

Annual Report Arab Educational Institute

1/9/2017-30/8/2018

Introduction

AEI supports Palestinian youth, women and educators in building community in Palestine and voicing their cultural identity and human rights. Our work is rooted in the values of *sumud*, peace, justice, nonviolence, and inter-cultural and inter-religious respect. In the long run AEI wishes that Palestinians actively and publicly participate in a free, democratic, and pluralistic Palestine – a Palestine in which civic rights including women's rights and the rights of religious communities are respected.

In its educational advocacy, AEI aims to promote the value of *sumud*, in particular in the occupied West Bank. *Sumud* - Arabic for steadfastness or resilience - has two meanings to which AEI's educational work contributes: a grassroots strengthening of community and a support to Palestinian people's voices and individual and national rights.

In building community, AEI continuously crosses borders: between city, countryside and refugee camp and between the religions and cultural diversity.

Through its emphasis on voices and rights, AEI wants to foster a capacity among Palestinian youth and women to do peace-making advocacy. In doing so, AEI applies UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 2250 which call for women and youth to be peaceful change makers in areas of conflict.

Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together

As part of its strategy to strengthen *sumud*, AEI fosters Moslem-Christian living together based on values of citizenship and respect for diversity. This is done through the educational school project, *Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together*, in which 30 schools in the central West Bank participate with at least one class, involving 60 religious education teachers, both Moslem and Christian.

During the last four years, the project has undertaken a strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority. The Ministry connects with the project through the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'diversity', both central to the subject of civics in the Palestinian curriculum. Through the direct participation of Ministry officials the project has become appreciated not only in private but also government schools. The Ministry of Education publicizes the project events. Particularly significant is that the PNA Minister of Education Sabri Saidam nominated the project for the 2018 UNESCO tolerance award.

The project focuses on students 14-17 years old. The students are old enough to have an understanding of the values involved and are also able to work independently or in teams/groups. From the 1036 students who participated this year, 570 contributed good quality contributions in the form of an essay, drama, poetry, presentation, community activity or any other educational form. The criteria applied: basic educational standards, showing a commitment to the project values, and originality. In general, AEI develops and tests student-centered, value-based methodologies that challenge both student and teacher.

Three choir groups at the government school girls of Beit Jala, Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, endorsed the project message of Moslem-Christian living together and gave a series of 10 school performances attended by many hundreds.

“How much did we as Christian and Muslim members of the choir group missed the singing when hundreds of people from my city are attending the annual Christmas celebrations of the AEI. However, when my beloved teachers Abeer and Mirvet explained to me that the political situation [Trump’s declaration to move the American embassy to Jerusalem in December 2017] did not permit us to sing during this Christmas feast, I felt a bit frustrated. After three days, my teachers and principal informed us that very soon a Christmas celebration would be organized at our school. I felt happier and began to prepare myself to sing with my Christian classmates. When the event took place in the presence of some parents, teachers and other classes, a great relief and joy prevailed at school.” (Mirvatte and Abeer – Beit Jala Government School)

Keeping the beautiful environment in Palestine clean was chosen as a theme for a community campaign of the project supported by the Friends of Young Bethlehem. Cleanliness has great value in both Christianity and Islam, in relation to both the spiritual soul and the physical environment. In total 19 schools organized discussions, lecturers and student activities in class (poetry, presentations, showing films) and 13 schools conducted an event about cleanliness inside or outside the school, involving in 8 cases physical work outside the school building.

The locations of the campaign activities included neglected and marginalized areas in villages such as Artas, Al Khader and Al Khas–Numan in the Bethlehem countryside as well as some densely populated areas in the three neighboring towns Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. The participating schools in Ramallah decided to implement the campaign inside the school or in the school environment, mainly for reasons of safety. Nine government schools organized journeys together with parents; approximately on average five parents of each school visited marginalized and neglected suburbs in their

towns and villages. Teachers, students and parents together with some representatives of local authorities joined for some time in cleaning the rubbish and in tree planting activities.

“When my Muslim classmate and I went together to our school neighborhood and volunteered to clean up the rubbish between our school wall and the quarter, many neighbors saw us and joined collecting dirty papers. Talks came up between us and those neighbors. During these conversations we forgot about some of our religious differences and learnt, enjoyed and overcame some of the community problems. We also gave a good example to the people in the area. I am sure that our neighbors became more aware of the importance of keeping the quarter cleaner to our mutual best interests. Finally, the teamwork helped both sides to work together in order to solve any future degradation of nature and environment. This is a very good example of a practical class lesson.” (Farida and Sabreen)

The project showed, according to observations from teachers and Ministry officials and the supervisory committee, a strong level of commitment and motivation:

