

AUTUMN 2014 NEWSLETTER

Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution and
Transformation Center

*“I came that they may have life,
and have it abundantly.” John
10:10*

A Word from Wi'am: Christmas is a message of Hope and Defiance

A cave baby was born in Bethlehem. He is the symbol of simplicity and down to earth personality. He represents the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden, the neglected, the persecuted, the forgotten, and the oppressed.

Indeed, Christ was born in Bethlehem under the Roman Occupation. As Herod ordered the killing of all children under two years of age, the angel appeared to the Holy Family and asked them to go to Egypt.

This story is not strange for us. Our children are still born under occupation. Herod is not only present in Jerusalem but also throughout the Middle East and the entire world. The new herods are instilling fear in whole communities, using religion to depict a god of vengeance, a tribal god of retaliation. These herods are dispossessing families, liquidating men and harassing women, manipulating and abusing children, maiming, stealing, robbing and creating havoc through their tyranny.

Our Lord reminded us that no matter where we seek refuge, we will practice our rights of return as Jesus did. We will resurrect from death as we will celebrate life conquering injustices on all levels: economically, politically, socially and religiously.

Christmas is calling to celebrate life. Celebrating Christmas means taking part in the emancipation from oppression.

Jesus encourages us to live our lives with full integrity, dignity, and responsibility. Yes we believe in life after death but surely we want to live our lives before death.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John10:10)

Prayer

Wi'am continues to hold monthly prayer services, on the second Wednesday of every month. Wi'am staff, internationals and locals gather together in the Wi'am courtyard and lift up prayers for peace and justice. Our prayers of word and song are strengthened by the prayerful act of gathering in faith in the shadow of injustice. We hope that the prayers offer encouragement and hope to those present as we work towards a just peace.

In addition to the monthly prayers, each week during the Season of Advent, Wi'am is offering prayers and candle lighting at the Wi'am office. We follow the lectionary from each Sunday of Advent and reflect on the messages of hope, peace, love, and joy of Advent. It is one way we are seeking to prepare our hearts, mind, and world for the coming of Christ at Christmas.



Women



Wi'am's Women's Group has continued to gather once a week, offering the women time to socialize and learn from a variety of speakers and programs. Recently, the women have benefited from a series of programs on health and wellness in partnership with the UNRWA and the Community Mental Health Program. One session dealt with the risks of high blood pressure and diabetes and the impact of these ailments on the community. Participants were also tested for high blood pressure and diabetes

and the group discussed tips for living with such health concerns. This series on health and wellness also included programs on emotional awareness and stress management. Specifically, the women learned of the health benefits of singing together as a way of stress relief. The importance of these meetings was stressed as a way of relieving the stress of daily life.



The women of Wi'am have also enjoyed trips together around the West Bank. They visited historic places in the Bethlehem area where they were introduced to the region's history and civilizations. In the Cremisan Valley they learned about the disruptions that the Separation Barrier will cause to the Cremisan Monastery. Participants also visited Solomon's Pools and the village of Artas, discovering more fully along the way the impact of the settlements.

The women also visited Jericho, stopping at Biblical sites. Located near the Jordan River, Jericho is a very ancient city whose oldest ruins date to 8000 years before Christ. The participants visited the place in the Gospel where the Lord Jesus healed two broken men: Bartimaeus, the blind man, and Zacchaeus, injured in the soul by his sins (Luke 18-19). The few sycamore trees still left in the modern city of Jericho remind us that Zacchaeus climbed up into the branches of a sycamore to see Jesus.



The participants then visited Hisham Palace (Khirbat al-Mafjar in Arabic). The Palace dates from the times of the Omayyad. It was built by the Caliph Hisham Ibn-Abd El-Malik in 724 and continued until 743. The group learned about the history of the Palace, including its ornate bath complex, agricultural landscape and amazing mosaics. However, only four years after its completion, it was destroyed by a severe earthquake. The tour was an enlightening experience to the history of Christianity and the significance of churches in the area.

