

Beatrice Forestan - Kairos Italia



They say your first time in Palestine stays with you forever.

I spent one week there as a representative of Kairos Italy, for the launch of **Kairos Palestine 2**, together with the Pax Christi delegation. And yet, since returning, that week has not really ended. It continues to surface in my daily life, in the news I read, in the words that are used here - often too light to describe what I witnessed.

I remember my first checkpoint as a threshold - a moment that changes how you see everything. Traveling on a Palestinian bus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, I clearly saw what a divided system looks like: **those who pass and those who wait**. Israeli vehicles crossed freely; Palestinian buses queued. We were ordered off the bus, lined up between metal bars, checked one by one, while a soldier inspected the vehicle. What struck me most was not only the control, but the uncertainty: you never know if it will take minutes, hours, or if you will be turned back altogether. That uncertainty governs work, education, healthcare, and family life.

Within this system, women often endure a specific form of violence: invasive searches, humiliation, hours of waiting under heat or cold. It is a quieter violence, but deeply damaging - one that attacks dignity, health, and freedom of movement.

What I came to understand is that occupation is not a single act. It is **layered**. It controls movement, resources, and ultimately the future.

In the **Jordan Valley**, occupation appears through land and water. Fertile fields, palm trees, agricultural potential - and yet access to land and water is tightly controlled. Water is not just a resource; it is power. When families cannot irrigate their land or sustain their livelihood, life itself becomes unsustainable. This is not accidental: it is structural.

Then there is displacement through force.

In **Jenin**, I listened to testimonies from women and girls forcibly displaced from the refugee camp - a place that has existed for decades, born after the Nakba and transformed into a living community. One 17-year-old girl told us: *"The camp was my soul. Now I have no soul."* A 12-year-old spoke about losing her school, her friends, her sense of normality. Hearing this from children makes one thing clear: what is being destroyed is not only homes, but **the future**.

And yet, amid violence and loss, I also witnessed resilience - not romanticized, but real. I met people and organizations practicing nonviolent resistance, preserving memory, and insisting on dignity. I encountered **sumud** - steadfastness - the daily decision to remain, to live, to resist erasure.

It was in this context that I attended the launch of **Kairos Palestine 2**. This document is not only theological; it is profoundly political and moral. It insists on naming reality without euphemisms: **genocide, occupation, apartheid, settler colonialism**. These are heavy words, but avoiding them does not make reality lighter - it only makes injustice easier to ignore. Kairos also delivers a clear message: solidarity cannot remain only spiritual or symbolic. Prayers for peace are not enough if injustice is normalized. Compassion is not enough if it does not lead to action. Every person we met repeated the same request: **"Go back and tell our story."**

That request stayed with me more than the walls or the checkpoints. Because it creates responsibility. Not to appropriate others' suffering, but to refuse silence. To challenge indifference and impunity. Because impunity, I understood there, is not an accident - it is part of the system. It is what allows these violations to continue daily, without consequences.

So the question I return with is not only *what did I see?* but *what do I do with what I saw?*

If the first time in Palestine truly stays with you forever, then it cannot remain a silent weight. It must become words - **the right words**. Not out of hatred, not to simplify, but out of dignity. Because naming reality is the first step toward justice. And because the strongest request I received was this: **do not allow us to be erased - not even through language**.

