



WI'AM- Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center

Annual Report 2008

"Peace is not something you wish for; It's something you make, Something you do, Something you are, And something you give away."

~Robert Fulghum ~

Introduction

Another year has passed since *Wi'am* first opened its doors to the Palestinian public in 1995.

A chapter has just closed and another will begin. Despite the transition, *Wi'am* has not lost sight of its main goals, among which are to spread peace and justice in the region and give the Palestinian community a ray of hope for the future. Undoubtedly, a better tomorrow will emerge. Through its unique entertaining and educational programs, *Wi'am* has succeeded in reaching out to different groups within society. All departments in *Wi'am* continue to work endlessly to deliver assistance, education, and hope to different sectors within society. The women's department continues taking steady steps towards equality and independence.

The children's department strives to build a peaceful environment where children can play and learn as any other child in the world can. The hope is that the children will be able to overlook the obstacles placed by the occupation and set their sight on a peaceful future. The Diplomacy Citizen department has witnessed a noticeable increase in international visitors. Visitors are given a unique insight into the complex historical, cultural, social, political and religious aspects of the Holy Land. The youth department continues to create a generation of conscious citizens. Also worthy of mention is the Christmas play that is held annually.

Last but not least, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all of our volunteers who have helped us in getting a step closer to our aims. Without your positive thoughts, warm prayers, and generous financial support, our vast accomplishments would not have been possible.

Citizen Diplomacy

One of *Wi'am's* programs is to encourage tourism in Palestine by organising home-stays and showing hospitality through lunches,

dinners and guided tours of the area. *Wi'am* has gained experience in organizing programs that give groups and individuals a unique insight into the complex historical, cultural, social, political and religious aspects of the Holy Land. This enables visitors to return home with an educated insight through first-hand experience of the natives of the land. This year *Wi'am* has witnessed a noticeable increase in international visitors.

Additionally, *Wi'am* has hosted visits from the USA, UK, France, Austria, Germany, Italy and many other countries. Their interest gives the Palestinians hope that the dissemination of the reality of the situation will increase and eventually change will take place.



Speaking tours/ training/ PSA

Every year members of staff and friends of *Wi'am* have the opportunity to travel abroad for training and conferences. This year representatives went to Lebanon, Jordan and Germany to receive interdisciplinary training. *Wi'am* is part of the "Global Alliance for the Establishment of Ministries and Departments of Peace" which, this year, has taken staff to England, The USA, Japan and Canada. The center is also affiliated with the National Danish Church, and the American Presbyterian and Methodist Churches which

have given staff members the opportunity to visit Texas and Denmark on speaking tours.

PSA

In November two members of *Wi'am* participated in a three week workshop in digital production entitled "Media, Activism and Democracy", given by Barefoot Workshops. The aim of the workshop was to teach participants how to write, shoot and produce thirty second public service announcements (PSAs) - short, non-commercial videos for the purpose of raising awareness concerning important issues. Topics covered varied from labour law and honour killings to Palestinian land rights. At *Wi'am* two PSAs were made, the first giving the message that people can magnify or minimize a problem, encouraging people to find peaceful means of resolving conflict, and the second that dialogue between different political parties is the only way to reach civil peace. The PSAs are now being circulated on the internet through sites such as YouTube and Facebook. The hope is that these messages will reach international youth communities. To watch one of the video's follow the link below.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WI0D3VoRLQ>

"The media is our outlet to show the world we strive for justice and peace. Media is a dynamic tool in showing our nonviolent society and our striving to get peace and justice done." ~ Imad Nassar, Project Manager, *Wi'am* ~

New Building

Wi'am will be relocating in the new year thanks to the generosity of the Sansur family and the *Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation*. *Wi'am* has kindly been granted the use of a building for a period of ten years as an acknowledgement of its outreach work and service to the community, not forgetting its tireless commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation. Moving the office to the new location acts as defiance to the injustice of occupation, checkpoints, land confiscation and the Separation Wall, to name a few. The new building is positioned beside the Separation Wall, which will act as an expression of steadfastness and non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation and apartheid division of the country. It will also provide the Palestinian people with a symbol of hope that reconciliation and unity is possible.



