



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

# SPRING 2015 NEWSLETTER

Wi'am, Palestinian Conflict Resolution/Transformation  
Center

Wi'am Board of Directors and Staff congratulate the appointment of Zoughbi Zoughbi as a member of the Preparation committee for "Bethlehem is The Capital of Arab Culture". This appointment occurred by Presidential Decree of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas.

We wish Zoughbi and his colleagues all the best and success in their mission.

### **A Word from the Director of Wi'am**

*We continue to face new and difficult challenges in Gaza and the West Bank as our population face the tragedy of displacement and trauma. The ongoing news of conflict and extremism in this part of the world is driving many visitors away resulting in a loss of much needed tourist revenues and further unemployment.*

*As human beings of faith we must show our steadfastness and continue with our work to alleviate human suffering and fight evil with good deeds. At Wi'am, we work 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, youth advocacy and children's activities.*

*I have recently visited Lebanon as part of Arab arbitration joining a regional platform of facilitators. I was also invited by the Living Stones organisation to visit the UK from 2<sup>nd</sup> of April to 22<sup>nd</sup> April. These trips have renewed my hope as I see the support and solidarity from those who hear our story and search for a peaceful resolution.*

*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. Please help us to continue with this important work and to fund our annual Children's Summer Camps, Youth Activities, our Ministry of Reconciliation and Women's groups.*



*With Best Wishes,*

**Zoughbi Zoughbi,**

**Director Wi'AM**

## **Mediation (SULHA):**

We continue to focus on the root cause of community conflicts in order to resolve them. These conflicts often arise due to socio-economic and political issues especially the chronic unemployment problems.

This type of situation creates havoc in the society and increases tension. People in their frustration often resort to violence but this is combatted by Wi'am mediators who go into the field and mediate these conflicts.

Conflicts vary from domestic violence, car accidents, accidents, land disputes and school peer to peer problems. The mediator shuttles between the different parties to reach a breakthrough and peaceful resolution.

In the last 4 months we have dealt with 67 major cases including 15 family disputes, 6 car accidents, 4 debt issues, 12 involving youth, 6 inheritance cases, 7 community conflicts, 6 employee employer disputes, 6 land related and 5 student related. In 85% of the cases we achieve resolution with the rest are long term or pending.

One case recently involved a conflict during a football match when someone had broken their wrist and there were medical bills and loss of earnings as a result. There have also been cases of domestic violence and neighbourhood disputes to resolve.

The mediator resources are used free of charge by the community. Living in an Arab culture the family is an extended group and so not just those directly involved in a dispute are affected but the whole ecosystem. This is especially true when a husband and wife are in conflict as this involves the children.

For some cases we arrange for counselling or legal advice if required. Legal advice is often required when facing discrimination against women in inheritance disputes. Neighbourhood, schools and universities are beneficiaries and mediation is very much needed because people who have experience of mediation and the benefit of a non-violent outcome are very positive and tend to ask for more help and services.

Disputants can see that problems can be resolved with non-violence and thus induce non-violence in their own lives, teaching this to their children.

It is essential that cases of mediation are dealt with confidentially in order to build up trust in the service. As Imad, one of our staff comments, 'with trust people return'.



## **Youth Activities:**

Youth in Palestine are under extreme pressure from the Israeli Occupation Security restrictions, unemployment and loss of hope. Like other youth around the world, they would like to travel but they face the high costs of visa's and flights via Jordan. These costs often mean that international travel is impossible. However we do see through our exchange program many young people visiting and volunteering at Wi'am.

To give Palestinian youth hope, a project based on volunteerism was implemented supported by the centre. Forty students from Bethlehem and Hebron area were accepted for the project which ran from 2013 to 2014. The project included six months of training on how to be an effective volunteer. Each week the students would discuss how to be youth leaders, the philosophy and techniques of non-violence, advocacy and religion...etc. The program also included discussion of contemporary narrative in films and other media. After conducting the training, 20 were selected for placement in volunteer posts in centres and foundations around Bethlehem and Hebron. Wi'am was able to help with small funding for travel and meals to attend the training and the arranged placements. As a result of the volunteering 6 students found work. This program will start again in June 2015 once student exams are over.

As an ongoing service, we offer internet and study space to students, interns and visitors who are always welcome. In this way we give hope and encouragement for our youth to stay in Palestine and not emigrate. Wael, one of our staff, came to Wi'am as a volunteer while studying at El Quds University.



## **Children's Summer Camp:**

Wi'am hosted 150 children last year this year we expect over 200 children in the summer holidays to come along to learn and to play. Our centre provides the space to allow children to play in a safe environment. Children will have indoor and outdoor activities, education, drama, art therapy to help to ventilate their problems. The children attending are suffering from a number of different problems. The family situation may be unstable, they may be from refugee camps and witness the soldiers, harassment, poverty and their parents may be unable to buy toys or books. These marginalised children are targeted for the summer camp where we feed them and give them ice cream and refreshments.

A typical child who would benefit from the camp would be perhaps living in one room with the whole family in poor conditions and crammed houses.

50 percent of the population in the West Bank are young people below 18-30 with children making up 25-30 percent of the rest. People cannot afford to go to theme parks or go to gardens, to take their children out to parks and trips.

Through the summer camp, we seek to ventilate their anxiety, sometimes they will need play therapy to express their feelings and we will refer some for professional help from a social worker or counsellor. We often identify children who need special support from their drawings and slowly and discreetly we deal with these cases.

