Wi’am, Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center

Annual Report

2011
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"This is the true joy in life – the being used for a purpose
Recognized by yourself as a mighty one;
the being a force of nature
instead of a feverish selfish clod of ailments and grievances
complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you
happy.
I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community,
and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can."
-- George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

Wi’am is starting its eighteenth year with a new zeal in its new location, but still full of the same hopes, ambitions, and dreams. We are working hard to create a safe environment for the children through our playground and by creating a balanced, sane environment for families. Here, children and women can find a safe haven for recreational activities, meetings, reflections, and social occasions. Other church and international nongovernmental organizations benefit from this open space, alongside the local groups who use Wi’am for public meetings, prayers and vigils, and protests. Therefore, Wi’am opens its doors for any person and any group, regardless of their social, religious and political affiliations. We are firmly rooted in accountability, transparency, restorative justice, and efforts to build civil society and human security.

We depend a great deal on your partnership so please continue to sustain us with the warmth of your thoughts, spirituality, prayers, and support for any of our projects. In this report, please find narratives of our activities in 2011, a representative taste of our work.
Sulha Mediation and Research

Wi’am’s commitment to a culture of restorative justice via Sulha mediation continues to be a cornerstone of our community stewardship efforts. With a success rate of at least seventy percent, Wi’am’s efforts ease the burden on courts and promote more cordial methods of reaching justice. Staff members here believe that conflicts do not only affect disagreeing individuals but entire networks of people. Our services remain free to clients as an act of goodwill, in accordance with our belief in the practice of cultivating social justice and peaceful social transformation.

People from many places across the West Bank turn to Wi’am for assistance in transforming conflict into an opportunity for reconciliation. The staff and volunteers at the Wi’am Centre are available as facilitators throughout the day and late into the night. Cases this year involved a variety of civil and domestic exigencies such as debts, traffic accidents, and inheritance disputes; we managed such cases even if it meant looking at land deeds from one hundred years ago. Wi’am also carries out the vital, unique function of resolving youth and family issues that could have damaged social cohesion without effective intervention. Other cases await further deliberation but the community increasingly feels Wi’am’s positive impact in conflict situations. As is the case throughout the global community, the changing world continues to provide fresh challenges for staff as they strive to apply traditional principles to disagreements that occur in new contexts. Internet misuse, for example, threatens to affect family honor, posing challenges to West Bank community members who wish to stay connected across borders. Facebook especially has become a disturbing locus of abuses. In addition to using Sulha to solve conflicts arising from Facebook and misuse of Internet technologies, Wi’am provides civic education and awareness campaigns for parents, students, and teachers as part of a larger campaign to highlight the positive use of social networking tools.

A pot of coffee shared in common can make a world of difference when people come face-to-face with each other, listening to and encountering ‘the other’ in their current state. Wi’am plans to continue to preserve time-tested methods of conflict transformation through Sulha practice while embracing the opportunity to enrich those methods and make them effective for twenty-first century problems.

The Research Study on “Community-Based Mediation in Palestine and its Impact on Peace-building: Towards the Implementation of Sulha as a Cultural Peacemaking Method for Managing and Transforming the Social and Political Conflict” is still ongoing. We are examining Sulha as part of truth telling in a social context that could facilitate the establishment of an effective internal means to rebuild cohesion,
facilitate reconciliation, and address grievances stemming from the current political situation. The research will have the positive effect of educating people about aspects of mediation, its different processes of negotiation, restorative justice, and third-party conflict transformation processes. The research will also provide extensive examination of the Conflict Resolution field based on experiential learning. The interim report will be posted on the website in 2012.
Women Activities

Wi’am networks with 15 local women’s organizations, and its own women’s group has a strong weekly presence. The women continue to seek opportunities for personal growth but also for making an impact on the West Bank community. They have created and led discussions about gender relations during political conflicts such as those in Ireland, South Africa, and the Balkans. These dialogues include ways to utilize UN resolution 1325, issues of violence against women, and how to communicate about joint peace activities with Israelis. Additionally, the women of Wi’am took an active interest in Bethlehem’s bid to join the World Heritage List.