Children

“Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future” ~John Fitzgerald Kennedy~

Every Friday, children from the Bethlehem area join together to participate in educational and recreational activities at the *Wi'am* center. *Wi'am* hopes to provide the children with a safe environment where they can sing, dance, and learn an assortment of new skills such as: arts, crafts, drama and English, which are all taught by experienced teachers. Through these cultural activities, the hope is that the children will develop their individual and communal identities and also be encouraged to try new things and discover new abilities. These activities allow the children an outlet where they can ventilate their frustrations. In some cases children who have experienced trauma have been identified and as a consequence have been provided with social workers. There, they are provided with skills for coping with trauma which teaches children to respond effectively to conflict through non-violence. Approximately forty to sixty children attend the meetings regularly.



Children's Summer Camp

Every year *Wi'am* organises a summer camp for the children. This summer around two hundred children aged between six and sixteen attended the events which were held at the *Wi'am* centre and other places. These events occurred between the July 16th and August 16th. The camp offered educational and recreational activities including music, drama and art workshops. The children learned glass painting, drawing, glass-shaping and jar labeling, and pottery. The children were taken on day trips to visit fun parks in Ramallah and Jenin and on cultural trips to Jericho, Artas Village and the Cremisan Monastery. Through these excursions they were afforded the chance to learn about the geography of these locations and extract historical and archaeological information about Palestine. The two important educational aspects of the camp were to develop environmental awareness and teach peer mediation in conflict resolution. This was carried out by educating the children about recycling and ?, pollution, home-made fertilizers and personal hygiene. The children were encouraged to apply basic problem solving methods to mediate between peers in order to resolve conflicts by peaceful means.

Training in Schools

For a period of three months this year, *Wi'am* offered educational support for school children in state, private, and UNRWA schools located in refugee camps, in order to increase opportunities for the children and provide them with extra-curricular activities not provided by the schools. The activities were held both in their schools and the *Wi'am* center. The sessions offered included English, Math, and education about civil society such as: children's rights, conflict resolution and mediation.



Women

“Educate a woman, you educate a nation,”

Empowering Women

Wi'am offers a programme for women empowerment, which reaches approximately 250 beneficiaries in the Bethlehem district, including Beit Jala and Beit Sahour and surrounding villages: Al-Shawawreh, Marh Ma'ala, Beit Fajar, Zatar, Al-Ebedia, Al-Walejeh, Wad Fukem, Aida Camp, and Om Salmonala. The programme incorporates civil and vocational education and training with counseling as a means to encourage and give power to the women in society. With this hope and confidence, they are motivated to be active members of civil society. The women

are encouraged to take part in influencing decision making in the community.

Civil Education and Training

Palestinian society is considered a patriarchal society, particularly in the villages where traditional values are maintained and women have little influence outside of the home. Therefore, raising awareness of human rights issues and gender equality is of vital importance in altering the mentality of the deeply rooted male dominated society. Conflict resolution also plays a key role in transforming difficult family situations and restoring respect and unity in homes. *Wi'am* offers training courses and workshops in Bethlehem and the surrounding villages concerning effective communication skills, democracy, human rights, women's rights, domestic violence, gender equality and conflict transformation.

The women have been able to use the skills learned at the center by applying them at home, enabling them to solve domestic conflicts, resulting in a reduction of external conflicts. This program strives to empower women with education and needed skills to transform their role in society from a passive to active role. This programme spreads awareness concerning human rights, and provides them with resources to support themselves



Vocational Education and Training

The Occupation puts great pressures on Palestinian society, creating a lack of jobs, restriction of movement, and victimization, which all add to the tensions both at home and in the wider. Often small problems may be exasperated.

By teaching women and encouraging economic empowerment through the development of micro-economies, women are able to produce an income. This contributes to the cost of family life and helps to gain the satisfaction of self-sufficiency which relieves the pressures on the males in a household and generates economic development and job creation.

The women's groups are trained in skills such as mosaic glass crafts, bead-work, embroidery, ceramics, pastry-making, olive soap making, flower-arranging and pickling processes. Apart from providing a source of income, these classes offer women an opportunity to try new things, to talk together and it acts as a therapeutic, creative outlet for pent up frustrations.

