Nour Shehadah lives with his wife in Tulkarem in the West Bank. Aged 40, he is now a social worker, but was previously a wanted man in Israel and leader of the local Fatah party.

I was born and raised in the Palestinian camp of Tulkarem. We lived in very difficult circumstances, not like human beings. All around me I saw violence, killings and arrests. In 1972 the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) arrested my father for possession of weapons, and put him in jail for a short period. When I was 15 two young men were killed right here in the camp. After that I decided that I wanted to take part in the resistance. At the same time it was discovered that the IDF had poisoned a girl's school and pupils had become very sick. The people of Tulkarem were outraged and many started to demonstrate. I took part in the demonstrations and was arrested for the first time.

In 1987, during the First Intifada, I finished high school and became a student at Birzeit University. A year later they closed the university and I was arrested again and this time beaten for my resistance activities. The intimidation was relentless. In the end, after yet another arrest, I ran and kept on running. Soon I became a wanted man in Israel.

While on the run I became responsible for the political and military wing of the local Fatah party. We would fight the occupation in any way to get freedom for the Palestinians. At this time I also wanted to get married, but it was difficult for a wanted man to find a wife. In the end I met my future wife, Amal, at a demonstration. She was throwing rocks at soldiers and I immediately knew that this was the woman for me. On the day of the wedding, in 1989, the IDF disguised themselves as women and came to arrest me. Luckily they were spotted as uninvited guests and shots were fired. I escaped with my bride to a mountainous area where we had a secret wedding. For the following six years I did not sleep in my own bed. For one year I was in hiding, but then I was caught and spent the next five years in prison.

In prison I was interrogated for 86 days. This was an extremely difficult time, with beatings, intimidation and mind games. The mental torture was worse than the physical violence. For ten days I was locked in a tiny, dimly-lit room with nine other people, all of us sitting with our hands and feet tightly bound: if you needed to go to the bathroom you had to do it on yourself During my time in prison I became a representative for Palestinian prisoners, and through liaising with Israeli guards I learnt how to use dialogue to get our needs met. On the day I left prison, the warden encouraged me to get involved in the peace process but I told him, 'I'm a free man now and I can do what I want. Peace hasn't achieved anything.' I thought to myself, first Israelis arrest me and then they ask me to make peace!

After my release I worked to help the Palestinian Authority take control away from Hamas. In 2000, when the Second Intifada broke out, I remember going to the District Commander's office and throwing rocks at the Israeli army. The violence escalated when Dr Thabet Thabet, a senior member of Yasser Arafat's movement and a man who believed passionately in the peace process, was shot dead in his driveway. By killing this man the Israelis killed any hope for peace. It simply fueled antagonism. From then on we saw airships, tanks and daily incursions. I also lost four of my best friends. It was around this time that I began to ask myself, where is all this violence getting us?

Then, a woman who used to teach me at the university, asked me to head up a non-violent movement. As nothing else was working, I thought I would give it a try, and I gathered 20 people for a workshop and training. It wasn't easy convincing people to get involved, but the more I studied the writings of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and

Nelson Mandela, the more certain I became that this was the only way. I knew that non-violence would work better than violence with Israelis. A lot of people in Tulkarem disagreed and called me a traitor, but I refused to listen.

The same day that I opened an office for peace, I was arrested by the IDF again, just as I was leaving to go on an outing with my wife and children. They tied me up, then blindfold me and interrogated me. I knew this was because non-violence threatened the army just as much as violence.

I've been involved in the movement from that day on, and through the years I've brought friends round to my way of thinking. In Combatants for Peace I am happy to talk to the young soldiers who have laid down their arms and are sorry for what they've done. I can forgive them. But if I were to meet an older IDF soldier who was coming to the end of his life and suddenly wanted forgiveness because he was afraid of death, then I couldn't forgive this person. People who don't judge themselves won't get my forgiveness and deserve to be judged by others. As for myself, because I have never believed in killing innocent people, and because everything I did was to defend my own land, I believe there is nothing I've done that I need forgiveness for.