All volunteers are trained and we run the summer camp from June to August. We need to ensure children attending are within the age limit in order to keep numbers within our funding.

We would be delighted with any donations to help us to support as many kids as possible as no child is turned away. We are looking for donations for consumables, paints and games, paper, clay, T-shirts and caps, food and fees to get to the park.



### **Empowerment of Women and Gender Activities:**

We are networking with 17 Women's groups and organisations to raise the profile of Women in Palestine.

The Women's group continue their weekly meetings on Thursdays. Their activities ranging from educational, workshops, round tables, health, human rights issues, and speakers. Such activities aim to build public and political awareness and a willingness to confront issues of discrimination and violence. Some of our staff attended the sixth national meeting of women leaders organised by the Miftah organisation ( The Palestinian Initiative For The Promotion Of Global Dialogue And Democracy ).

We welcomed and trained many women groups from the West Bank and Jerusalem. For example, we hosted 32 female teachers and educators from Issawiya in Jerusalem recently.

Wi'am has solidified the coalition of women's groups in Bethlehem through joint activities, advocacy and vigils against violence and marking World Women's day on March 8th 2015. The

focus for World Women's day was the end of domestic violence, the penal code and honour killing.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> an article authored by one of our team, Lucy Talgieh, was published which evaluated the work with women evidenced by women's achievements and results.

We are trying to reduce domestic tension and the chains of poverty and violence by increasing women's income selling goods they make in our shop and at fair trade markets.

Wi'am also has many women's retreats with representatives from different churches attending and discussing spiritual issues and questions.

In order to bring change in the patriarchal Palestinian society, Wiam has run many workshops on gender issues, mainstreaming gender and gender Justice for all ages and generations ranging from children passing through youth to elderly.



### **Interns Volunteering at Wi'am:**

We are once again delighted with the contribution of our interns and volunteers who have come to Wi'am and helped us with our work. Their presence is a great source of energy and hope.

We welcome 15-20 students from the local university each year as part of their internship requiring 50-60 hours of voluntary work.

We appreciate the presence of Grace Killian from the Methodist church in the USA who spent 2 years with us leaving in Feb 2015. Grace worked with youth, a young women's group (16—23 age group), a sharing a program called 'just sharing fellowship'. Grace has blessed us with all of her work in editing and proposal writing, spiritual leadership and consultation. Grace is from Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. To quote Grace herself, 'I have sincerely enjoyed living in Bethlehem. Learning a lot from Wi'am and witnessing to the resilience and steadfastness of the people'.

We also were very happy to welcome four young volunteers (Alexandra, Frieda, Sophia, Emilie) from Sweden for two months, from March to April 2015. These volunteers were students who were doing research on the work of Wi'am and the issues associated with the Apartheid Wall, settlements and violence against women. While they were here they gave talks and workshops on extremism and communication between cultures.

Most recently we have welcomed Mary Nicholson and Karen Rizzello as volunteers at Wi'am during May. Mary and Karen are training for ordination in the Anglican Church in the UK. They have been supporting us through strategic thought leadership, communications, peaceful witness and assisting in hosting our many visitors.

If you are interested in volunteering please contact Wi'am at [hope@alasha.org](mailto:hope@alasha.org) .



### **Groups' Visiting Wi'am:**

Wi'am has hosted 30 groups and many individuals and delegations coming from many destinations including Latin America, Canada, China, EU, UK and the USA. We hosted a reception for the World Council of Churches who were on a pilgrimage for peace and justice. We briefed them on the socio economic and political conditions, religious dialogue of cultures and regions, peace process, extremism and fundamentalism, Christian presence in the Middle East and issues of non-violence, justice and reconciliation. Wi'am staff accompanied them to Hebron, South Hebron Hills, Nablus, the Wall, refugee camps, Jerusalem, Jericho, the desert and the Holy places. While helping them to visit the holy places (holy stones) we also helped them to meet the living stones and to be introduced to the rolling stones (the social, economic and political conditions).

We have also hosted one of our partner groups, the Amos Trust in March and May, and the Pilgrims' of Ibillin led by the Revd. Joan Deming also in May, raising awareness of the situation in Palestine and accompanying them in their travels to appreciate the beauty of the land and the hospitality of the people.

We also continue to keep alive our links with EAPPI groups and CPT, The Council of Lutheran churches and also the WCC led by General Secretary Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit.

The Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility came in April and will return in October as part of their regular visits to provide medical care.

This year the Pax Christi conference was held in Bethlehem in recognition of their 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Pax Christi visited Wi'am where we hosted ecumenical worship at the centre.



### **Non Violent Activities:**

Wi'am also has taken part locally and regionally in many campaigns to advocate the rights of women and children, joined marches against the occupation and calling for the freedom of the Palestinian people whether around the West Bank or the Vigil in front of the court against killing women based on honour or through our non-violent conflict program engaging on behalf of the marginalised, women and children.

In March we planned and attended a demonstration against honour killings along other groups, and participated in many non- violent activities in different pocket of resistance and especially against the erection of the wall near the Monastery of Cremisan. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, we participated in a march for freedom of the press in Bethlehem.



## **Oral History:**

Wi'am is embarking on a program to capture oral history. To expand this effort we have built a relationship with the Cultural Heritage Preservation Centre in Bethlehem .The partnership wishes to collect stories and recordings to be published in booklets. Wi'am has already published six books on oral history in Arabic and English. The partnership wishes to collect stories and recordings to be published in booklets.

Wi'am has reprinted the second edition of the booklet of (SULHA): Community Based Mediation in Palestine.