



WI'AM

The Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center

June 2009 Newsletter

"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."

— Eleanor Roosevelt

Introduction:

This year we are celebrating our fourteenth year in service. Fourteen years of peace building, conflict resolution and offering hope to people. Our central mission is to plant peace where occupation has uprooted it and scatter rays of hope for a better future in the occupied land.

This year started off in a bloody manner, as the Palestinian people, along with the world witnessed the war on Gaza. It is considered one of the bloodiest wars that has ever hit Palestine. Yet, we did not lose hope nor did we lose track of our aim. On the contrary, such tragic events only highlight the importance of our work and encourage us to find nonviolent means to resolve conflict.

At Wi'am we have many departments, each targeting a specific group in society and complementing each other. We can confidently state that through these fourteen years all departments have blossomed and touched the lives of many.

Citizen diplomacy:

Citizen diplomacy is a program launched by Wi'am Center. Its main aim is to encourage tourism in the Holy Land, but most importantly to educate visitors about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through living the experience, not merely reading or hearing about it. Visitors have the opportunity to meet and stay with locals. By doing so they can experience what life is like as a Palestinian living under occupation and get a closer look at the Palestinian culture and lifestyle. In the past six months we have received more than sixty groups among which are peace activists, tourists and university students. We organize trips that enable them to explore the complex political, historical, and religious aspects of Palestine.

If you would like join this program contact us at the following email:

hope@alastah.org.

Furthermore, through this program we seek not only to give people a chance to get to know the Palestinian culture, but we are also interested in enriching ourselves with other cultures. For instance, we were pleased to participate in the Danish Cultural Week which took place in Bethlehem. Through dialogue, meals, and cultural activities we were able to get to know the Danish culture. All staff members participated in group discussions about numerous topics such as, Identity, religion and culture. Through these talks we were able to build a bridge of understanding between these two cultures.



Job Creation Program.

Prior to the current Intifada, Palestinians sought work opportunities inside Israel. Around 115,000 Palestinians relied on work in Israel as their main income. However, the building of the segregation wall and the closure policies that Israel inflicts has seriously impeded the flow of workers. Therefore, unemployment levels have soared, leaving a damaging impact on the Palestinian economy. As a result, Wi'am Center has started a project aiming to create job opportunities for unemployed workers. We have employed more than 13 workers in King Husain hospital and Bethlehem Mental Hospital. The workers have been able to accomplish tasks such as, fully set up the kidney ward consisting of six rooms, clean up and plough an eighty dunum piece of land, build a garage for ambulances, fix and paints the walls of the hospital, as well as many other tasks. So far this project has received positive responses from numerous institutions requesting more workers and more workers have applied to join us. Furthermore, since the summer vacation is on the verge of starting we

are expecting an increase in the number of workers seeking job opportunities, as many university students will enroll in the program in order to support themselves financially.



Cultivating a Garden

Wi'am has kindly been granted the use of a building for a period of ten years as an acknowledgement for its outreach work and service to the community, not forgetting its tireless commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation. The new building is positioned beside the Annexation 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 there can be reconciliation and unity.

Moreover, a large empty piece of land sits next to the building; Wi'am hopes to be able to transform this lifeless piece of land into a colorful flourishing garden. The message that we will strive to convey to the children and the people of Bethlehem, is that although the land is in front of the wall, an area that seems lifeless and null of anything but oppression and occupation, hope and life can sprout into existence. This garden will have a positive impact on the Center's work, for it will provide us with an area to carry out numerous outdoor activities, rather than traveling long distances to gain access to a garden. In addition, it will help raise awareness concerning environmental issues. It will also give the children who are deprived from a free, outdoor play space the chance to play freely in a safe area. Play is critical to children's healthy development, and carries profound therapeutic benefits for them, especially those who are traumatized.

Cultivating a garden is a way of expressing belief in a better tomorrow, for when you plant a tree you plant hope. Help us turn our vision into reality, donate a tree...



Children:

"If we are to reach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with the children."

— Mahatma Gandhi

Since we believe in the truth that is conveyed in Mahatma Gandhi's quote, we work endlessly to plant seeds of justice and optimism in the children allowing them to develop into conscious citizens. The children of Bethlehem have lived all their lives under occupation. Consequently, they have not been given the chance to live their childhood normally. They are deprived of basic rights that other children take for granted. For instance, freedom of movement; what stands behind the segregation wall lies a mystery to most children as they are trapped between the cement borders of the segregation wall.

