

BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK

Mahmoud Darwish, 1941-2008

Mahmoud Darwish was born in 1942 in Al Birwa, Palestine, into a land-owning Sunni Muslim family. Following the Israeli occupation in 1948 his family fled their hometown, which was obliterated from the map. He attended the University of Moscow, USSR, for one year in 1970, and then moved to Cairo, Egypt. As a young man Darwish faced house arrest and imprisonment for his political activism and for publicly reading his poetry. His collections of poetry include *State of Siege* (2002), *The Adam of Two Edens* (2001), *Mural* (2000), *Bed of the Stranger* (1999), *Psalms* (1995), and *The Music of Human Flesh* (1980).

Darwish's awards and honors include the Ibn Sina Prize, the Lotus prize from the Union of Afro-Asian Writers, France's Knight of Arts and Belles Lettres medal, and the Prize for Cultural Freedom from the Lannan Foundation. He was an editor for a Palestine Liberation Organization monthly journal and the director of the group's research center. In 1987 he was appointed to the PLO executive committee, and resigned in 1993 in opposition to the Oslo Agreement.

In 1996 Darwish was permitted to return to Israel after twenty-six years of exile to visit his birthplace, and settled in Ramallah in the West Bank. He had a history of heart problems, and traveled to Houston, Texas at the end of July for open-heart surgery, having requested not to be resuscitated if the surgery did not succeed. He died on August 9, of complications following the surgery. His funeral in Ramallah was attended by thousands of mourners from all over the world, demonstrating the unity for which Darwish had called in his verse and his life. Bay Area Women in Black's silent vigil today is but one voice in the world's lament for its lost poet.

...If you had contemplated the victim's face
And thought it through, you would have remembered your mother in the
Gas chamber, you would have been freed from the reason for the rifle
And you would have changed your mind: this is not the way
to find one's identity again...

—From *Under Siege*

Bay Area Women in Black are Jews and allies who stand against militaristic and fundamentalist leadership in all countries, including our own. We wear black as a sign of our mourning for all the lives that have been lost as a result of war, militarization and violence, and particularly those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine. As part of the international movement of Women in Black, we seek to transform women's mourning for the dead into a powerful refusal of the inevitability of war.

Join us at the Grand Lake Theater every Saturday at noon to register your protest and your presence as we continue to urge the end of the US military and financial support for Israel's disastrous occupation.

The group with flags and signs supporting Israel is the San Francisco Voice for Israel, a local group who oppose Bay Area Women in Black's criticism of the policies of the Israeli government and military. BAWIB is not anti-Israel. BAWIB believes Israel's occupation is wrong and deprives Palestinians of basic human rights. BAWIB calls for the end of the occupation and its violent effects on Israelis and Palestinians. The flyers distributed by Voice for Israel do not accurately reflect BAWIB.

www.bayareawomeninblack.org

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Bay Area Women in Black join other peace-loving peoples to mourn the untimely death of Palestinian Poet-Laureate, Mahmoud Darwish.

Let his verses speak for themselves:

I Come From There

I come from there and I have memories
Born as mortals are, I have a mother
And a house with many windows,
I have brothers, friends,
And a prison cell with a cold window.
Mine is the wave, snatched by sea-gulls,
I have my own view,
And an extra blade of grass.
Mine is the moon at the far edge of the words,
And the bounty of birds,
And the immortal olive tree.
I walked this land before the swords
Turned its living body into a laden table...

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