



Lærdal Municipality
Friendship Committee Jericho - Lærdal

Lærdal 12. December 2023

To Jericho Municipality
Mayor Abdelkareem Sider
and all our friends in Jericho

The year 2023 is soon coming to its end. On thinking back on this year, we get so many mixed feelings concerning our friendship: 2023 gave us some of our very best moments and memories, but in other ways this year has been terrible.

The year started with our plans for a visit to Jericho in March. A delegation of six persons were chosen and the tickets were ordered, and we were all looking forward to visit Jericho, the oldest city in the world, where we should meet our friends and even celebrate 25 years of friendship between our municipalities. But in the end of January something happened. Jericho and other cities on the West Bank came under Israeli siege, and the violence from soldiers and illegal settlers escalated. The letter from you, Mr. Mayor, on 5. February, where you described the increasing violation from soldiers and settlers against the Palestinian population, made a deep impression on us, and it was with grief and deep sorrow we decided to postpone our visit to Jericho.

The happier we were, when we realized that a delegation from Jericho could visit Lærdal in June, 25 years after our Friendship Agreement was signed. We were so happy to receive you and spend some wonderful days together with you and your delegation. It was an historical event when you and Mr. Hans Tønjum, the two mayors who signed the treaty 25 years ago, could meet again after all these years. And the confirmation of the friendship agreement signed by the two present mayors of Jericho and Lærdal was a new step forward in our amicable relation. The fact that Mrs. Marie Antoinette Sedin, the Palestinian ambassador to Norway, also had the opportunity to visit Lærdal on the occasion of our 25 years celebration, was also an important contribution to this big event. Last, but also very important, was that so many members of the friendship association and other inhabitants of Lærdal got the opportunity to meet the Mayor of Jericho, your delegation and the Palestinian ambassador. We remember every moment, the friendly conversations, the official celebration, the speeches, the meals, the warm smiles. Last, but not least, in our memories stands the moment with the solemn hoisting of the Palestinian flag in Lærdal. We will forever keep it in our hearts, as we are hoping and waiting for the day when Palestine is free.

The last two months, since 7. October, have been like a long nightmare. The suffering of the population of Gaza is beyond words, and it is not at all understandable that the world can accept this to go on. But we also suffer together with you, our friends in Jericho and elsewhere on the West Bank, when we hear about the closure, arrestations, killings and all kind of sufferings. Believe us, you and your friends and siblings in Gaza are in our thoughts every day. From our hearts we hope that occupation and violence soon will stop, and long run solutions will be found, so you can live in peace in your hometown Jericho and a free state Palestine, like we do in Lærdal, Norway.

One small light in the darkness is that solidarity with the Palestinian people is increasing. There are almost daily solidarity actions and demonstrations claiming cease fire in Norway, like all over the world. In our Jericho Shop as well as in other Palestine shops in Norway, we experience that people want to buy olive oil, embroidery, ceramics, soap, scarfs and other products from Palestine. We are

almost running out of products! This way of showing solidarity is also important, and may give hope and optimism.

In Christmas time we listen to the message from Bethlehem, where Jesus was born more than 2000 years ago. It is a message of Peace and Hope, of Equality and Tolerance. From our hearts we hope that these values will grow and be victorious all over the world, also in our beloved Palestine. Together we hope for a better new year!



Audun Mo
Mayor of Lærdal

Yours sincerely,

Anna Avdem
Head of Friendship Committee Jericho-Lærdal

