



SUMMER 2014 NEWSLETTER

Wi'am, Palestinian Conflict Resolution/Transformation
Center

*“Keep alert, Stand firm in your faith, Be
courageous, Be strong.” 1 Corinthians 16:13.*

A Word from Wi'am

These days constitute an outstanding challenge to humanity with the Gaza crisis taking its toll and the loss of human life reminds us time and again of displacement and evil. As human beings we must show our steadfastness and continue with our work to alleviate human suffering and fight evil with good deeds. At Wi'am, we are working hard at different levels to provide children with hope amidst despair; resolving community conflicts to break the cycle of vengeance and hatred; and empowering women and youth to be active citizens who enjoy their rights and contribute in the process of change and development. The ultimate driving force behind Wi'am staff to deliver its services is the belief that building a democratic state that believes in human rights for all must accommodate the grassroots as the motor of change.

To fulfil our message and vision in the community, we are working at different levels delivering essential services and programs to all strata of the community around the West Bank and Jerusalem:

Summer Camp

Wi'am held their annual summer camp throughout the months of June and July, offering joy and a chance to play in the midst of the stress of the ongoing occupation. The children came to the Wi'am courtyard and playground Monday through Friday for 3 hours of crafts, games, and cultural activities. They learned new songs and dances and created skits to perform. One such skit, was a role-play of experiencing going through the checkpoint. Such activities allow them to process the world around them while still having fun at age-appropriate levels.

For one craft, the children made prayer flags and banners. Everyone gathered around a large sheet, and held it at arms height, while balls covered in paint were thrown on. The kids struggled to keep the balls from falling off, and in the process made a beautiful banner. Later, 'We shall overcome' was painted on the banner in both Arabic and English. While the banner was being finished, campers began painting smaller pieces of cloth. After painting, children wrote prayers onto their flags, or had staff transcribe. The prayer



flags were put on display at Wi'am, and the Banner was hung up facing the street.

The unrest near the Wi'am office in the past several months posed a challenge to the summer camp. At times, the camp only operated a few



days a week for the sake of safety. This setback, however, does not stop the campers from enjoying their time at Wi'am. We at Wi'am believe that the summer Camp was all the more important during these times of tension and uncertainty. It is important to continue to live our lives, especially offering children an opportunity for fun and sense of normalcy. We greatly value the laughter, smiles, and color they brought to our office.

Volunteers

Our efforts through the years and over every summer would not have been possible without the generous help of local and international volunteers. The effort of the volunteers has been very rewarding during the summer camp and other activities. We were happy to welcome 3 students from Goshen College, Indiana, USA namely Sam, Kiernan and Jessica and one volunteer from the Church of Sweden to Bethlehem this summer, namely Erica. We highly appreciate their hard work and dedication.

We were also blessed by a good number of local volunteers who helped in the Summer Camp and in the Sulha ministry of reconciliation.



If you are interested in volunteering at Wi'am, please email us at hope@alastah.org so that we may discuss this possibility.

Women Empowerment

The women's meetings took a break throughout the summer but have commenced again in August. These meetings help bring women from different backgrounds together in order to



discuss socio-political and spiritual issues. Our women's group participated actively in advocacy campaigns that promote women rights and joined non-violent vigils and activism protesting

the Wall and other human rights abuses of the Occupation. For instance, in July, Wi'am staff and the women's group participated in a silent demonstration in Manger Square protesting the human rights violations and atrocities in Gaza. The demonstration was an outcry to the outside world to intervene to protect innocent citizens and children from being killed.

On May, 21st. 2014, Wi'am Centre in cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the constellations of developmental institutions in Bethlehem Governorate, Tawasul Center, the NGO Forum for combating violence against women organized a protest in Ramallah opposite to the Council of Ministries. The participants raised banners and slogans demanding the endorsement of a Palestinian Penal Code that can constitute deterrence against the killing of women.

The participants raised banners calling for the Prime Minister and the Palestinian Government to pass a law to protect women from murder, especially with the increase in homicides against women in Palestinian society, which is worrying many of the relevant parties and the authorities that deal with women's issues. This comes a day after the issuance of the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, an edict amending the Penal Code, which includes the abolition of mitigating circumstances for perpetrators in cases of abuse against women motivated on the pretense of the so-called "honor killings".