During various day trips to West Bank towns, the women of Wi’am networked with many organizations. At a workshop in Jericho, women worked together to create needs assessments for future programs. With the facilitation of Wi’am staff, women discussed a wider variety of topics from the Palestinian context as they relate to the implementation of nonviolence.

The Bethlehem women joined participants from Nablus, Hebron and Ramallah during different workshops throughout the year on combating impediments to inheritance rights, focusing on the pivotal role of media in cooperation with the YMCA. They also discussed real case studies, participated in focus groups and role-plays, and learned about taking-on the role of negotiator. The women took on a vital role in helping to define best practices associated with inheritance. We provide women with opportunities to meet and consult with lawyers and human rights groups about fulfilling their needs.
Last July, women’s groups joined with young human rights activists during training sessions centered on providing information about the history and origins of “International Human Rights” principles. These also served as a means to provide participants with the skills necessary to document and effectively report human rights violations occurring in Palestine. The workshops focused on training and learning skills in the English language and in using computers as documentation tools.

In the fall of 2011 women’s groups from Wi’am and Sabeel ecumenical centre combined for a retreat at the Cremisan Monastery, where representatives from the Latin Patriarch, Melkite, and Greek Orthodox leadership spoke about the meaning of Christmas. They attended mass the next day in the olive grove, in opposition to plans to build more apartheid wall there.

When meeting with other organizations, the women of Wi’am learned to recognize symptoms of post-traumatic stress in themselves and their children, as well as learning about counseling services and the stigmas surrounding therapy. In Palestine, the trauma of the Occupation is on-going and so West Bank residents must learn to cope with stress on an on-going basis. By overcoming stigmas historically associated with pride and shame, the women of the community help children and young people mature with the emotional tools they need to be strong amidst adversity.

Wi’am is a place of celebrations in which women play a pivotal role. The Wi’am women had several cooking parties throughout the year. Several times, the entire centre was filled with the scents of exceptional food and the sounds of lively conversations. Visiting internationals are welcomed to partake of this special feast. Combining voices, the women filled Manger Square with caroling around Christmas. The excitement continued with a competitive game of Bingo. Afterward, Wi’am wished all the women a Merry Christmas by giving each a gift.

The Wi’am Center continues to believe that women have critical roles to play in the health and growth of all spheres in society and that community organization should be active to include them. Women are half of Palestinian society and usually raise the other half. We affirm that by empowering and learning from women, the entire Palestinian society will benefit. Women as well as men have taken part marking the women’s day and the prisoner’s day. They had sits in and have written different appeals.
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Youth Programs

Wi’am works hard to empower young people in Palestine to assert their voices in their quest for success, peace, and better dialogue. The ongoing social upheavals in the Arab World provided an excellent opening for discussions about youth activism. Wi’am works in the areas of enhancing youth civic and political participation in public life through trainings and facilitating youth engagement in social and political nonviolent action such as advocacy campaigns, marches, sit-ins, and vigils. We also provide youth with opportunities to have meetings with decision-makers where they can discuss youth needs and problems in face-to-face encounters. Such meetings empower youth voices and ensure that their voices are being heard in official decisions.

A youth camp Wi’am conducted in Taybeh, in summer 2011, gave participants the chance to appreciate Taybeh village’s historically rich heritage while they reflected on modern Palestine. Rachel Friesen of Mennonite Central Committee and Fr. Raed Sahlie each made presentations about the practice of nonviolence in the Mennonite church and Palestine, respectively. “Wi’am Café”, a program developed by Wiam’s staff, split participants at this camp into small groups so they could rotate from station to station, discussing elements of social and political life. The youth who participated in this program later initiated informal dialogue forums at three schools.

The “Wi’am Cafe” model was used again during a three-day youth conference in Beit Sahour, called “Nonviolent Resistance in Palestine”. In addition to discussions, staff screened the film “Budrus,” which documents nonviolent resistance to the Annexation Wall in the Palestinian village of Budrus. The youth were able to have a discussion with co-producer Roula Salama and Ayed Morrar, who led the resistance. Wi’am staff used the attitudes and input expressed by the young participants to create a “needs assessment” of youth in Palestine that we can use in future projects and activities. The needs assessment, along with other consultations, is needed for disseminating the culture of nonviolence, resisting the occupation and building the Palestinian entity based on democracy, accountability, and separation of the three governmental powers.
Last August, four youth and one youth-leader brought their Palestinian perspectives to the esteemed Dunoon Grammar School in Scotland. They explored creating a relationship with the school while also networking with an ecumenical collection of local church congregations from Catholic, Baptist, and Church of Scotland denominations. As well as being an incredible opportunity for the youth from Wi’am, the presentation benefited Scottish pupils in the Higher Modern Studies program.

