

Title: Just Visions of extending the olive branch

Draft 2

Byline: Tebben Gill Lopez

“We don’t have time for wars,” says a tired-looking man on the screen. The heavy, Mid-eastern sun beats down on his face. Smoke from his cigarette slips out his mouth with the words seeming to give them more substance, adding to the reality of the statement.

This is how this man, Ayed Morrar the leader of the Budrus movement, opens the documentary “Budrus: It Takes a Village to Unite the Most Divided People on Earth” opens. The movie recounts the tiny village’s struggle to save itself from obliteration by uniting peace-minded individuals. Just Vision, a nonprofit organization whose goal is to highlight the work of Palestinian and Israeli citizens for peace, produced the film. A Q-and-A session was held after the movie with the Online Content Associate for Just Visions, Sudha Babaa.

The Students for Social Justice (SFSJ) at Fairfield University organized a screening of the film Tuesday night of September 20, on the eve of the International Day of Peace, or Peace Day. Established by the United Nations in 1981, Peace Day offers an opportunity for everyone from nations to individuals to create opportunities of peace on a united day.

The group decided to show the piece because of its pertinence to current events, explained Executive Board Member Julie Whittaker. “Right now is a huge time for Palestine and Israel in general,” she said. In the spirit of the Day of Peace, Obama met with both the Israeli Prim Minister and the Palestinian Authority President about the upcoming bid for UN recognition of an independent Palestine state. With recent backing from the United States for peaceful relations between the two parties, the motion seems possible. “The fallout is anticipated to be big and maybe violent,” said Whittaker, if the state is recognized, “and this film is about peace.”

The event kickoff was pushed back half an hour to try and maximize attendance. SFSJ was also happy to offer a First Year Experience credit that had been approved the day before.

Not all students that attended needed the incentive, however. Anna Edelman ’15 saw one of the posters as she walked by the Oak Room and was interested in the subject and thought its recognition was a good sign. “It has lots of nominations,” she said.

A new member of SFSJ, Sohail Sumra ’15, thought that students should come because “it’s a relevant issue that affects everyone,” he said. Sumra also pointed out that the film is a “key example” of global citizenship, a focus of the university for its students.

The late start also allowed for students in related classes to attend. According to FUSA representative Dan Jones, four International Studies classes attended the event, including those of Dr. David Crawford and Dr. Marcie Patton.

Almost all of the 178 chairs were filled as the lights dimmed and the movie opened with the weary face of Morrar fighting for his village. Budrus was a village of 1500 people whose livelihood relied almost exclusively on olive trees. When the Israeli government mandated the Separation Barrier, construction cut through the fields, destroying the trees. Morrar organized peaceful marches to protest the construction. Their strength grew as first the women joined them, then international and Israeli supporters.

The movie has been said to view “like an action film,” said Babaa, because of the footage provided by protesters in the heat of the conflict between the marchers and Israeli border police.

The movie made its debut in 2009 after three years of production and has since screened in all seven continents, including screenings on Capital Hill and Jerusalem.

“Budrus” received second prize for the Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2010.

Just Vision has used the film to engage communities and universities. “Most people hadn’t heard about the movement,” said Babaa. And she notes the growing support for peaceful protests against the Israeli government that emerged in the film’s wake.

Since the Budrus events, several nonviolent demonstrations have been organized among other villages for issues from housing evictions and movement limitations of checkpoints to basic water access. But the new groups have faced “an increase in repression and aggression” by the Israeli government, said Babaa.

The movie “illustrates how powerful a nonviolent demonstration can unify a political environment,” said Babaa. Both Farah and Hamas have agreed to cooperation in pursuit of their mutual goal of autonomy.

The Budrus people saved their village and land in a relatively secret war of nonviolence. The olive branch is a symbol of peace, and the restoration of the people’s trees might be a sign of things soon to come.