The Women's group also participated in a workshop on the status of Senior Citizen's in partnership with UNRWA. The workshop stressed the need to show them respect and kindness because this is the time that we should make the effort to learn from their wisdom and sound judgment. Respecting them should not be limited to love and kindness, we should engage



them in things they are capable of doing, making them feel respected and that their contribution is valued by their grandchildren and the community in general. Respecting seniors should be taught from childhood. The trainers stressed that we should get involved in their conversation and show interest in what they are saying. The

participants agreed that it is our obligation to find the time every few months to visit senior citizen's home and spend time with them. Showing respect to the aged in our daily lives will make our life more satisfactory.

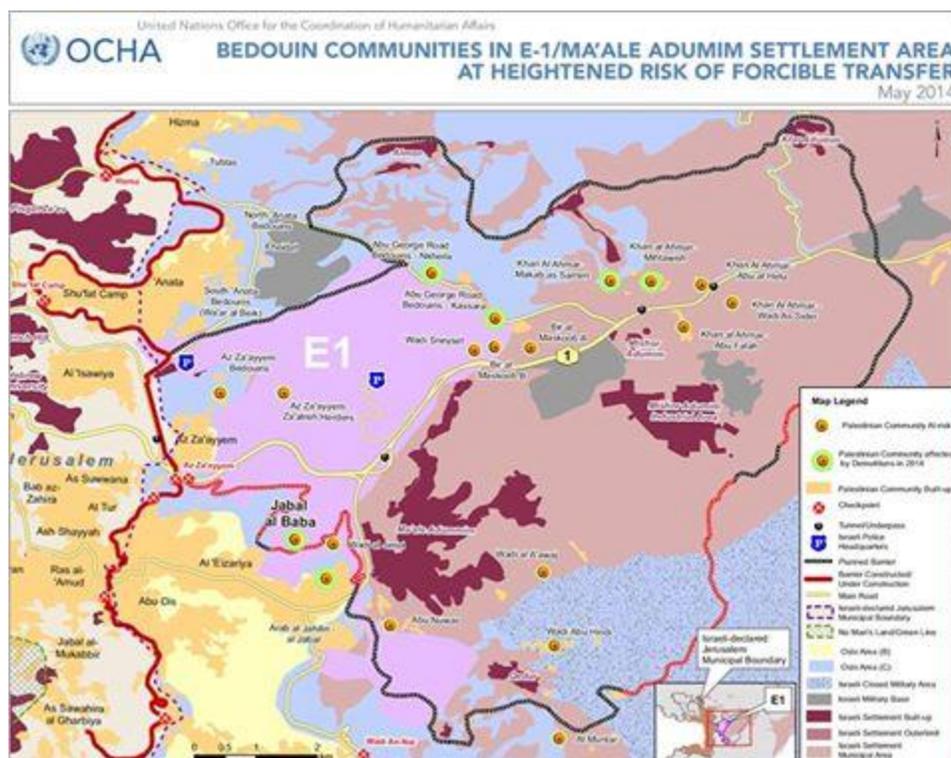
At the end of the workshop, the participants watched a short film about Senior Citizens in their area. The film was followed by an open discussion about the status of Senior citizens in the local context and the intergenerational relationship between the young and the older generation. They all agree that neither civic organization nor the local communities are doing enough to accommodate senior citizens in a safe and caring place. They reaffirmed the need to strengthen the bond between the generations through more meetings and awareness-raising at the level of the family, school and the civic society.

