

Wi'am Newsletter

January - June 2007

It is impossible to create a healthy culture if we refuse to meet and if we refuse to listen. But if we meet, and when we listen, we reweave the world into wholeness. And holiness." ~ Margaret Wheatly

Wi'am continues in its innovative and effective work promoting initiatives to resolve conflict within the Palestinian society. As widely known in the community, much of our work is directly related to mending social breakdown, resolving conflict, running community training in civic education and non-violence, and developing and advocating solutions to local issues and the political problems with the wider social bodies and organizations. A lot of successful stories and cases of mending social fences and restoring normal relationships between community members have been recorded through our work. Moreover, many lessons relating to the development of effective peace and advocacy initiatives have been learned from the field. Many more challenging tasks are ahead of us that require our orchestrated efforts and direct involvement. As you all know, the current situation in Palestine is precarious. The occupation still makes our lives impossible and infighting between rival factions destabilizes the very basis of the society.

Citizen Diplomacy Program

During the last six months, the Wi'am Centre has had various groups visit from all over the world including Great Britain and Idaho, USA. The visits included orientation to the region and an overview of the current political situation. Both groups took trips to Hebron, Jerusalem and Ramallah, and participated in local tours of Bethlehem. In addition, the groups were able to have meaningful exchanges with the youth from Wi'am about cultural interests and differences.

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Imad Nasser and Zoughbi Zoughbi with the Irish Delegation.

In February, activists from Ireland's political parties joined the Centre to discuss conflict mediation, political development and the peace process. Former enemies turned partners in peace, these Irish figures shared their experiences in overcoming violence in a mutually rewarding discussion of peaceful resistance.

ONGOING PROGRAMS

Women's Program

The women's department at the Wi'am centre is continually working with women in different areas of the West Bank with a focus on underprivileged locations (refugee camps and rural areas) and women's groups. The program involves conducting training and education on different civic education topics such as human rights, democracy, conflict transformation, and family therapy. Women are also engaged in topics of gender issues and political awareness on the local and international level.

After initial training and education, a more advanced phase focuses on a "training for trainers" component, which prepares trainers to work in these fields. This past spring, women were able to receive training in election processes and cultivate skills necessary for societal leadership.



Cooking Class at Wi'am

In celebration of Women's Day, March 8th, Wi'am participated in a conference of thirteen women's organizations in Bethlehem. The program included female speakers from the legislative council, women's rights activists, lay

women with traditional Palestinian dance, food and cultural activities.

During the event, Wi'am coordinated a seminar with a panel discussion on "The Prospects of the Unity Government and Means of Preserving Civil Peace". We have guest speakers including local politicians, religious figures, women's rights activists and the general public.

In the beginning of June, Wi'am organized a trip to Jericho and the Dead Sea for the women and youth. They played games, went swimming and were able to spend time together. Another trip is planned for the end of August.



Swimming in Jericho

The centre also provides cooking lessons and craft workshops for the women. Glass designs and traditional Arab meals are particular favorites.

Currently, several women from the center are participating in international women conferences and workshops in Holland and Sweden with IFOR.

Children's Program

Throughout the year, Wi'am conducts training and recreational activities for

hundreds of children of different age groups. During the summer, the children meet at the Wi'am Center and other places. There are many activities that the children are involved in: crafts, painting, drawing and computer training. Also, Wi'am organizes trips for the children to the local pool, hospital, elderly home, and factories where t-shirts, soaps and shampoos are made. In the upcoming weeks, the children will have the opportunity to learn about photography.



Children have many opportunities at the center to play football, tennis and basketball. In addition, they can learn useful gardening skills.



Furthermore, if children need assistance with their studies, they can receive tutoring at the center.

Trauma Coping for Children, Parents and Caretakers (teachers)

Wi'am continues with its "Trauma Coping" activities that target underprivileged children exposed to unpleasant experiences as a result of the region's dire political situation.

Additionally, we target parents and teachers with educational programs about stress and trauma. Participants learn skills that help them address children's issues while understanding the psychological implications of stress on kids and their families.

Healing-oriented programs include:

Recreational/entertainment activities: Creative expression through arts, drama, drawing, games and story-telling.

Individual counseling and support interventions. This includes a range of individual forms of psychotherapy, family therapy and counseling.

Training the local community (teachers and parents) in psychosocial support skills

Youth Program

There have been many activities for the youth during the last six months. In January, the youth were involved in a study on the role of women in society, specifically issues of gender and non-violence and gender and religion. Muslim and Christian youth from Jerusalem and Bethlehem participated in the training. During the month of February, Dr. Bernard Lafayette, a civil rights activist and scholar, was a guest of the Wi'am Centre. He spoke about the challenges

of non-violence in an unstable environment.



Usama Zoughbi and Father Khader

The youth took part in two studies during the winter. The first study, conducted by Fr. Jamal Khader and Mr. Zoughbi Zoughbi, focused on Christian Zionism, specifically the theology and history of the movement. The second study addressed the hopes and challenges of living in an oppressed society while seeking peaceful methods for resolving conflict. Besides Bethlehem youth, the scouts committee also received training about peaceful conflict resolution and mediation.

During the last several months, the youth watched various films, which facilitated discussion of the occupation and its effects; the 1948 Arab-Israeli War; and forty years after Al Nakba and the implications for Palestinians.

On March 20th, Peter Yarrow, from the 1960s American singing group *Peter, Paul and Mary*, was the musical guest for the evening. His music spoke to non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution.

Currently, participants from the youth power program are working with other youth from Germany and the Balkans. In addition, a youth from Bethlehem was able to participate in a

human rights training conference in Jordan this past spring, and another youth is living in Virginia attending Eastern Mennonite University.



Youth participating in workshop.

Wi'am is proud of participating in the Euro-Med project, which connects young people from Europe and the Mediterranean. This year, we have five groups of eight young people going to different parts of Europe (France, Germany, Italy) to meet their counterparts. The themes of the meetings centre around intercultural dialogue, youth empowerment, youth networking and solidarity, conflict transformation, leadership skills, dialogue and much more.

In addition, we in partnership with a youth project that brings young people from the Balkans, Palestine and Europe in a joint project called "Youth Power". The aim is to allow young people to learn from the experiences of other countries that have suffered violent conflict.

Ongoing Training of Trainees for Youth Groups in the West Bank

TOT (training for trainers) for youth groups equip future trainers with the necessary knowledge and practical experience in civic education subjects (conflict transformation, advocacy,

gender, leadership, mediation, human rights, etc.). Every year we train between 50-60 'multipliers,' who will train other youth groups in the field.

Community Mediation- Sulha

Mediation – *Sulha* – is a method of non-violence. It is a belief that we can promote justice by serving the truth in ways, which respect the dignity and integrity of human beings. As proponents of non-violence, we assume that in each situation of conflict everyone has a valid perspective that requires understanding. Therefore, *Sulha* is about enabling those in conflict to communicate with each other and improve understanding, letting truth prevail and justice be done.

Our work in mediating cases of conflict requires ongoing activities day and night. Since the beginning of the year, Wi'am mediators intervened in 150 cases involving family disputes, youth issues, domestic violence, family feud, marriages, neighborhood conflicts, theft, traffic accidents, and more.

The aforementioned conflicts are exacerbated by the ongoing political situation, civil disturbances, economic deprivation and the weakness of law enforcement.