Counseling

Abuse against women is a common problem, and something that is difficult to openly talk about in Palestinian culture. Women are often afraid to go to the police and risk putting themselves at a greater risk. *Wi'am* offers a safe place for women to come and speak freely without judgment, and to respond to needs without necessarily involving the police. For example, social workers and counselors can provide help and offer substantial support and advice. *Wi'am* aims to help restore these women's lives and their families who have suffered in a dysfunctional environment. By working together with the counselor, *Wi'am* can provide further sessions in order to effectively support the women and offer new perspectives within domestic

conflicts in order to train families to avoid future troubles.



Weekly Meetings

Due to a number of other NGOs that take an interest in women's needs, *Wi'am* is careful to avoid overlap but provides weekly meetings every Thursday. Approximately thirty women attend these meetings on a regular basis. They are provided with educational and vocational training, and recreational activities and entertainment. At the centre, the women can find a safe and fun environment where they can learn new skills and enjoy group activities. Examples of past activities include a workshop on healthcare, discussing diabetes and arthritis, a lecture on human rights and democracy, and English language lessons.

Other opportunities for this club include excursions to other women's organizations and regions in the West Bank.

Women's Conferences –operation 1325

Wi'am Center held a seminar on December 12th-15th concerning UNSCR 1325, the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council that specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. Women representing organizations from all over Palestine took part. The aim of the

seminar was not only to spread awareness about the UNSCR 1325, but also to encourage women to implement such themes into their daily lives. One goal of the conference was to arm women with needed advocacy and networking tools and skills.

The seminar agenda was based on the “Logic Framework Approach with an Appreciative Approach”, which is a concrete method that looks at strengths of one's own organization in order to create and find new solutions.

The first day began with an introduction on UNSCR 1325, highlighting its importance; this was followed up with success stories from other conflict zones such as, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, S. Caucasus, Serbia and Kosovo.

Participants were divided into groups where they discussed questions such as: What are the hopes for the future? Where can solutions be found? Who are the violators? What strategies can be used? (Cultural, social, economic and political), and many other questions were also addressed. Furthermore, the seminar participants came up with many recommendations, among them creating a network of women's peace activities from different areas in the West Bank. Participants also expressed a need for a training program for young student activists from different universities. The same seminar was also provided to a group of women in Cyprus.

The Seminar had opened my perspective about my legal rights, and empowered my charter in a way that drives me to join future activities that the network is planning to organize” ~ one of the women who attended the seminar~

Oxfam International Meeting Cairo...

In November Oxfam International led a workshop in Cairo titled: “*Women Leading*

Change in the Middle East and Maghreb region”. The aim of the workshop was to bring participants from Oxfam International and partners to reflect and work around what is effective and sustainable in promoting women leadership in the Middle East and Maghreb region. Throughout the workshop the participants were able to identify opportunities for further work on “women leading change”.

Youth

The youth are one of *Wi'am's* greatest priorities. It is critical that the youth receive training skills so they will have the necessary skills to train their peers in methods of conflict resolution and mediation. Through educating the young people in matters concerning democracy and human rights, they will become the hope for change in the politics of the country.

In 2008, as in previous years, the youth were given the opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops, training sessions and intercultural exchanges. The work with youth has continued in activities with the Euro-Med cross-cultural exchange program, an initiative to enable young people to encounter and learn from their counterparts from different countries. Such interaction is a vital means of overcoming the distortions, fear and mistrust that can be easily created through misperceptions of the ‘other’. Through these personable exchanges youth meet and build relationships that connect them to others at a grassroots level, influencing future relations between nations.

Regular Meetings

Wi'am regularly offers evenings for the young people to come together and examine social problems and ways of countering them. The youth often view films, or listen to speakers, which are then followed by a discussion, or workshop. Seminars throughout the year included, “*Arab-American Activism – Its Impact on USA Policy and American Public*”

presented by Rebecca Abu-Chedid from the New American Foundation's Middle East Policy Initiative; "*The Importance of Heritage in Bethlehem –how to preserve and renovate historical buildings*"; "*European Court for Human Rights*" by Dr Abdullah Abu'aid; "*Internal Political Division and Conflict*", which tackled the issue of disunity between Palestinian factions *Hamas* and *Fateh*; and a discussion with Alfred Rock about the High Court order against the and the effectiveness of the court system. Alongside volunteer Rachele Friesen, the youth created posters and videos with other international volunteers, to be delivered to Canada as advocacy material. For the UN International day of Prayer for Peace, *Wi'am* welcomed celebrations for three days with the women, youth, and children. In one event, Sheikh Bilal spoke about Ramadan and the message for peace. The event culminated in an ecumenical service and breakfast with the youth.