Every Friday there is a children's club. Here the children gather together to participate in a variety of activities, including drama, dance, and art. To many of the children this is the only means of entertainment they are afforded and the only safe environment provided for them to play freely. The activities focus on nonviolent conflict resolution techniques, peer mediation, matters concerning children's rights, gender equality, and environmental issues. We also emphasize the importance of volunteer work in one's community. In the past six months the children have participated in numerous events inside and outside of *Wi'am*:

Visit to the Retirement Home

Mother's Day is a day that is celebrated worldwide. It's the day that we give back a small portion of the love and affection that has been unconditionally given to us throughout our lives. Sadly, not all mothers have the chance to experience such a day. Thus, we arranged for the children to celebrate Mother's Day with the elderly living in the retirement home.



The children spent time with the elderly, talked with them, listened to their stories and most importantly cherished them for all their contributions and sacrifices that they have given the community. This visit also held a heartfelt message from the children, "you are loved, cherished, and by all means not forgotten". These kinds of visits help turn the children into responsible citizens who are considerate of others.



Field Trips

The children have been taken on many trips since the beginning of this year. Some have been only for entertainment; others held an educational, religious theme to them. They have visited different cities including Jericho, Haifa, Jaffa, and Akron.

Dabkeh:

Dabkeh dance has great significance in the Palestinian culture. It's a dance of unity and a way of expressing nationalism and the age-old presence of art and culture in a positive way. Furthermore, having a Dabkeh group at Wi'am has made it easier for other nations to understand the Palestinian culture. It also helps the children in putting the pieces of their Palestinian identity together, boost their self-esteem, and help preserve culture.

When most people speak about Palestine they don't see beyond the Palestinian- Israeli conflict. However, with the Dabkeh group we strive to convey the message that the Palestinians, like any other nation in the world, have the love for life.



Women

“The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it” ~ROSEANNE BARR:

At the Wi'am Center, we unquestionably believe that no woman will gain her rights by waiting for them to be handed to her. She must play an active role in the community and strive endlessly to reach her independence in society.

Through meetings, excursions, and seminars we strive to empower women to be able to claim their rightful role in society. The women's program is

among the most active programs that we have in the Center. A weekly meeting is held every Thursday and in each meeting women participate in a different activity. Some are for simply for entertainment while others are for educational purposes. We believe that a nation with uneducated women has no future. Over the past six months numerous activities have taken place.

Democracy Day

To mark the international day of democracy a workshop was held in the center to emphasize the importance of democracy, what it involves, the challenges it faces, as well as the opportunities it offers.

International Woman's Day

In light of the fact that the Wi'am Center is a place that takes great interest in women's issues, on such a day, we joined together with other voices in the society and together called for full recognition of women's rights. A work shop was held at Wi'am to help spread awareness concerning women and to enlighten women about the rights they should endlessly strive to gain. Furthermore, a group of women went to "Alma'sara" to participate in a peaceful demonstration against the illegal confiscation of Palestinian lands and emphasize that the Palestinian women also play an essential role in the Palestinian strive for independence.

Mothers Day

Mother's day is a day of honoring mothers. In the Center numerous activities took place to honor the Palestinian mothers and to show gratitude for all the sacrifices that mothers make. We started the day off with a lively and delicious breakfast party. On behalf of those in the Wi'am Center, we gave the women presents as a token of our appreciation.



Lent month

At the beginning of Lent, the sacred month of sacrifice, Wi'am center took the women on a religious trip to Jericho. A group of women were taken to Dier Hijla where they prayed and celebrated the beginning of the Lenten Season. Following the visit, the women were taken to "Banana Land" where they all ate together and played games such as bingo.



Field Trip

Wi'am Center organized a trip for both the women and children's department. The trip took place on the May 1st and it included visits to Jaffa, Haifa, and Acre, all occupied Palestinian cities that are now considered 1948 areas. 110 members participated in this one day trip. It was not only used for entertainment purposes, but it also gave the participants the chance to visit historical Palestinian places, especially those that have been fully occupied. We consider such a visit essential, especially that this one came in close timing with the *Nakbeh*, which marks sixty-one-years of dispossession, displacement, and uprooting of the Palestinian people.

