

natural
born
rebel

When did you first become a rebel?

When you grow up in an environment of oppression and occupation, you just open your eyes and find military jeeps, daily curfews preventing you from going wherever you want. Just thinking about how to get rid of that is an act of rebellion. I started doing practical activism during the first Intifada, when I was 15 or 16 years old, resisting the occupation like everybody else in my community.

Who is an inspiration for you?

Locally, I am inspired by the older generation: those old men and women who never give up. One of my uncles is an amazing man. Whenever he wants to visit somewhere, he never thinks about military jeeps or curfews; he just goes for it, even if it endangers his life. Globally, I love the stories of Subcommandante

Healing oil

Tayseer Arbasi is a Palestinian farmer and organiser with the al-Zaytouna (Arabic for 'Olive') co-operative. It sells its organic, fair-trade olive oil through the UK not-for-profit collective, Zaytoun, which organised a speaking tour here to raise funds and support in June. He spoke to **Max Watson**

Marcos and the Zapatista community, who marched all the way to Mexico City, refusing to be oppressed.

What are the goals and principles of al-Zaytouna?

Firstly, the principles are to work and to develop the olive oil sector, which is the main source of income of 65 per cent of the Palestinian community. The goal is to raise the quality of the oil to meet global market standards and make it fair trade: it's our social economy. This is not only

the objective of us as an organisation, but also of the farmers themselves; so we are trying to implement the farmers' vision. We are enhancing the formation of the cooperatives in the West Bank and Gaza, because collective work is the best method and we are achieving a revolution in this sector.

How will the cutting of EU/US aid to Palestine affect al-Zaytouna?

I am not a religious guy; I am a communist. I am not for Hamas,

but I recognise democracy as the way forward and they were elected democratically – we should respect this, not put sanctions on Palestinians.

The EU and US funding came from political agreements in Oslo. Cutting it means limiting resources and the development process – al-Zaytouna has lost funding for development projects already because of these sanctions. It means increasing the oppression, because the cuts will give rise to poverty – creating a miserable life, in fact – and this situation benefits the occupiers, because poverty weakens our steadfastness.

It's a humanitarian issue, it's humanitarian aid, it should be continued. Why has democracy produced this level of extremism? It's because of the Israeli oppression against the Palestinian people. If you want to finish extremism, you must finish the occupation.

What's your message to us?

My message, as a farmer, is: buy Palestinian olive oil – buy it, promote it. It is the life of a nation concentrated in that bottle. If you help in selling it, it means that you are helping to find some food for vulnerable families, and milk for those kids living in isolated ghettos. Buy the oil, promote it!

www.zaytoun.org