In October, fifty young people from the West Bank embarked on a nine-month mission to build their nonviolent resistance capacities through sessions at Wi’am and public nonviolent activism. Through focused trainings, the program sought to not only empower young people as agents for peaceful social change but also increase their ability to endure physical and psychological attacks while resisting injustice. The young activists participated in actual events protesting the advance of the Annexation Wall. This training provided contextual knowledge and opportunities for role-play in addition to round-table discussion. This program remains ongoing and we are evaluating the program in order to build future initiatives and programs.

Yet another key project, started in July, aimed to strengthen the Palestinian community through conflict transformation training and constructive dialogue. The first component was comprised of capacity-building workshops, which provided interactive theoretical and practical training in conflict transformation, Sulha mediation, negotiation, and related topics. Staff also utilized theater as a creative response to conflict and as a way for interlocutors to learn about one another. Meanwhile, a core group organized dialogue meetings that included diverse stakeholders. In November, Wi’am organized a national conference to follow up on this project called “Palestinian Youth Representation, Participation, and Change.” The speakers in the conference represented a wide spectrum of relevant ideological points of view.

Wi’am continues to run peer mediation workshops in area schools, building the foundations for a culture of assertive nonviolence in the next generation. The project aims to equip students with skills and provide them with tools that allow them to effectively address conflict without resorting to destructive patterns of behavior. Through comprehensive approaches, these programs give young people what they need to gain control of a situation, analyze it, ascertain needs of the parties, and patiently guide the process of reconciliation. These trainings also bolster the leadership skills of the youth and empower them for civic action in the future.
Wi’am also runs workshops at increasing rates in the surrounding communities. For example, our workshops in Toquo, Surif, and Jericho (just to name a few) gave young people the chance to come together to discuss current events without having to leave their village. Instead, Wi’am staff came to them, both to help teach and to listen to their developing voices. Wi’am will continue to reach into the surrounding communities both with its message of nonviolent, assertive resistance and in order to ‘feel the pulse’ of the wider community.

We consider it essential to work with youth both in the surrounding communities and at home in our own community in Bethlehem to create a culture of nonviolence in the world’s future leaders. Through these activities, we affirm that these young peoples’ opinions are valued and that their voices are heard. By facilitating opportunities for young people to engage in nonviolent activism and to bring their experience and training in nonviolence and conflict resolution strategies back to their peers, we are encouraging a culture of peace that will pervade Palestinian society for decades to come.
Children’s programs

The staff at Wi’am recognizes that children are the future of the community; in order to invest in them, the center hosts fifty to one hundred children from different communities almost every Friday for activities. Problem solving and peer mediation skills are key foci, and our staff members promote the importance of volunteer work. Children can engage in trauma coping activities like drawing, acting and airing-out-games as well as cultural programs, such as dance and music. Children can engage in sports, art, and drama and also take field trips into natural settings, do environmental activities, or play in the garden. Computer and language lessons help our little ones to be well rounded and technologically savvy. Our staff conducts regular meetings with their parents to ensure a concerted effort to raise fine young people.

As always, the Wi’am grounds are kept well-groomed to be a safe play-space for children in the community who may otherwise lack a place to express their personality and socialize with their peers. Wi’am strives to keep special events and programming available to the children who too often cannot connect with such opportunities.