Advocacy around E1 Area

On Wednesday, October 15, Wi'am Centre, in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, organized a workshop on the Israeli plans to annex the E1 area. This event was attended by more than a hundred persons representing Bethlehem Governorate, AIDA, OCHA, World Council of Churches, The Mufti, Christian and Moslem religious communities, different local and international NGOs, local councils and committees, and other civic society organizations

The meetings opened with a welcome by Wiam's Executive Director, Zoughbi Zoughbi, who talked extensively about the Israeli policy and plan in transferring Bedouins from forty-six communities and resettling them in three concentrated localities namely: Al Jabal, Nweima, and Fasayil. He added that land confiscation is still going on throughout the West Bank, including the confiscation of the five thousand dunums in the Bethlehem Area. Zoughbi commented that this policy will put an end to the Two State Solution and will assassinate any remnants of the Peace Process.

The Governorate spokesperson, Mahmoud Zawhra briefed the participants on the reality of land confiscation and its impact on the ordinary Palestinians as well as on the role that the governorate in exposing unlawful acts of land confiscation. Nafez Rifa'i from the Foreign Ministry, spoke of the negative impact of the displacements policy on the populations, population growth and Arab expansion in Jerusalem. He also indicated that the Israeli plans aim to separate the south of the West Bank and force Palestinian to use less developed roads for their travel. After that, Isra Al Muthafer from OCHA gave a presentation about the issue of E1 and the fact that the Israeli plan is to connect the area in question to Ma'leh Adumim settlement and annex it to Jerusalem. She detailed the Israeli plans to evacuate the Palestinian population living in the area and put them in an enclave.



At the end of the meeting, the participants discussed options for an action plan and thus gave the following recommendations:

1. The Foreign Ministry will prioritize advocacy campaigns against the unjust Israeli policies of transfer, land confiscation, annexation and the continuous settlement building.
2. Concerned and involved parties will orchestrated a well-organized media, advocacy campaign.
3. The civil society organizations together with other human rights organizations should coordinate plans to protest the E1 and other confiscation of land in cooperation with international bodies and human rights organizations.



We should complete the following tasks:

- a. Empower the non-violent and popular resistance among the grassroots.
- b. Boycott Israeli products, and enhancing the BDS movement.
- c. Develop and support the affected communities living in the confiscated areas to help them settle in their land and resist evacuation.
- d. Reclaim the land in the affected areas to help farmers

A group of representatives from Wi'am also joined an educational, political tour of E1 with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center. The group visited with Bedouin leaders and representatives from the Palestinian Authority and Jericho Governorate, hearing of the struggles of the Bedouin community as they face relocation. It was an eye-opening and highly educational day for all. Those gathered on the tour also had the privilege of hearing from the late Minister Ziad Abu Ein, who was just recently killed on December 10th during an Israeli Defense Force violent suppression of a non-violent protest.

Children

Trainings and Workshops

Wi'am continues with its effort to empower schools and students in areas of civic education, peer-mediation, children rights and leadership. In total, Wi'am has held trainings for more than 275 students.

Wi'am delivered a three-day training for 200 students (grade 8) from 8 schools in Bethlehem and Ramallah in cooperation with the "*Environmental Education Center*" on the issue of children's

rights. The participating schools included the Future school, Ramallah; Chile, Beit Jala; Roman Catholic, Beit Sahour; Lutheran School, Beit Sahour; Talita Kumi, Beit Jala; Dar il-Kalima, Bethlehem; Aida School for girls, Aid Refugee Camp.

The first day focused on highlighting children's rights through using audio-visual film clips. The films illustrated children's rights described in the global rights treaty, such as "protection from neglect," "protection from torture," "protection from illegal arrest by occupation," "protection from forced labor", etc.. The films are an excellent tool for informing children about their rights and society about its obligations.



The films were followed by a general discussion in which students discussed the rights infringement that they face at the social and political levels. The students interacted positively asking a number of questions and inquiring about ways of attaining these rights.



The second part of the day focused on practical training in which the trainers used role-play, case studies and power point to help the students learn more deeply about their rights and pinpoint what social and political rights they are denied. At the end the training, the students were able to write a letter to human rights organizations and the governmental bodies responsible for children's welfare. The letter

mirrored their aspirations to attain their rights and see progress in implementing Human Rights Agreements in their country.