Environment day

Women were taken to the environmental center in Beit Jala for a day to further their knowledge on the environment. The visit started off with a small lecture about birds; the types of birds that live in Palestine and those that immigrate. They were also educated about how birds are tracked and were given the opportunity to set a bird free. They were then taken to the museum filled with a variety of bird, some which may soon face extinction, and some that have already been so. They were then shown all kinds of animals and were provided with interesting information about each animal's diet and the role that each animal plays in the ecosystem. Then the floor was opened up to questions from the women.



Youth

The youth of Bethlehem are different in comparison with youth from around the world. They have lived their entire lives under occupation, caged in by the concrete walls that surround Bethlehem. They have practically no entertainment spaces, leaving them with nothing to do in their spare time. At Wi'am we fear that the lack of recreational facilities for youth to let go of all their bottled up pressure will force them down the path of self- destruction and violence. Therefore, we continually hold activities that will keep them busy and encourage them to learn and grow. Every Saturday we hold a meeting for the youth, and each gathering involves different activities.

Youth of Palestine Unite

On May 10th, along with the Student Forum Organization, Wi'am Center organized a day trip to "Alrashydeh", south of Bethlehem. A group of youth accompanied by youth director Usama Rock participated in the trip. The main purpose behind this was to bring together youth from Bethlehem with the youth of isolated areas. The activities included a walk in the desert, interaction with locals and site seeing.

Cultural Exchange:

A group of youth accompanied by Imad Nassar, a Wi'am staff member, participated in a cultural exchange program that took place in Macedonia. This program was a follow up of a previous one.

This year, for the first time, Wi'am was able to act as a host rather than a visitor. The participants journeyed to Palestine from Turkey, France, Portugal and Italy, each bringing with them their own unique culture and heritage.

We arranged an activity called, "culture nights" where participants got the chance to present information about their country and inform us about

their culture. Through this activity, participants confronted and overcame previous stereotypes and prejudices they had about other cultures. Each group also learned the key characteristics of different cultures and discussed the differences and similarities that between the two. They were taken on trips around historical Palestine and visited the religious and historical sites.

Peace Tones:

In our center this year we were more than happy to welcome two representatives from the PeaceTones Organization. PeaceTones is a pilot project geared towards exploring issues relating to international e-commerce through the distribution of digital media. This organization believes that through music we will be able to unite and become one. Many youth in Bethlehem are gifted with musical talents. However, due to the current situation they are left silent and their talents are undiscovered. Through cooperation between Wi'am and PeaceTones we hope to open tightly shut doors in front of these talented youth. The artists from Bethlehem were given the chance to perform for the PeaceTones representatives, which was followed up with questions about the nature of the music where, its origin, and the message that they strive to convey through it.

Richard and Barbra Dash visit Wi'am Center.

Wi'am center was pleased to welcome Richard and Barbra Dash, who we consider to be influential people in the world of peace building. They both have eighteen years of work experience in conflict resolution in the Middle East. They have great ability creating practical and effective tools for teaching conflict resolution and counseling.

They have both dedicated their lives to making a peaceful future by treating traumatized children and adults. They visited the center and presented a work shop to the people of Bethlehem. Through participation in the workshop, attendees learned:

- Conflict resolution skills and the ability to reduce arising tension at home and in the work place.
- How to openly communicate with others.
- How to become a more cooperative and supportive individual.
- The needed language skills to be able to communicate with others effectively and accurately.



Conference: Where is the Palestinian Society Heading?

Beginning June 18th Wi'am center held a three day conference entitled, "Where is the Palestinian Society Heading?" at the Golden Park Resort in Biet Sahour. The participants of the conference encompassed youth from all over the West Bank aged between 18- 30 years, and each brought different political and social points of view. The main aim of this conference was to encourage dialogue between the Palestinian people, give sound to the youth's voices that usually go unheard, and enhance civil peace in the community.

The conference was opened with a speech given by the Governor of Bethlehem, Abed Al-Fatah AlHamayel. In his speech he thanked the Wi'am Center for their steadfast contributions towards the Palestinian

society and their role in establishing dialogue between different groups within the community. He then talked about the critical role the youth of Palestine have in the future of the country. He expressed his faith in them, believing that they hold the lanterns that light the path to a better tomorrow. After his speech the floor was open for questions and a discussion took place between the Governor and the youth, where he answered all of their questions.