Prayer

In July, Wi'am held their first monthly Prayers for Peace and Justice in our courtyard. On the second Wednesday of each month, the staff and any visitors gather in the courtyard, in the shadow of the Wall, to pray for a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

At the July gathering, we also walked up to the gate in the wall outside our office and laid our hands on the Wall, playing in the same place His Holiness Pope Francis prayed in his visit in



Bethlehem in May. We prayed that the wall will fall and Palestinian rights and dignity will be recognized.



All are welcome to our prayer service, locals and foreigners alike. If you ever find yourself in the Bethlehem area, please join us!

Yes to Volunteerism

The final phase of the “Yes to Volunteerism” project for unemployed young graduates implemented in Bethlehem and Hebron areas is progressing with great success. We are very proud of the young people for their achievements in the project. They have implemented two social initiatives in Yatta and Bani Nae’m villages.

The first initiative in Bani Nae’m succeeded in turning an old quarry into an environmental botanic hub full of native trees and herbs. The creation of this environmental space is used by the town to raise the awareness of students and the larger community on indigenous flora and other environmental issues related to pollution and preservation of extinct species.

The other initiative in Yatta Village petitioned the Health Ministry and the local Council to refurbish a desolate local maternity clinic to become more able to serve mothers and children. After renovation, the clinic is more equipped and able to receive more people and operating at full capacity as opposite the past several months.



As a culminating event for the project, Wi’am hosted a conference and public hall meeting on the subject of volunteerism with the support of Catholic Relief Services and USAID. Many young people and community leaders attended. The 100 participants heard several speakers and discussed the

importance and state of volunteerism in the West Bank. They developed recommendations for cultivating a spirit of volunteerism. At the end of the conference, the participants in close cooperation with Wi'am staff formed a committee of 5 people who will be responsible for submitting the Recommendations of the conference to relevant Ministries and civic society organizations.

Young People: Training and empowerment

Our programs for young people are a priority of our work at Wi'am. However, our efforts have been complicated by the situation this center due to our location directly next to a flash point. Some of the youth have been afraid to come to the center. Despite all this, we continue our programs as best we can and have found other venues to hold the trainings and events.

We have held leadership, conflict transformation and human rights training for youth throughout the summer and provided them with the space to discuss social/political issues and other matters that can improve youth activism and participation.

We have implemented different training in local universities in areas of conflict resolution, leadership. The trained students are on-call to help their peers to mitigate conflicts in their universities which helps the administration create a better environment that facilitates study in the university.



We continue to encourage the youth to engage in civil society through civic action and volunteering. For instance, we have brought the youth participate in Mass in Cremisan Monastery and other non-violent actions throughout the West Bank. Several youth also volunteered in our summer camp.

In the future, we are working to put forth a database on youth volunteers that can help us and other civic organization in the



selection of volunteers. We are also planning to continue trainings about volunteerism to sustain the success of the project. Finally, we are organizing a Bible study led by church leaders to foster spiritual values among the youth and young adults.

One of our young volunteers, Marcelle, has been active in different activities abroad, specifically attending and participating in a conference entitled, "Strengthening NGOs - winning support for ideas & their political implementation," which took place from 8-20 June, 2014 at the International Academy for Leadership" in Gummersbach, Germany.

Lucas also represented Wi'am at the Center for Christian Spirituality, Kairos South Africa. Lucas reflects on this occasion below:

Moving Mountains Festival 2014 (South Africa)

I was the delegate from Wi'am Center Palestine at the Moving Mountains Festival South Africa 2014. A group of around 100 participants from all over the world were in Stellenbosch. This is week-long festival that is aimed at providing hope, direction, and connections for youth around the world who are concerned with social justice and changing the world in a positive way. The participants were able to listen to various speakers that range from those who were very involved in fighting the apartheid regime to speakers who are overcoming the challenges of post-apartheid South Africa. We heard from the inspirational Michael Lapsley who paid a high price for speaking out against apartheid and how he overcame losing his hands by terrorists. The delegates and participants learned about the Apartheid Regime, the struggle, and post-apartheid South Africa and how social injustice still exists and we are the ones to move these hypothetical mountains.

