

## **CITY MAN RECALLS CHILDHOOD TERROR PALESTINIAN COALITION PLANS CITY PROTEST**

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Charleston resident Dirar Ahmad sees the recent news about Israel through different eyes. He sees it through the blue eyes of a Palestinian. He sees on television the land that he left.

"I was born in 1959," he said. "Before I am even 8, we found ourselves under Israeli occupation."

He paused to take a deep breath. He said he knew it happened long ago, but it still seems close.

"When they were bombing the West Bank, we were hiding in a cave. The cave had a pretty thick roof. I thought it was so strong; it would not fall on us."

He was lying on his mother's lap, very conscious of the strong roof that started shaking, "like you would shake a box of matches."

"I had tears on my face. I don't want to die ... So I laid down to take a nap, figuring if the roof fell on me at least I would be already lying down."

The Middle East may seem a million miles from Charleston, but for some residents it is much nearer. Ahmad is one of several who have organized the Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine that was to hold a rally at 3 p.m. today in front of the Charleston Federal Building.

The intent of the rally is to protest "the latest Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people," according to a press release sent out by the coalition.

In the Middle East, where the rhetoric is so charged, even the name of the coalition is enough to cause disagreement. The name Palestine currently describes no recognized swath of land. The area of land Ahmad referred to is called Israel and has been called that since the U.N. declared it in 1948.

"In my heart it's Palestine," Ahmad said.

Politically it is Israel, and Rabbi Israel Koller of Charleston's B'nai Israel Synagogue said, "This is the most friendly government with which the Palestinians ever dealt. If they can't get along with this government, if they can't make some kind of peace agreement with this government, they're never going to do it."

He said the tensions of the Middle East haven't transferred themselves to the Muslim and Jewish populations in Charleston.

"I would like to believe we would not import to the United States the hostilities of dysfunctional peoples and countries," he said, adding that he has many friends in the Palestinian community but he hasn't heard from them lately.