- There were more students and classes participating than formally agreed with the schools.
- The project allowed for many different contributions by students. Through this flexibility, both students and teachers felt that education can take on many different forms inside and outside the class.
- The project helped to train teachers in student-centered methods of teaching.
- Teachers showed strong interest in discussions about the new curriculum and inter-religious education as well as the representation of Christianity in the curriculum, while Ministry officials showed responsiveness to such discussions.
- After the cancellation of Christmas celebrations due to the US declaration on Jerusalem (December 2017), many schools in the project organized internal school celebrations with an inter-religious character.
- Several school teachers were able to give examples/stories of how the project had a calming effect on any inter-religious tensions at schools. For instance, some students and teachers of the Beit Jala Government School for Girls calmed rising anger among the Christian school population after an incident in December in which a reckless Muslim driver knocked down several cars in the town and injured Christians and Muslims. (There was an unsupported rumor that ISIS was involved).
- Some schools organized fieldtrips, such as to the Church of Nativity, though the project did not provide additional funding for such activity.
- At 13 schools parents took an active role in promoting the project.

During this year the project was funded by: Misereor, Kindermissionswerk, Cafod, Solidariteitsfonds (Netherlands), Friends of Young Bethlehem, and Diozese Munich.

Local advocacy actions in communities

A main work focus of AEI this year was the encouragement and facilitation of *sumud* advocacy actions for peace/conflict resolution.

As member of Pax Christi, AEI is part of the international peace movement. In the Palestinian context AEI works on education for nonviolent strategies and solutions based on international law.

In a situation of overwhelming problems such as in Palestine youth need to get a hold on a certain issue that is practical and concrete, build confidence and open minds, and engage in team work. In doing advocacy, the youths choose topics, formulate demands, organize events, and directly relate to relevant stakeholders and decision-makers.

In an AEI project partnered by the EU and British Cafod, 300 young participants from the Bethlehem area, including marginalized communities, started to train themselves on advocacy community topics directly relevant to the youth. Groups of young women and school youths were involved. In 4 women communities in the Bethlehem area significant progress was made in leadership development: Aida Camp, Walajeh, Artas and Khan al-Ahmar. Leadership building among the teenager youth happened at 5 schools in the Bethlehem area: Lutheran School Beit Sahour, Dar al-Kalimeh Bethlehem, Greek-Orthodox Shepherd's School Beit Sahour, Greek-Catholic School Beit Sahour, and Swedish School in Bethlehem.

Later this year and next year, they will organize nonviolent community advocacy actions informed by respect for human values, civil rights, and international law. In communicating their *sumud*, participants learn skills to represent local communities and become ambassadors of Palestinian youth towards decision-makers and the world.

The project is expected to have the following outcomes:

- Improved knowledge and skills of Palestinian youth related to leadership and just peace advocacy.
- Palestinian youth able to identify, and link with key stakeholders and grassroots activists.
- Palestinian youth having documented and shared *sumud* narratives with Palestinian stakeholders; compare them with international narratives of nonviolent peace-building, and understanding the intrinsic connections between *sumud* and values of peace.
- Local level civil society engagement strengthened maintaining prospects for a just peace.

- Decision/policy makers persuaded to take effective action based on the needs of Palestinian youth.

In the course of the summer 2018, AEI prepared a new project for youth to advocate for local conflict resolution. In this project, in which 8 communities in the Bethlehem area and government schools will be involved, the pedagogical viewpoint will be the translation of general civic values into concrete civic advocacy action. Central to this translation will be the notion of *respect* as applied to practical situations: basic human respect for others inside and outside the Palestinian community; respect for those who disagree within one's own opinions, and respect towards nature and environment. Respect for humankind as well as nature and the environment is a central value in different religions. In the proposed project, Palestinian school youth will be encouraged to apply the value of respect in advocacy researches, networking, and campaigns addressing local and broader conflicts.

Cultural entrepreneurship

AEI pays special attention to culture as an educational source of inspiration for developing voice, story and sumud.

We started this year with an annual course in cultural entrepreneurship in particular focusing on the *sumud* of women in the countryside of Bethlehem, especially in the so-called areas B and C which are under ongoing pressure of colonization. Cultural entrepreneurship is here understood as the ability to communicate to visitors the beauty of the heritage, cultural surroundings and environment. In this project, supporting sumud is understood as (a) preserving and communicating the Palestinian culture and heritage, especially by women; (b) developing income-generating activities which help to keep women and their families on the land; (c) creating capacity for advocacy for women's rights and for keeping the communities viable in the face of colonization.

Students were initially recruited through local NGOs around Bethlehem in refugee camps and villages, especially women's organizations.

Two courses of 320 hours were provided. They involved 14 women in the following subjects:

- Computer use: Effective use of Internet and social media, especially for office work or home-based business in tourism (80 hours)
- Tourism and archeology: Basic knowledge of tourism and archaeology in Palestine so as to be able to organize and accompany day programs for visitors (80 hours)
- Basic administrative and communication skills: Basic knowledge of administrative and communication skills relevant to office work and home-based business in cultural tourism (80 hours)

- Communication English: Basic fluency in conversational tourism English with the focus on Palestine (80 hours).

