

Annual Report Arab Educational Institute

1/9/2018-30/8/2019

Introduction

AEI supports Palestinian youth, women and educators in building community in Palestine and voicing their cultural identity and human rights. Its work is rooted in the values of sumud (steadfastness), 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.

AEI’s two premises are the Sumud Story House in north-Bethlehem (a women’s house), and the headquarters in Madbasseh, central Bethlehem. In the Sumud Story House, several women’s groups, youth and kids groups, a women’s choir and a parent group come together for a variety of activities and workshops.

1. Inter-religious citizenship education

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. It involves 60 religious education teachers, both Moslem and Christian. 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. 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 10 school performances attended by many hundreds. Other project methods included: implementing a joint religious studies lesson twice a month (rather than separate Moslem and Christian religious lessons as is usual), fieldtrips to Moslem and Christian holy places, introduction of educational drama and discussion techniques like the posing of a moral dilemma, joint religious celebrations, teacher workshops and training, student essay competition and story writing, an annual community campaign and evaluation workshops with teachers, school principals, students and parents.

2. Sumud and peace advocacy

Coordinated by AEI, 20 Palestinian schools and youth/women clubs in the occupied West Bank have been involved in an advocacy project for Palestinian youth in the West Bank (2018-2021). The project promotes civil society engagement in non-violent action for peace. In the project 600 young participants from the Bethlehem and Hebron areas, including from marginalized communities, worked on community topics directly relevant to youth.

This last year the focus was on training and local advocacy actions among young women in the Bethlehem area (neighborhoods and villages - Khan al-Ahmar, Sumud Story House, Al Walajeh, Artas, ‘Azzariyyeh), teenager students at Bethlehem schools (Lutheran school Beit Sahour, Greek Catholic

school Beit Sahour, Greek-Orthodox Shepherds School in Beit Sahour, Swedish school in Bethlehem, Dar al Kalimeh in Bethlehem), young women in downtown Hebron (Jabal Johar, Al-Qasara, Tel Rumeideh, Shuhadeh Street, Haret al Sheikh), three schools in the Dura region (Sikka, Deir al Asal, Bourj) and two youth clubs also in the Dura region (Abou Asajeh, Beit al Roush al Fouka).

The advocacy actions included local demands ranging from improved garbage collections services, regular and safe school transportation, improved access to health clinics, to broader issues such as more accurate representation of women in media, no drop outs from schools, no cut of UNRWA services, or freedom of movement.

3. Conflict education

For 9 months during 2019, the project **Palestinian Youth Protecting Civic Values in Conflict** took place in 8 communities in the southern West Bank, specifically in locations where Palestinian youths are frequently engaged in violent clashes with Israeli army or settlers. It targeted 400 Palestinian youth in the age range of 15-18 years. The desired changes included a reduction in the use of violence by those youth and a behavioral change to protecting civic values in conflicts and challenging extremist ideologies which promote violence.

The project was conducted in government schools in areas near Bethlehem: Battir, 'Abdiyyeh, Artas, Beit Jala, Aida Camp, Doha (both a girls and a boys school) and Dar Salah. The advocacy topics included dealing with conflicts by improved town planning, safer tourism routes (due to conflicts with settlers), strengthening cohesion of agricultural community, dealing with water shortages, and safety on the roads due to various tensions including political conflicts.

4. "Wall education"

The Wall Information Center at AEI's Sumud Story House in North-Bethlehem aims to give voice to Palestinians who are directly hurt by the so-called separation wall. It provides information about the impact of the wall toward domestic and international audiences and gives attention to people's narratives of loss as well as *sumud* [steadfastness, resilience].

Partially in the context of the Wall Information Center, AEI organized its Ninth Annual Sumud Festival in September in the context of the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel and the International Day of Prayer for Peace. AEI opened a 'reflection corner' at the Wall around Rachel's Tomb for visitors and locals alike to contemplate the impact of the Wall in an imprisoned area. The corner is where the Anastas family house is surrounded by the Wall. The corner is part of the 'Wall Museum' and contains quotes of Bethlehemites about imprisoned life and of the poet Mahmoud Darwish articulating the trauma of a broken home/homeland. Together with Palestinian kids, Dutch visual artist Ada Krowinkel, of the Friends of Young Bethlehem, helped prepare the paintings.

5. Games

As part of the various projects, AEI developed in 2018-19 a series of educational or awareness-raising games, with different purposes in mind. Some show the absurdities of occupation including an (old) checkpoint game (still available in French) and a new permit card game, in English. Others support critical thinking among Palestinian youths, such as the 'Rules of Respect Game' (Arabic). Still other games support the documentation of heritage stories, like the 'Wisdom of Sumud Game' (English).

Advisory board

A new AEI advisory board convened in summer 2019, consisting of 7 members involved in community and school education and women's development work. The new board members represent the broader community and educational leadership: Zuheir Tinezi, Maysoun al-Qawasmeh, Widaad Rabi'eh, Anton Nassar, Sana'a al-'Azza, Manar Ateek, Dr Sliman al-Lucy.

**Arab Educational Institute
February 2020**