at the Colonel's headquarters when we arrived there. We asked him about the situation, and his assessment. I still remember what he told us: "If air strikes were to continue, and artillery shelling followed, we have to expect a full-scale assault on the region. They are aiming to destroy our forces, and to disperse our combat troops." He finished by saying: "I will continue communicating with the Headquarters of the Field Commander (Fawzi al-Qawuqji) in Ain Ebel (Lebanon) and we will contact you with any new updates." Here we are now with Dr. Amin exploring the possibility of relocating the military hospital from here (Tarshiha), to Harfish behind the frontline.

Tarshiha Massacre

We left Colonel Mahdi Saleh, and Doctor Amin Ruwaiha exploring and walked around the neighborhoods in Tarshia on our way back. The scenes were distressing: homes turned into rubble, women, children and men carrying their families, a man searching for his wife and children under the rubble, because he had just returned from guard watch, a child coming out of the rubble alone, crying for his mother and brothers under the rubble, people carrying some baggage and wandering around seeking help, old people unable to walk, crying outside their houses.

Strikes Continue, Collapse Continues

Air raids continued over the villages in the region, and convoys of displaced people passed through our village heading north to Lebanon. Villagers started leaving their houses, some to the olive groves, some to the nearby villages that were not bombed by warplanes, and others wandering around. In the evening, the village was nearly empty of its inhabitants; my family moved to a cave in an olive grove near our house.

Moreover, the Liberation Army forces started moving the headquarters, and the military hospital northeast, to the rear sites.

Help Ceases to Reach the Liberation Army

The transmitter of the Liberation Army was installed in one of the houses outside the village (Fahd Ahmed Murra's house). Two technicians worked

there; Mahmoud Hasan Thaher (from Deir al-Qasi), and Mohammed Hijjo (from Jerusalem). I went to the headquarters of the transmitter to hear the news especially as Mahmoud had been my classmate in Tarshiha. He started telling me about the deteriorating situation, and the requests for assistance that were not answered despite repeated and urgent calls. He also told me about the orders issued to the brigades to retreat, that the enemy was attacking from the east and had taken over the villages of al-Safsaf and Jish and was moving towards Sa'Sa'. He also told me the military command feared that with a rapid rush of enemy forces, the road in front of the troop stationed in the region and the surrounding hills in Tarshiha and Sihmata would be blocked, and the troops eliminated. Mahmoud finished by saying that he was considering leaving the responsibility for the transmitter to his colleague Mohammed Hijjo, and returning to his village (Deir al-Qasi) to find out what had happened to his family.

So I said to him, what can you do for your family? Whether they were still in the village or had left, you are now a fighter in the midst of the battle, charged with a key task; securing communications between local leaders and the rear. I encouraged him to stay, and convinced him. Then he asked me to bring him and his colleague some food, because the supply car did not pass by the headquarters all day, and his colleague Mohammad went to Harfish with the ambulance and would come back soon.

My Colleague Mahmoud, Injured and Killed

I left him and went to fetch some food. I was only a short distance away when a Zionist aircraft carried out a raid targeting the house where the transmitter was and the main street.

After I returned to the road, I found my friend Mahmoud lying where we had been sitting: he was wounded, and the house was destroyed along with everything in it. Later on, brother Sa'id Jamil Qaddoura took him to the field hospital in Harfish, and from there he was moved to Lebanon where he passed away in Bent Jbeil. May God have mercy on him, he was a true gentleman.

A Discussion with My Father

I returned home to find that one of the bombs from the Zionist raid had hit the houses of the neighborhood including ours. The walls were cracked and one of them had been demolished. My family had already left to the "al-Mghara" cave in the olive grove. I followed them there, and my father started

telling me about God's will. My mother was thanking God the great for saving her and my sister who was with her when they returned to the house to bring some covers and food, and as soon as they left the house taking what they could carry, before they even reached the cave, the plane bombed our neighborhood again.

My father asked me to step outside the cave with him because he wanted to discuss something. When we were alone he said, " Now Ahmed, what do you think? Don't you see with your own eyes people departing from the nearby villages? The army vehicles? Even the people from our village have left. The committee members you worked with, and demanded people to remain steadfast have also left the village. Why are you fighting destiny son? Why don't you think about the future? Why? Why?"