Training in Social Media



We have done a series of workshops on the impact of social media on families, and particularly, the behaviors and life of young folks. We have been digging deep in frank discussions with young people and scout groups on the best ways to use social media in a constructive way and discussing the social implications for abusing social media and its impact on the family and young people. We provided the target groups some tips on using the

social media programs and how we can gear it to promulgate dialogue and use it as a tool for peace, understanding, mutual respect and better understanding. Young people had also some tips

on ways to reach more success in life and how to utilize Social Media to help them in their study on the personal level.

Non-Violent Action

Much of the staff has continued to participate in non-violent action that embodies Wi'am's vision that non-violence is the ultimate way to reach our national aspirations. As tension has escalated greatly this summer in Gaza and to a lesser degree in the West Bank, this work is all the more important. It is important to express our solidarity with the people of Gaza and tell them that their pain is the pain of all humanity without perpetuating more violence. To this end, we have joined marches, solidarity pauses, and vigils and Masses.



Sulha (Ministry of Reconciliation)



Our mediation services have continued in the past few months unabated with an even higher rate than usual. The current situation has led to increased economic hardship in the Bethlehem area with many tourist cancellations that take their toll on the city

and other West Bank areas. The mediation team is intervening in around seven cases per week on average, most of which deal with financial issues, family feud, inheritance, debt, and youth delinquency.

The increased need for the practice of Sulha during this time demonstrates the vitality of the ministry. By transforming conflicts in a non-violent, transformative manner, Sulha contributes to an overall movement of non-violence in Palestine and at the same time send a message that reason and dialogue can yield results. It offers the people involved in the conflict a non-violent way to solve and transform the issue while generally encouraging non-violence in our society.

Peer-Mediation in Schools

The rate of school violence among students is on the rise at the national level. This rising trend has negative impact on the learning environment in schools as well as in the larger community. As a result, we had many calls from schools in the area to intervene and help in reducing rates of school conflicts. The training focus on equipping students and teachers with peer mediation and problem solving skills

The teachers and students were trained to serve as mediators for peers in conflict. They learned basic skills in resolving conflicts. They participated in interactive activities that include role-playing a mediation case, simulations and theoretical knowledge. The participants learned procedures for peer mediation (introduce oneself, explain mediator's role, active listening, agree to a solution, signing a written agreement, defining the problem, brainstorm solutions, look for areas of agreement and present possible solutions).

The feedback we got from teachers and principals indicate clearly the level of improvement in student's behavior, reduce level of violence in schools and the better rate of achievements among students.

Citizen Diplomacy

The Citizen Diplomacy project is our contribution to tell the world about the plight of Palestinians, the current geo-political situation and orient visitors about our outreach programs that respond to the needs of the local population. The project provides our visitors with an idea about the deep-rooted Palestinian culture, our exquisite cuisine. The sharing of meals with the visiting group is one aspect of building a solid bond and reciprocity with the center and the larger community.

During the last three months, Wi'am hosted 623 people as part of the Citizen Diplomacy and Advocacy Project. Participants learned about the work of the center such as disseminating educational materials, empowerment and capacity-building for youth, children and women as agents of change and transformation. They discover the larger political situation and the facts on the ground touching upon the different facets of conflict and our vision for a just resolution to the conflict that respects the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. The project invites visitors to explore the Palestinian narrative which they witness during their travel and bring it back to their home communities. We provide internationals with unique opportunities to deduct their own

judgments and feel at home in Bethlehem and around the West Bank. It is learning in the context of their own experience as they observe and weigh their own judgments.



We have hosted guests from across Britain, Sweden, the United States, Canada, Latin America, Brazil, France, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Belgium, South Africa. Unfortunately, so far 5 groups have cancelled their trip because of the current situation. The visitors are composed of partner organizations, high school students, university students, political and religious leaders, teachers, business people, interfaith members and lay people. We also provided the groups with home stays, tours to historical places and areas affected by the Wall. The groups dine with Palestinians enjoying exquisite traditional food for lunches and dinners as part of the job creation project. In addition, people have also enjoyed their home-stays with local people, visiting a refugee camps and participating in non-violent action with Palestinians as a joint human effort to protest injustices.