Summer Camp

Last summer, the Center hosted over one-hundred children between the ages of six and fifteen Monday through Friday. During this summer camp experience, children were afforded crucial opportunities to build self-esteem and valuable skills, release stress and develop their personalities, have new positive experiences, and meet caring volunteers from the Bethlehem area and abroad. The children pursue educational and recreational activities at the Center and in trips to surrounding villages and cities.
Wi’am used this opportunity to introduce young people to problem solving and conflict management skills. Learning in a fun environment helps children develop positive behavior and demeanor. In the safe setting of the camp, children had the chance to practice peer-mediation techniques that they can carry into their families, schools, and neighborhoods in order to accomplish their goals with less frustration. Children were also engaged with their community and took initiative through volunteering opportunities such as visiting the elderly, participating in public cleaning initiatives, and assisting in local gardening projects such as tree planting.

The performing arts of music, dance, and drama gave the children a rich outlet for accessing their inner selves and realizing their capacities. The underlying goal was to help them realize their creative potential for change but the children responded with their whole hearts and had fun, which was the main goal. Drama programs allowed children to interface with issues of child safety and getting along at school. Through dance and music, children connected with their traditional culture and expressed their inner feelings through their bodies.

The children had numerous sports and recreation opportunities through games and trips to local pools. Swimming was a special escape from the heat and heaviness of the summer sun. Otherwise, when not engaged in more constructive educational activities, the children enjoyed playing silly games – as kids do.

Wi’am staff and volunteers guided numerous arts-and-crafts projects that provided children with yet another outlet for their deeper feelings as well as a chance to produce work that they could be proud of and show to family and friends. By building their skills the children also built stronger character. Examples included painting, pottery, making picture frames, working with marble pieces, and drawing exercises related to themes that are hard to express: peace, friendship, fear, aspirations, and hopes. Many of the young people brought their skills into other contexts, displaying artwork in school exhibitions, for example.

Wi’am believes in connecting children with the land by teaching good environmental stewardship. Lessons discussed human impacts on the environment and health. At Talitha Qumi Environmental Centre in Beit Jala; they learned about Palestinian flora and fauna. On the grounds of Wi’am, children
were able to put into practice lessons about waste management, recycling, and composting.

In the interactive library, children were able to learn by fusing reading and writing with playing, conversing, and artistic expression. Adults in the library focused on each child’s needs as they led programs like “Together We can Build our Country”, “We are Different But Yet Alike”, and “Stop Bullying. Each of these programs addressed a different social issue that is relevant to the lives of the children. Wi’am also provided computer education and language lesson opportunities.

Children in the summer camp came from different areas and backgrounds in the West bank, including scout groups. Programs such as Wi’am’s summer camp are vital for these children because not one of them is immune to the pressures of growing-up in a disadvantaged context. Outlets for creative initiative are critical tools in the battle against despair and underachievement in the Palestinian context. The children and staff were also joined by a cohort of volunteers from the United States and Europe who added their energy and experience, while working in solidarity with the volunteers from the community who lent their love and expertise in a wide range of fields. Wi’am was pleased to take children places that they had never been while helping them better understand themselves and the world in which they live. During this entire summer, no one could take for granted the importance of having fun and allowing children to enjoy being young in a safe place. Without a doubt, the Center will plan to keep its grass green for future generations of campers to enjoy.
During 2011, Wi’am hosted 1467 people as part of the Citizen Diplomacy and Advocacy Project. Seventy-eight groups visited and learned more about the work of the centre, its place in the community, and what the greater conflict in the region means for Palestinians in the West Bank. The goals of this project are to increase the number of visitors to Palestine and encourage them to bring the Palestinian narrative back to their home communities. We do this by providing opportunities for international citizens to feel at home in Bethlehem and learn about Palestine in the context of their own experience in the world community. Visitors journeyed to Wi’am from all across the world this past year. We hosted guests from across Latin America, Canada, the United States, Ireland, Scotland, Britain, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and Japan.

All visitors participate in an orientation about the socio-economic and political situation in the Occupied Territories, courtesy of the staff. This year, the citizen diplomats took tours to many locations that exemplify the problems caused by the conflict, including a walk along the wall to refugee camps, meetings with local activists on different societal levels, and excursions to various villages affected by the wall and settlements, such as the tense old-city area in Hebron.
One good example of our many programs for international visitors was a half-day workshop last June, which brought together Wi’am staff and eight volunteers from Goshen College in the United States. The goal of the session was to make Wi’am Center’s vast knowledge and experience in the field of nonviolence explicit. Having worked in the Palestinian context for many years, staff input was vital to the needs assessment. Director Zoughbi Zoughbi, led discussion on understandings of and different terms for nonviolence, the history of nonviolence in Palestine, pros and cons of nonviolent activism, and other nonviolent movements that can be sources of inspiration.