Wi'am also organized and held trainings in peer-mediation, communication and conflict resolution. Early in the fall, Wi'am held a workshop for 75 students of Talita Kumi School, the Aida Refugee Camp School, and the Lutheran School of Beit Sahour. Saliba and Wael led the young participants in discussions and role plays of peer mediation and conflict transformation, including the use of short video clips. Another such workshop hosted Grade 8 participants from three schools in Bethlehem area: Chile and Talitha Kumi schools in Beit Jala and Roman Catholic School in Beit Sahour.

Such training programs have two primary goals: stimulating cognitive learning, critical thinking and cooperation skills; and developing integrative peer mediation and conflict resolving skills. The Training methods included interactive learning, small group work, role-playing, watching video clips that had an inherent message followed by discussions, case studies, peer-mediation activities, games. The training helped the students gain basic skills in peer-mediation and communication skills.



The major themes of the training were active listening, where participants summarize what each has said to ensure accurate comprehension; encouraging cooperation and acceptance between students and of each other's differences; and creative problem-solving, which takes into account each disputant's position and their approach in resolving peer conflicts. Energizing games encouraged students to use their cognitive skills in a positive manner. Role play and video clips were used as a pedagogical method to portray various real life scenarios and to give a rational response to them. The video clips centered around the value of dialogue, responsible leadership, cooperation, initiatives, non-violent approach to conflicts, respecting differences, and codes of conduct in situations of conflict. Through role-playing, students learned how to deal with peer conflicts, negotiating their way out of problems, and working with others reaching win-win solutions.

The case studies that Wi'am circulates in such trainings are real life problems that we managed to resolve in schools and the community. It provided students with knowledge on ways of resolving conflict in non-violent manner. The case studies also help students learn negotiation skills as a strategy in conflict and real life scenarios. Students were able to learn communication skills, non-verbal (body language, personal space) and para-verbal (how we say what we say).

Weekly Children's Ministries

As the children returned to school in the fall, Wi'am also began its weekly children's programming at the center. Children came on Fridays for a time of crafts, games, and free play on the playground. It is always a joy to see the children in the courtyard, bringing fresh life to the area. Unfortunately, due to violence by the Separation Barrier and security tower, we have had to cancel the weekly program for most of the autumn. We pray that we will be able to hold children's programming throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons and commence weekly programming again in the New Year.

Youth and Young People

Voluntary Work at the Latin Scouts Headquarters in Bethlehem

On 15th - 16th of September, Wi'am's young people, in partnership with the Latin Scouts, volunteered at the Scouts building, performing needed maintenance and repairs. The day started with cleaning the premises from the inside and then cleaning windows and doors from old painting, dirt and posters. After that, they painted the doors and windows again with fresh paint. Later, the volunteers decorated the windows and doors with folkloric figures such as Palestinian women, the Palestinian folk dresses, and a drawing of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.



Empowerment

Over the past several months, Wi'am has also been working on a project to empower young Christians and develop young leadership within the Church. We have worked with 45 young people from the Bethlehem area, offering workshops on leadership, conflict transformation, and communication skills as well as Bible studies and field visits to strengthen spiritual identity.



In the leadership workshop, participants worked to define leadership and how it is used to motivate people. They discussed theories of leadership as well as the different types of leaders: autocratic, democratic, liberal and free leadership. The workshop on conflict transformation introduced practical tools in conflict analysis and transformation, approaching conflict from the perspective of a peace builder. The training session addressed the

definition of conflict, the root causes and conditions of conflicts, cultural approaches to conflict resolution and communications skills. Participants worked in small groups on case studies to analyze hypothetical conflicts, to map out the key issues and stakeholders, and then present their

findings and analyses to the large group. In the workshop on communication skills, participants worked on improving their non-violent communication skills orally, visually, and physically. The exercises and discussions also sought to cultivate empathy among participants and clarify how best to demonstrate it.