Following the welcome speech, Zoughbi Zoughbi, the director of Wi'am Center, welcomed all those present and thanked them for their attendance. Then he addressed the importance of dialogue between all the Palestinian people, and called for civil peace and reconciliation between the different political parties. Assuring that it is the only way the Palestinians will ever be able to reach their goal which is independence and freedom. Lucy Talgieh, the coordinator of the women's department at the center, gave a small introduction about the Wi'am center, stating its aims, the events that it holds and most importantly the message that the center is striving to convey to the Palestinian society. She then started an orientation session with an ice breaker, where all the participants got the chance to get to know each other.



In addition, numerous papers were presented by key speakers who have influential roles in the Palestinian society:

Day one:

- **“The Palestinian Liberation Organization Being the Sole Representative of the Palestinian People, Where is this Heading?”**
Presented by: Mr. Samer Salameh, director of “Johod” Organization which specializes in development. In his paper he talked about the Palestinian Liberation Organization and its faults emphasizing that

we need to retrieve and reconstruct it in order for it to serve its purpose. He also called for diversity in the organization, highlighting that each political party should have an equal say in the future of the country.

- **“The Role That Visual Media Plays in Promoting the Culture of Civil Peace and Preventing Violent Acts from Occuring ”** Presented by: Dr. Saed Ayad, head of the Palestinian Radio and Television Office-Bethlehem, Vice Associate of the Palestinian Journalism Association. In this paper Dr. Ayad addressed the influential role that visual media plays, and expressed that media can be used manipulatively to serve certain parties interests. Consequently, he requested that people have an objective point of view whilst watching the news. He compared and contrasted between the Aqsa television channel and Palestine television channel, stressing the fact that each of these channels differs in the priority of the news they broadcast and the tone used to address the matter. He gave an example that the Aqsa television always starts with news about the Fateh and Hamas disputes, while later mentioning the Israeli occupation’s violations. Whereas, Palestine Television does the exact opposite.

Day two

- **“Overcoming Violence and Protecting Civil Peace...The Social and Political Problems in the Palestinian Society.”** Presented by, Mr. Zoughbi Zoughbi director of Wi'am Center. This paper was more of an open discussion about various topics, rather than a presentation. The participants were divided into small groups and each group was given a specific topic to discuss. Each participant got the opportunity to choose the topic they preferred. Among the topics that were spoken includes President Obama’s speech, the Fateh and Hamas conflict, the media’s role in spreading civil peace, and what’s preventing the youth from playing a bigger role in society. Then each group presented their main points that they came up with and discussed them with the rest of the participants.
- **“The International Agreements and the Reality of the Palestinian Politics”**. Presented by Dr. Jonney Asey, lecturer at Bir Zeit University, specialization in international law. In his paper Dr. Asey gave the

participants insightful knowledge concerning the international agreements and where the Palestine people stand in terms of international law. He focused mostly in his paper on the Geneva Convention that aims to protect civilians in times of war and conflict.

- **“The International Changes and Their effect on the Palestinian Society”**. Presented by, Hassan Abed-Rabo, Hassan Abed-Aljowad, and Suleiman Abu Gosh. This paper was presented by three key speakers each belonging to a different Palestinian political party. They encouraged and emphasized the importance of an open dialogue between all three parties. Throughout their presentation they were able to set a profound example of what dialogue should stand for.
- **“The Legitimacy of the Palestinian Liberation Organization”**. Presented by Dr. Fayez al Saka, member of the Palestinian Legislation Council. This was the last paper presented in the conference. It focused mainly on the youth's role and the hindrances that prevent them from playing a more influential role in society. He then answered questions concerning the Palestinian Legislation Council and the corruption that took place.

After the presentation of each of these papers, group discussions took place and the floor was open to all those who wished to participate through questions and opinions.



Furthermore, the participants were given a tour around Bethlehem city, where they visited all of the Nativity Church, Old city of Bethlehem, Suleiman Pools and the conference palace.





The last day of the conference the participants' evaluated the conference and gave the following **results and recommendations:** Civil peace and dialogue between all Palestinian political parties is a must in order for the Palestinians to reach their goal of independence and freedom, stating that resulting to violence should not even be an option. The called for the increase in the role the youth play in the Palestinian society and requested that there be a constant dialogue between the youth and the officials in order to serve the peoples interests. They also showed their sincere gratitude towards Diakonia organization for sponsoring such an event and for caring about the youth of Palestine. They also requested that there be a follow up for this program also, that all the results and recommendations be raised to officials.

Special Thanks:

We want to continue to thank all of our volunteers which help make our services a success. We also want to thank you. Your support through your conscience thoughts, prayers, and financial support are appreciated and needed. Thanks again for all your love and support.

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