I tried to calm him down, to ask for his blessings. I tried to convince him that the Liberation Army was still with us; that the artillery was ready and military cars were coming and going, carrying ammunition and help, and so on. Why fear father? Why would we leave our houses? We have to stay with the army, not leave...etc., etc. When he saw that I was not responding to his call, he said with tears in his eyes: " May God bless you and protect you".

We headed to a place overlooking the main street together and saw a convoy of military cars parked close to us. We went to explore the matter, and found officer Akram al-Diri there; he had been wounded in the battle of al-Shajara. We approached him, and after we exchanged greetings I asked him what was happening. He said "the military command decided to move the artillery to the hills near Fassouta village (north of the village of Sihmata), and move the headquarters from Tarshiha, perhaps to your village." I asked him if he wanted anything. He replied negatively, saying that they were waiting for the rest of the cars to arrive. I tried to convince my father on our way back that things were still reassuring, and for him not to yield to despair. He shook his head. I don't know if he was convinced by what he heard from officer al-Diri and me, or whether it was a sign of disregard.

We returned to the cave and told the family what we had heard. I returned to the main street, observing the loaded convoys of military cars heading east. Some of them were coming from Majd al-Krum en route to Lebanon, where the headquarters of the leadership of the Liberation Army was stationed. I only realised then that it was a military withdrawal!!

The Second Attempt to Convince me to Leave

When I went back to the cave, my father was sitting outside. He initiated a conversation: "You were trying to convince us, reassure us. What do you

think now when you see all these withdrawals? I didn't believe the officer who told you that the artillery was being moved to Fassouta hills, and that the military command will be headquartered in our village".

I tried to convince him that what he heard was true, but he was not convinced. He tried to bargain with me. He said: take your older sister and brother and leave the village with the others. I will stay with your mother and younger brothers here. I replied with some stubbornness: spare me this task, father, I will never leave this village, I will stay here to die. This is the last thing I am going to say to you; it seems that my voice was loud, it brought my mother and brothers outside to where we were sitting. I continued talking with intensity, addressing everyone: "If you wish to survive, leave the village and leave me alone. If you prefer to die in the village, let us remain together. A man dies once, whether we go to Lebanon or Syria, eventually we will die, and I prefer to die in Sihmata, or with a burning bullet from an enemy. Better than dying away from my birthplace, regretting everything I have done".

This is how I answered my father in front of my brothers, they were not familiar with such stubbornness coming from me. My father could not control himself – he started crying, and my mother joined him.

With the same stubbornness, I addressed my brothers, "Where are you going to go? And how are you going to live? I visited Lebanon, I went to Sidon and met the mayor, I saw the conditions of those who left Palestine and how they live on the streets. If you insist on leaving the village, go. Do not ask about me, I am not leaving it alive".

Then I told my father, "If desecration of honor, stabbing pregnant women, and stripping them is what forces you to leave the village in order to protect your honor, I am telling you: here is the Sten machine gun in front of us, and bullets next to it. If the enemy approaches, we will not let them get near. I will shoot you, and shoot myself with the last bullet. We will die in honor, instead of leaving and living a life of displacement and deprivation".

No one answered; their tongues were tied and they were crying. But my father broke the silence asking, "What do you think about what Ahmed said?" "We all prefer dying to leaving Ahmed alone", my mother answered. I cried and everyone else joined in.

My father asked me again, "What if we go to Kofor Samee?" It was located south of our village, and it was rumored that the inhabitants were not going to leave. "this way we stay in Palestine close to our village?"

"I don't mind as long as we stay in Palestine", I answered. (My father had friends and acquaintances from the Falah family, and I had a classmate from the Falah family as well).

My father stood up in haste and said, "I'll go with some of your brothers and some luggage to Kufur Samee', and you stay with your mother and baby brother until I return. Then we'll all go and settle there, until God resolves the matter".

Ein Tiria Instead of Kufur Samee'

In the absence of my father and brothers, we started hearing the roar of enemy tanks, coming from a westerly direction (from Tarshiha), firing shells, and bullets in the area to terrorise the citizens, because the Liberation Army had completed its withdrawal from the area. So I then realised that my father's estimations had been proven correct, and that the Liberation Army was leaving the area.