Through these and more activities, all of which we cannot describe in this short space, we hope to increase our connection with the international community. We aim to share the Palestinian narrative with visitors so that they will spread this knowledge in their home communities, increasing global awareness of the Palestinian case, nonviolent resistance movements, and the humanity of the people here. We consider 2011 to be a great success in terms of these goals and look forward to further progress in 2012.
The staff at Wi’am continues to tune our practice and pedagogy in conflict resolution and social transformation. This past year we added two new staff members to the Wi’am team – Areej Najjar as a secretary and Wala Badra as an accountant. Different capacity workshops have been conducted for Wi’am staff by many trainers from Kurve, Mennonite Central Committee, Eastern Mennonite University, Summer Peacebuilding Institute, Methodist Church, the Quakers, the Pontifical Mission, Amos Trust, The Danish Jars of Clay, and The Catholic Relief Services. Each of these sessions bolstered the staff’s capacities in both theory and practice, helping us to reflect on our work, improve our capacity, and increase organizational cohesion. Our sponsor’s efforts are invaluable to our development and capacity building.

We attended a course at Bethlehem University called “Managing Organizational Change in Non-Governmental Organizations,” which allowed the staff to think critically about organizational growth. Palestinian nonprofit workers and one Bosnian gathered here to discuss modes of change in NGOs, specifically in conflict zones. We learned that changes can be emergent, from everyday operations, transformative, as in challenging times, or project-related, in cases where stable organizations are able to make conscious plans about the future. Wi’am staff applied a heuristic to examine and draw conclusions from case-studies. The trainers also employed familiar techniques like ‘open space’ and ‘world café’ to encourage participatory learning. We are continuing to employ techniques learned in this course to evaluate organizational objectives and build cohesion between Wi’am staff.
In 2011 Wi’am staff joined other members of the peace community in Beit Jala for a protest mass each Friday. Both local and international activists gather in solidarity to pray and sing songs near Cremisan Monastery, which is the last open green space accessible in greater Bethlehem area. The Apartheid Wall is projected to run through Cremisan. Construction would not only uproot the olive grove and ruin the ground nearby but also separate the monastery and convent, which would disrupt the sisters’ work with local children. By communing in the grove weekly, the people of Bethlehem send the message to authorities and settlers that Palestinians are still connected to the land and refuse to accept the Wall’s course. At one mass, staff and activists had a memorial service to share in remembrance of a great spiritual leader in nonviolent movements, the late Scott Kennedy, who was an activist and good friend of Wi’am. Scott founded The Resource Center for Non Violence in Santa Cruz, California, dedicated to the study and practice of nonviolence.

On Sunday, May 16th, 2011 Palestinians commemorated the 63rd anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba. More than one hundred people gathered next to the Wall at Wi’am, including participants from key peace partners such as the Arab Educational Institute, Pax Christi International, Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre, YMCA, and Sabeel Centre. Wi’am led the group in a song and Zoughbi Zoughbi gave a speech urging Christians in Palestine and around the world to stand by the oppressed regardless of religion, color, and nationality.
Early in 2011, Bethlehem was nominated for a place on the World Heritage List. In May, the Wi’am Center cooperated with the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation to deliver a program to the Bethlehem community about the nomination in two parts. During the first section, architect Nada Atrash introduced the audience to the background of the World Heritage List and the effort to prepare Bethlehem’s bid for inclusion. Virtuoso George Al-Ama presented the second segment, where he reviewed the pilgrim phenomena, the Pilgrimage Route, the historic town of Bethlehem and its development, the culture and handicrafts, and, finally, how these combine to make Bethlehem a treasure for all the world.