Another key element of this project was to fortify the Christian identity of the young participants. To this end, the young adults took part in Bible studies and a workshop on Christian identity. Through these activities, participants studied the biblical and historic idea of the “Church” and how best to engage in this community. Such study and discussions helped young people who are searching for answers, trying to find any place that will give them a sense of

value. They discussed that the Church should be teaching young people who they are in Christ so that they can experience faith transformation while instilling a sense of belonging in a tangible community. Therefore, in order to further cultivate this sense of belonging, Wi’am offered a field visit to Nablus to the participants. Together, they visited ruins of the Byzantine Church in Sebastia, Jacob’s Well, and the Samaritan community who continue to live on the top of Mount Jerzim, their holy mountain. Such an experience was very moving and spiritually fulfilling.



Just Sharing Fellowship

Wi'am has embarked on a new project in partnership with Unstoppable, a young women's Christian movement in Pennsylvania, USA. The Just Sharing Fellowship is a narrative based sharing project that seeks to empower young women's voices and stories, connecting young women across cultural boundaries and dispelling harmful stereotypes. Two circles of young women, in Bethlehem and in Pennsylvania, meet separately and regularly to discuss the power of stories as well as compassionate listening. Each individual will also produce two blog posts featuring a life experience to be shared on a blog developed by the participants. Furthermore, each participants is also paired with one or two participants from the other circle of young women so that they may develop a relationship across the distance.



The participants in Bethlehem have met several times. In our most recent gathering, participants watch and discussed Chimamanda Adichie's speech entitled, "The Danger of a Single Story." The discussion focused on the stereotypes we hold of other cultures and how simple, non-diverse



stories can be used as a tool to both perpetuate such stereotypes while a collection of diverse and varied stories can dispel them. Adichie's comment that, "'Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.'" is a catalyst for the mission of this project.

Citizen Diplomacy

In the past three months, Wi'am Citizen Diplomacy Department has hosted 410 people. The visiting groups are part of our advocacy campaign that highlights the socio-political and economic situation of Palestinians and orients the groups on the cultural values of Palestinians

and their traditions, customs, and food. Furthermore, we also introduce the visiting groups to our outreach work and the impact of our work within the community.

We seek to encourage more visitors to come to Palestine and carry the Palestinian narrative back to their home countries. We do this by providing opportunities for international citizens and groups to feel at home in Bethlehem, visit refugee camps and learn about nonviolent action in Palestine. We also give the visiting groups a general overview of the region with illustrations that feature a historic timeline of the conflict. We have also organized tours to areas that are affected by the Wall or in danger of land confiscation in order to show visitors the facts on the ground. We also highlight the beauty of this land that is full of warmth, hospitality and generosity.



In the past several months, we have hosted guests from different parts of the world, including Britain, the United States, Latin America, Brazil, Australia, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Canada. The participants in the groups were members of partner organizations, study tours, high school students, University students, political and religious



leaders, teachers, business people and interfaith members. Some of these groups are Pilgrims of Ibillin, GIZ, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, IFOR, the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, Pal Craftaid, EAPPI, Australian Ministries, University of Notre Dame Professors, Council of Lutheran Churches, The Presbyterian Church USA, the United Methodist Church and the Church of Canada.

As usual, an important component of the Citizen Diplomacy program is our volunteers. We have had three short term volunteers: Emilia and Ida from Sweden and Tim from Britain. Grace Killian continues to serve as a long-term intern through the Global Mission Fellows program of the United Methodist Church.

Sulha (Ministry of Reconciliation)



The Ministry of Reconciliation and mediation services have continued in the past several months under increased need. This past year, Wi'am's staff and volunteers have dealt with a total of 124 cases, 80% of which have been solved and finished. Example of these cases include inter-youth and familial conflicts, car accidents, ended engagements, or land disputes. 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.

We give thanks for all that God has done for us and through us as well as for the support of friends around the world. Let us all pray together that the light and love of Christmas will shine throughout the year and the world will know more peace and justice in 2015.

Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year!