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## On A Mission From The Mideast

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The three women met for the first time two weeks ago, and they have been together almost every day since.

A Palestinian Christian, an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian Muslim have been sitting side by side speaking at colleges, churches, synagogues and community centers about living amid the pain and strife of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"It's not my story that I bring, it's the story of my people, the youth who are my age," Shireen Khamis, 23, a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem, said in an interview Wednesday. "Every Palestinian - no matter who he or she is, Christian or Muslim - everyone is suffering."

The "Jerusalem Women Speak" tour highlights the efforts of women in Israel and the Palestinian territories seeking to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The tour is sponsored by Partners for Peace, which hopes to change the way Americans view the conflict.

At home, it's not possible for the women to work together as activists with people from the other side. Checkpoints severely restrict the movement of Palestinians, and Israelis are barred by their government from entering certain areas, the women say. Despite living on opposite sides of the conflict, the three women agree that Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories must end.

Their tour, which began Oct. 7 in Washington, D.C., included stops at three colleges in Connecticut, and now moves on to New Hampshire. The women spoke Tuesday at Manchester Community College.

Ghada Ageel, 36, a Palestinian Muslim, said she has been unable to return to her home in the Younis refugee camp for the past seven months because she was abroad working on her doctorate in the United Kingdom when Gaza fell under strict border restrictions.

As bad as things have been, Ageel said, she fears it is about to get much worse.

"Forty-five people have been killed in the past five days - can you imagine if that happened anywhere else? There would be such an outcry," she said. "For us, the United Nations means nothing, international law means nothing - we feel powerless."

Rela Mazali, 56, an Israeli writer and peace activist, speaks about what she calls the "militarization" of Israeli society as a result of her country's prolonged conflict in the Palestinian territories. Her work in Israel includes helping Israeli youths who resist mandatory military service.

"Being on this tour has really helped me reconnect to my emotions about what is going on," she said. "I have been involved in this for 25 years. It's very difficult. It takes a lot of work and determination."

At Manchester Community College Tuesday, the women spoke eloquently about the hardships and despair in their daily lives, and asked the crowd of about 150 students for their help in bringing a new way of looking at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and American involvement in it.

Ageel said the women have experienced a range of responses from people as they travel the country. "There are a lot of misperceptions. ... We are saying things that people are not used to hearing."

After hearing the women, sophomore Jessica Perez said she felt Americans were not getting the full story of what has been going on. "If the people really knew what was going on there, the American people would raise their voices over what is being done. Because the American government has interests with the Israeli government, that information is being kept from us."

When the tour ends, the women will return to lives on opposite sides of the conflict, but while on tour, Mazali said, "we have laughed together and we have cried together."

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