My brother Hani arrived. My father sent him to let us know that he changed his mind, he did not go to Kufur Samee', but instead to Ein Tiria (a water spring and an orchard between our village and al-Buqe'a). My father knew the owner of the orchard who had a house there. He did not want to overburden his friends in Kufur Samee'.

We headed towards Ein Tiria, and on the way a fragment of a stray bullet fired randomly by the enemy hit my sister Hanieh's toe. We reached Ein Tiria exhausted, and after a short break I asked my father for permission to go to al-Buqe'a to meet Col. Youssef Kamal to examine the situation – he was a member of the Central Committee of the Galilee region, and the military affairs officer in the committee. Abu Kamal's house was in the village entrance, where some of al-Buqe'a's notables had gathered, along with some of the people from our village "Sihmata". They were all discussing the position they would adopt when the Zionists reached al-Buqe'a.

Returning to the Village

During the session, Col. Youssef Kamal said: "We as a Central Committee are no longer able to do anything to protect the citizens. The Liberation Army decided to retreat from the region and the enemy has all the capabilities. We are incapable of resistance and we no longer have a choice except to stay in our homes. I advise everyone to keep calm, and not do anything that could provoke retaliation".

The meeting ended after hearing this declaration. I left with the people from my village, and we agreed to return to Sihmata. I remember some of the

people who returned: Hasan Ayoub, Kamel Saleem Sam'an, Fahd Eid Sam'an, Atef al-Jushi, Ali Mohammad Azzam, Mustafa Mohammad al-Hajjar, Youssef Hamadah, Ali Suleiman, Abdul-Rahman Hussein Qadoura, Khaled Mohammad Hussein Qadoura.

It was very painful to see shreds of white cloth fluttering on top of the houses of al-Buqe'a. It was a sign of surrender to the enemy army before it reached the village and destroyed it as people feared.

We reached the village at night. Some of us agreed to meet in the morning with the people who were in the village to explore what should be done.

We realised that the enemy army entered from the western and eastern sides. The army raided empty houses looking for weapons, and from the dawn hostile forces began calling the villagers through the radio to gather in the village square (al-Rahba), and that no one should stay at home because the army was carrying out an inspection, and would execute whoever is hiding in his house and demolish it. Thus the people in the village gathered in the square which was besieged by soldiers.

The commander of the group came forward and asked in clear Arabic language about the Mukhtar (village headman). He was told that the mukhtar moved with his family to the olive groves because the planes carried out several raids yesterday and destroyed a lot of houses. They pointed to the Mukhtar's brother (Ahmad Saleh Qadoura, Abu Ghanem) and ordered him to open al-Mukhtar's office. They sent some soldiers with him, who broke the locked door and searched the office. Then they called us to the square surrounded by soldiers. Once we got there, the commander said, addressing us: "We want the weapons you owned and used to fight us with. We know you partook in the attack on Naharia, Hanita, and Jiddin. If we do not receive all the weapons within one hour, you will all die and we will demolish the village".

The commander of the group approached me, (I was the youngest in the crowd), and asked me about the weapon I had and had used to fight with. I replied, " We do not have weapons to surrender". So he cursed me, slapped me and silenced me. Then he went on to ask everyone about their weapons, all of them answered like me.

After that, he started asking about the Arab forces and their location. We answered that we did not know anything about where they were based, all we knew was that the forces were stationed in Tarshiha, and withdrew from there.

Taken hostage

After some time, the commander of the group ordered our detention. He picked me with Haj Hashim Qadoura and Khaled Mohammad Qadoura and told the others: "You will stay here under guard, we will take those as hostages until we return. If we hear the sound of a single bullet, I will execute these three and the soldiers will execute all of you".

They tied each one of us with ropes (the three of us) to the front of a tank. The convoy of tanks moved with us in the front towards al-Buqe'a village. Before we reached the village, we met groups of people walking towards the tanks carrying white flags!!

The commander alighted there and approached with the soldiers surrounding them. Then everyone returned to al-Buqe'a, to Col. Youssef Kamal's house where they held a meeting. We were still chained to the front of the tanks, not knowing what was discussed in the meeting. But we heard some of the villagers saying that the Jewish officer was "Ibrahim Hilal".