Wi’am’s staff, volunteers, and supporters have also joined weekly nonviolent resistance in different parts of the West Bank such as Bilin, Na’lin, Almassara, Beitumar, Nabi Saleh, Atwani on several occasions. We will continue to support nonviolent action in the West Bank and elsewhere and apply our conflict transformation work to special events throughout the region. We plan to continue engaging in activism and facilitating the inclusion of members of the community, particularly women and youth, in the struggle to build a culture of nonviolence in Palestine and the world.
**Wi’am in the Media**

Wi’am has taken part in publicizing and writing articles about nonviolence and the prospects for justice, successful nonviolent struggle, and peace. Members of the staff have regularly been interviewed by radio and television stations locally, regionally, and internationally, writing about and speaking on a wide range of interdisciplinary topics including conflict resolution/transformation, possibilities for peace, and the current social, economic and political climate in the world and Bethlehem in particular.

All of the staff of Wi’am including Lucy, the two Usamas, Imad, Saliba, Adnan, and Zoughbi are active in speaking to groups and have interviewed by different Media groups.

Please do consult our Web Page and the Face Book for more details..

**Wi’am in the World**

Wi’am staff members have been active in speaking engagements and they have reached the four corners of the world. The speaking is based on promoting the center, introducing and talking about the work of Wi’am, advocacy campaigns, and spiritual nurturing. We have been both trainers and trainees in these engagements.

In October Zoughbi Zougbhi attended a conference in Canterbury England for local churches, in the presence of the arch Bishop of Canterbury. One conference topic focused specifically on Christians in the Holy Land, taking place at Lambeth Palace. Zoughbi also attended annual conferences of the Mennonite Church in British Colombia and Toronto, Ontario this past November. Making in-person visits has been an excellent way to solidify relationships and give space for clarification when we are normally an ocean apart from our international partners.

In Semarang, Indonesia, Zoughbi participated in an international conference titled “The Future Potential of Mediation with Special Reference to Asia and Indonesia University.” In Denmark, Imad Nasser joined Zoughbi to represent the office on important visits, including meetings with YMCA Denmark and the Danish Council. Usama and Lucy joined Imad was to participate in capacity building and organizational development training in Germany.
Regrettably, Wi’am lost a dear friend to death this past year. Scott Kennedy of California was a politician, activist, and champion of peace scholarship in Southern California. Scott was a close partner to the Wi’am Center and its staff, along with the entire Palestinian people through solidarity. Scott was remembered with warm thoughts and many muffins during a Friday mass at Cremisan. His wife and children, who always believed in and supported his efforts to promote a dialogue of peace in the Holy Land and sustain peace education both in his home state and around the world, will most dearly remember Scott.

Wi’am has also been blessed by the dedicated presence of its volunteers from around the world during 2011. Students from The Mennonite Goshen College, and friends of Marcel Zoughbi, were instrumental in running the Wi’am summer camp alongside local staff and volunteers, ensuring that the children received the attention they needed and the Wi’am grounds remained in one piece. This fall, Wi’am welcomed Liam and Gabby from the greater Washington DC area.
Although they came from very different backgrounds, both wanted to take time before their next step in life to show their solidarity in a deep and meaningful way by helping Wi’am with tasks like sending e-mail appeals, proof-reading materials, and joining guests on tours. Finally, the United Methodist Church sent a new Mission Intern to spend over a year with Wi’am in order to become a better advocate and lend Wi’am comprehensive support. His name is John Daniel Gore and he does his best to provide help with written materials and keep his ears open to learning from the Palestinian context.

*Reach out to those you fear*
*Touch the heart of complexity*
*Imagine beyond what is seen*
*Risk vulnerability one-step at a time*

*(John Paul Lederach)*

Special Thanks to our partners, interns and volunteers (individuals, groups and foundations) who have been with and supported us through spiritual empowerment, capacity building and training, funding and volunteering in the Garden, in the Summer Camp, and around the office.

Such wonderful and amazing partners are:

- Kurve
- Diakonia
- Mennonite Central Committee
- The Methodist Church
- The Pontifical Mission
- The Danish Jars of Clay
- Catholic Relief Services
- Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
- World Vision
- Berghof Foundation
- Amos Trust
- Kairos Canada
- May 18 Foundation
- The Melkite Greek Catholic Church
- General Board of Global Ministries
- Church of Scotland Geraldine
- Bob and Gerri Haynes Haynes
- Pilgrims of Ibillin

*We would like also to invite you to visit and like our Facebook page.*