The youth also participated in anti-Wall demonstrations, Yoga sessions, Italian and English language courses, dabkah (traditional Arab dance), and day trips to Jericho and Wadi Qelt.

Additionally, a basic knowledge competition took place between three local universities. Those that participated in the competition include: Bethlehem University, Bethlehem Bible College, and Palestine Ahleeyeh University College. Contestants were asked general knowledge questions and questions related to international law and the European Union.



Exchanges

One girl from *Wi'am*, Maisa Ayyad, spent three months as a volunteer at an NGO in Palermo, Italy.

In March a small group of five delegates from *Wi'am* went to Portugal to participate in a conference organized by *Euronucleo* entitled "*The Way to Tolerance*" during which they met with other young people from Egypt, the UK, Israel and Tunisia in order to develop intercultural understanding through workshops in multimedia editing and mixing, theatre, music, art, a hidden camera excursion in the city and a culture night including dabkha, Arab sweets and Arabic coffee.

Youth Power Project:

Part of the ongoing Youth Power Activities, *Wi'am* continues with different local youth civic education trainings, non-violent action, and meetings with young trainees. The trainees have also the chance to participate in different mediation events and on-violent action and demonstrations that help build their practical capacity in conflict resolution. On April 19th-26th, a group of seven youth and two trainers from *Wi'am* participated in

the youth exchange and the training event in Menschefitz, Germany, alongside with other young people from Albania, Serbia and Macedonia, as part of a three year program. The exchange included training on aspects of conflict resolution, peace-building, non-violence and leadership. The program also included education about non-violent action in Germany, especially in response to nuclear waste that is a problem at Gorleben. A follow-up youth exchange is scheduled to take place in Macedonia next year.

On May 11th-15th, the women and youth coordinators at *Wi'am* visited Turkey for a seminar with Euro-Med where they learned about Euro-Med strategy, means to finding common ground between partners and they also planned future projects together.

In October three youth leaders attended a weeklong meeting in Bulgaria, the final meeting of a two year project called "*Inventing the Future*". The project is based on the Reciprocal Maieutical approach, developed as a non-violent response to violence and corruption in Sicily by Sr. Manifesto. This method considers the root causes of conflict within cultures, between ethnic groups and faiths (in particular within youth contexts) and encourages dialogue about non-violent conflict transformation and a culture of respect.

A group of four youth accompanied by one staff member from *Wi'am* headed to Como, Italy to participate in a week programme entitled, "Walking into the World". The participants came from Italy, Spain, Turkey and Israel. The main purpose behind the visit was to break down stereotypes, by exchanging cultures and learning to accept the other. In the future, a book will be written as a follow up, in which each of the participant's

countries will write a chapter that portrays its culture, traditions, and every day life. Not to be forgotten are all the benefits gained from such an experience, and including the fact that their outlook concerning other people's culture changed.

Wi'am is in the process of organizing a *Euro-Med* youth conference to be held in Bethlehem in January with youth from several European countries.

Workshops

Every Saturday for a period of three months *Wi'am* organized workshops for twenty high school students at the centre, the municipality and the ministry of tourism in Ramallah. The workshops aimed to teach student leadership and management skills.

Future

It is hoped that all these activities will continue in the coming year. In May there will be a long-term volunteer completing a year-long internship in Poland through the European Voluntary Service.



Christmas Festival

Wi'am held its annual Christmas festival on the 22nd of December in Tercenta School hall.

Approximately 1,200 children and their parents attended the event. The festival brought both the children and women's department together in joint activities and performances. All the children that participated in the festival went through rehearsals; these rehearsals had a profound impact on the children, for it helped in boosting their self-esteem. The festival was divided into two phases. The first phase of the festival was dedicated to honoring the elderly who seem to be forgotten at such times and are of great need to feel a sense of remembrance and love. The second phase was the central communal Christmas celebrations, which was attended by children and their parents. The children put on a performance that included drama, folk dancing (dabkah) and singing. Then they were provided with a small educational gift that aids their learning at school. The festival's accomplishments went beyond entertaining the people of Bethlehem, for it created long forgotten smiles on the faces of the children and restored the meaning of life to the elderly.