The project contributed to an improvement of the target group at the following levels:

- training students in theoretical and practical skills related to administrative, computer use and presentational skills
- students learned about each other's work and tourism-related NGOs
- the women's centers benefitted from student internships in terms of work and learning
- the women's centers were supported in their visitor programs.

After the course, a *cooperative* for promoting cultural tourism was formed under the umbrella of AEI together with 7 local organizations or businesses. The cooperative will support learning processes among the members, conduct quality control and bring tourists for local tours. In addition, the cooperative will make pastries and other food products for the domestic market, as well as creative souvenir products under the label "Stories of Sumud".

Funders: Diozese Stuttgart-Rottenberg and BVA/Lenten Campaign in the Netherlands.

Women and youth groups

As is clear from the above, AEI keeps working on supporting and organizing Palestinian women's voices and rights, either in-house or in relation to women groups in Palestine and abroad.

AEI's Sumud Story House is located near the Bethlehem-Jerusalem checkpoint and the Separation Wall around Rachel's Tomb in north-Bethlehem. Rachel's Tomb is a holy place annexed to Israel and walled-off, made inaccessible for Palestinians. Initially the Sumud Story House started in response to the building of the Wall in the Rachel's Tomb area in 2003-5. Later on it developed a 'Wall Museum' of hundreds of large, weather-resistant posters with sumud stories of youth and women.

At the Sumud Story House 3 women groups including a choir came regularly together for their weekly meetings and training sessions dealing with a wide range of social, cultural, psychological and inter-religious topics. The women groups have a mixed Moslem-Christian composition, and focus on community building and developing voices and personal stories on justice and peace.

As for AEI's youth, some 50 youth of different age levels came regularly together in AEI's Youth Media House to debate issues of Palestinian youth life. The youth were challenged to develop inner focus by thinking critically, acting creatively, and communicating effectively.

Another youth project concerned the professional development of the Palestinian teenager music group Sawa in Bethlehem. The project's aim is to engage youth in educational activities outside school so as to give them experience in life skills and help

them raise their voices through music. A German volunteer, sent out for one year by Pax Christi Stuttgart, Theresa Priebe, coordinated the debates and music group.

Volunteering

Also this year AEI hosted volunteering guest trainers.

A German music conductor provided training sessions for Sawa.

Two Dutch Quakers, Sytze and Marlies Tjallingii, gave workshops on Neuro-Linguistic Programming to AEI teenager and postgraduate youth groups as well as women.

AEI hosted Janny van Heerbeek from the Netherlands, who offered several training sessions to an AEI women's group about the subject of parenting.

Monitoring and evaluation

During this year AEI developed a Child Protection Policy that was shared with staff and stakeholders during workshops. It also trained its staff in social media use and advocacy strategies.

Networking

AEI is a networking organization, and actively linked up in 2017-18 with other organizations:

- Pax Christi, of which AEI is a member organization.
- World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, convened by the World Council of Churches
- Kairos Palestine and Sabeel and its new initiative Kumi Now
- Christian organizations in Palestine, coordinating political positions and statements
- UNOY Peacebuilders, with its network of 80 youth organizations in 50 countries.

Locally, AEI maintained and developed networks in the central West Bank and the Hebron area among schools, women organizations and cultural or youth clubs.

AEI also took part in a committee with inspectors of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in overseeing inter-religious education at 30 schools, both governmental and private.

Permanent staff

Name permanent staff	Type of involvement in AEI	Qualifications
Fuad Giacaman	Co-president and political and educational adviser, program coordinator, member financial committee, monitoring and evaluation, member management team.	Former headmaster and teacher at Bethlehem schools, former AEI general director. BA in English language and literature.
Elias Abu Akleh	Co-president and financial adviser, program coordinator, financial management and accounting, member financial committee, member management team, monitoring and evaluation.	Experience in financial administration of dozens of AEI projects as well as private schools in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, involved in AEI since mid-1990s.
Rania Murra	General director, program coordinator, adviser on political and women's affairs, spokesperson, member financial committee, monitoring and evaluation, member management team.	10 years' experience in setting up and coordinating women groups. MA in women and development studies. Presently member of international board Pax Christi.
Roger Salameh	Project coordinator, member management team.	Experience for over 8 years in youth projects, coordinating and secretarial work, coordinating AEI youth groups, international exchanges.
Toine van Teeffelen	Educational adviser and researcher, project manager.	Experience in developing, monitoring and evaluating of projects at AEI and elsewhere, author teacher manuals and books on Palestinian daily life, culture and identity. Ph.D. in discourse analysis, MA in social anthropology.
Advisory Board with 15 members, mainly community and educational leaders.		

AEI's staff and management meet weekly. Workshops connected to staff meetings for in-depth communication on issues of implementation and learning processes are regularly organized. In such workshops issues of management, M&E, analysis conflict environment, and procedures for youth and children's rights protection are among other things discussed.