

“ I’ll give up half of my life for those who make a crying child smile; and I’ll give up the other half for those who save a beautiful flower from withering”

Christmas Smile Festival

In the past two years of the current Intifada smile has been absent from the faces of the people living in the

West Bank. Living conditions are going from bad to worse reaping social havoc in their way. Optimism has overtaken hope; melancholic thoughts and discouragement are also on the rise.

Christ was born into this world in unfavorable situation almost two centuries ago in this very Biblical city, Bethlehem. Jesus was but a young baby, a baby in the manger bringing light a great gift to the world. Jesus brought to us the gift of hope, the gift of tolerance and

Christmas in Bethlehem has more than one symbolic value to the Palestinians as it has to the rest of the people around the globe. Christmas in the Palestinian context means more than just decorations and exchanging gifts; it symbolizes a spiritual and social value that gives Christmas season a unique flavor. The coming of the messenger of Peace, Jesus Christ, to the world personifies diverse meanings for many people; it is primarily a message of hope and reconciliation to the world. This Hope is a source of great empowerment despite all the suffering from the political turmoil and economic hardships engulfing the region. The Bible tell us: “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” John 1:5

However, these sublime values are marred with political upheaval that deprives Christmas from its sublime message of Peace. Unfortunately, history repeats itself in the modern era with the same players committing injustice and brutal acts against the ordinary inhabitants of the area. The historical birth of Jesus has been marred with persecution of the 'Child' and his fellow children in which all this had culminated in the massacre of "the Innocents". Thus, depriving the rest of the people from celebrating the miracle of the birth of a savior. While, in our modern times, Christmas celebration is also engulfed with the same analogy of persecution, injustice and wrong doings against all segments of the society, especially the most vulnerable, Children.

Nowadays, the inhabitants of Bethlehem area are living under harsh financial strains and mercy political reality which makes it impossible for the ordinary Palestinian family to earn a decent living, let alone securing normal education and a token Christmas present to their deprived children. The crisis in the Palestinian Territories has resulted not only in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, but also provoked new humanitarian needs among the wider population. Many people in Bethlehem area have lost their nerve income because of the downturn in Tourism, Hotel industry and olive and mother of pearl handicrafts. Many people also lost their jobs due to border closure, incursions, border restrictions, leading to a sharp unemployment rates and diverse social problems.

Many parents during the season of Christmas are understandably unable to bring back the smile to the faces of their children. The economic crisis is inflicting a heavy toll on the daily life of families in Bethlehem. Parents are unable to meet their children’s daily expenses such as schools tuitions, books, etc. By the same token, children are not enjoying their God’s given freedom which is guaranteed by all mundane laws.

To bring back a kind of normality to the life of children and make them enjoy the spirit of Christmas, Wi’am is planning a “Christmas Smile” festival, which brings with it a hopeful Smiles and giggles to the

children in the biblical city.

Target Population:

Over the past years Wi'am has held an annual traditional Christmas festival for the underprivileged and the marginalized kids in the community. By the coming of Christmas kids will be eagerly anticipating and waiting for this divine and joyful event in which they receive their Christmas presents. The past two years, however, has been so tragic to children; they have been exposed to all kinds of brutal acts; they have been also exposed to scenes that left many of them with cases of psychological stress, bedwetting, hyperactivity, anxiety and education recursions.

Our aim is to target a population of around 1500 children living in Bethlehem area.

Activities:

Wi'am over the last 5 years has continued to be a gift giver to children. This year Wi'am will start a campaign to raise funds to bring normality and smiles to the life of children and their families alike. These donations play a pivotal role in bringing success and fruition to our Christmas Smile initiative and help us reach out more and more deprived children in Bethlehem. Just before Christmas Wi'am staff will go to the local market to buy recreational presents that embodies the message of Christmas, they will also pack it in parcels to match the age group of children attending the activity. In addition, Santa will visit the homes of children who couldn't attend the festival and those who cannot afford to come to the festival location for one reason or another.

During the festival we plan to hire the services of the famous entertainer "Khalid Masso" with his famous acts of clowning, joking, singing and magic shows. It is not enough to distribute gifts to children; amusing children is an important ways to make them feel that they are living their childhood despite the harsh reality around them. It is a reality of deprivation and soul weakening, which should be dealt with extra caution and care. Thus, bringing back the lost smile to the children faces requires exerting extra efforts and work in the field.

Objectives:

- To help bringing normality and smiles back to children
- To help deprived families by relieving them from buying gifts to the children
- To spread the Christmas message of peace, reconciliation and forgiveness
- To give parents and children a sense of normality in their life particularly with the harsh economic situation most families are going through
- To show to the inhabitants that the message of Christmas is alive and being fulfilled on the ground
- To give parents and the community in general a hopeful sign that darkness will fall and light will prevail despite all the evil in the world

Time Duration 20-22 December 2002

To regain the innocent "Smile" on the children's faces is a hard but possible task. We truly hope that Christmas spirit of giving and forgiveness will truly come to Bethlehem. The City is till licking its deep

wounds sustained from the continuous and countless Israeli incursions into the City that brought in its wake socio-economic catastrophe to the inhabitants of Bethlehem and deprived many of them from their loved ones, their daily bread and most importantly inflict heavy damage on children's psychological stability in which they suffered from symptoms of trauma and educational recursions.

At the end, your generous contribution will go towards bringing back the lost Smiles to children's faces and help families cope with the burden of buying presents to their children. Your donation will help us make this event become a yearly tradition that rejuvenates hope and peaceful memories in children's life.

Let us help the kids enjoy a normal Christmas full of hope, peace and goodwill. It is wise to quote Philippians (3:10) "Our faith in God does not allow us to lose hope. The day will come, and we pray soon, when joy will replace grief, trust will remove fear, justice will triumph over oppression".