

YWCA Newsletter



Advocating for Justice

Volume 2, Fall 2016

Advocating for Justice



Advocacy for Justice and Peace in Palestine

Rev. Loren McGrail

Communications, Advocacy, and Church Relations under Advocacy for Justice

Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage.

Anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain as they are.

Augustine of Hippo

The peace process has been frozen since 2014 and there is no indication from informal talks that Israel will hand over enough land or relinquish enough control for a viable Palestinian State to emerge. In the wake of these events, other things have happened including the recognition of the State of Palestine by a majority in General Assembly (Palestinian flag flies outside the UN in New York) and Israel receiving the 38 billion dollars over the next 10 years from its chief ally and supporter, the United States of America.

As we approach the 100 year old Balfour Declaration, the 71 year old Partition Plan, a half century of a military occupation, and 30 years after the first intifada, it is time to take stock of what the social/political landscape looks like, and what it means to advocate for a just peace.

Violence against Palestinians has escalated (over 225 Palestinians and 3 foreign nationals killed by Israeli forces since 2015). There are renewed attacks on Al Aqsa and record breaking settlement or colony building. In addition, the detention of children continues in record numbers (over 1,000 detained since beginning of 2016).

Many argue that imposed military rule is terror over four million Palestinians living and resisting under this terror and only a handful who express their despair by actions that lead to their deaths. Amira Hass in her article, *Israelis Can't Recognize Terrorism Staring Back at Them From the Mirror*, says there has been collective restraint because there is despair that “those who listen around the world aren't the deciders and those who decide are not listening.” She also adds however that there is hope in this restraint because “Justice and the future are on their side, since they are fighting for their liberty.”

Two alternative approaches to seeking justice have become clear. One is civil society driven BDS movement and the other is a multilateral approach to diplomacy based on moves through the UN General Assembly and other international bodies. A good example of the latter is the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion against the Wall in 2004. Another example are the cases piling up at the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Israeli suspects for war crimes committed since June 2014 which include the offensive war in Gaza in 2014 and illegal settlement building.

At the present moment the UN, the Quartet, the USA and the European Union (EU) call for the end to settlement expansion because it diminishes the possibility of a two-state solution and creates a one-state reality. They are rightfully concerned about how can a Palestinian State be peopled by Israeli settlers/colonists (nearly 700,000 on 60% of the West Bank)?

The international community has legal, ethical and moral obligations to act. Refusing to act is a form of acceptance and condoning. To keep hope alive, we must embrace Hope's daughters---anger and courage--- anger at the injustice and the courage to face it and stand up for Palestinian rights for freedom, dignity, and security.

The History of Our Advocacy Work

Mira Rizeq

National General Secretary



“For decades these wars have produced generations of refugees and displaced, marginalized and poor people, and resulted in disconnected families and communities. This is still an ongoing situation that calls for the YWCA to act.”

The YWCA has a very long history in Palestine; it started in 1893 when groups of women gathered around bible studies. Eventually, women groups started establishing local YWCA's and since then the organization has played different roles supporting women to survive, to get access to resources and to understand and defend their rights. Since its establishment, Palestine has been through and witnessed several wars, and has been under different occupations and colonizations, and parts of it have been annexed to different neighboring countries. The role of the YWCA has always thus been closely linked with this political context. For decades these wars have produced generations of refugees and displaced, marginalized and poor people, and resulted in disconnected families and communities. This is still an ongoing situation that calls for the YWCA to act.

The YWCA of Palestine is a member affiliate in the global movement of YWCA's, and as such honors all relevant resolutions pertaining to women, youth and children. The advocacy role of the YWCA became more organized when the national association established a Human Rights and Advocacy Committee in the early 80's, to formulate the organization's formal policies on advocacy. This committee was very active in drafting and issuing action alerts, every time the need came up. Since 1967, and in every World Council Meeting of the World YWCA, the YWCA of Palestine has worked hard to issue a resolution advocating for a just peace, the peace that will bring about dignity, security and prosperity to all the people on the land called the Holy Land. In the fall of 2015 at the 28th World Council Meeting it passed a Call to Action on Taking Action on Instituting Human Rights Standards and Implementation of UNSCR1325 in the Middle East Region.

The World YWCA has observer status at the UN and affirms all the resolutions it passes including UNSCR194 calling for the Right of Return for all refugees. It follows the same structure as the UN and passes its own resolutions.

As a rights based organization, the role of the YWCA has never been restricted to service delivery; the YWCA has always seen its role as advocating with and for the marginalized, displaced and poor. After the 1948 war, the YWCA was one of the first to establish women and children programs in the refugee camps. The YWCA recognizes its strategic role in supporting women's and communities' resilience and advocating for their rights.

The YWCA has managed over the last few years to produce several advocacy tools to assist its partners in advocating for these rights.



The YWCA's advocacy work is directly related to our Strategic Plan with its goals and thematic areas. It comes out of our deep commitment to justice in all its forms and to the belief that youth and woman are key players in building a democratic civil society that respects equality, diversity and freedom. As the occupation approaches the 50 year mark and Israel's stranglehold of settler colonial policies continues unabated and with impunity, the YWCA of Palestine invites you to join them in staying steadfast in their work for justice based on human rights, humanitarian, and international law.

As stated in our Strategic Plan under Goal 2, we advocate for "Palestinian women's political, economic, and social rights" at all levels –locally, regionally, and internationally. Therefore, we have three main advocacy areas: Just Peace, Social Justice, and Economic Justice.



Just Peace

In the summer of 2015 and in an effort to build young women's leadership and engagement in peace and justice, the YWCA of Palestine established the Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force.

YWCA of Palestine Peace and Justice Task Force

Mayadah Tarazi,

National Youth Coordinator

The YWCA of Palestine Young Women Peace and Justice Task Force Group started to meet in the summer of 2015. This task force group is formed by members from the four YWCA Local associations: Jerusalem, Jericho, Ramallah and Bethlehem. Early on, the group developed a vision, mission goal and objectives in December 2015



Task Force Vision: A space where empowered youth empower others.

Task Force Mission: To build a sustainable network of empowered youth leaders that influences the peace and justice decision making process.

Task Force Goal: Young women develop their capacity to understand and analyze the impact of conflict on women and advocate for and support peace and justice.

Objectives:

To understand and analyze conflict and power structures, human rights, gender rights, UNSCR1325, CEDAW and other International Women's Conventions;

To produce and deliver learning and development opportunities and resources to empower and enable young women to become advocates for peace and justice nationally and globally;

For young women living under Occupation as well as in conflict and post conflict contexts, there are unique challenges to be faced in working on peace and justice. These challenges are often defined by risk factors such as social exclusion, contested spaces, sectarian tensions, racism, discrimination and sense of rejection. On the global level young women are often underrepresented in political and peace forums.

In Partnership with the YWCA of Great Britain and the YWCA of Ireland four young women from the YWCA of Palestine Peace and Justice Task Force began work on a joint Project funded by the World YWCA Power to Change Fund, called the Young Women as Advocates for Peace and Justice. The goal of this project is to bring young women together to share strategies and around the issues identified above by women in conflict and post conflict situations. We held our first skype conversations in the summer of 2015 ahead of the YWCA World Council meeting in Bangkok in October of 2016.

The young women coordinators from Ireland, the UK, and Palestine came together in this setting face to face to learn about the cultural contexts each other and their role within the global YWCA movement. Through workshops and seminars with a peace and justice theme the YWCA's Young Women's Peace and Justice Task Force increased their knowledge and capacity of peace and justice issues worldwide.

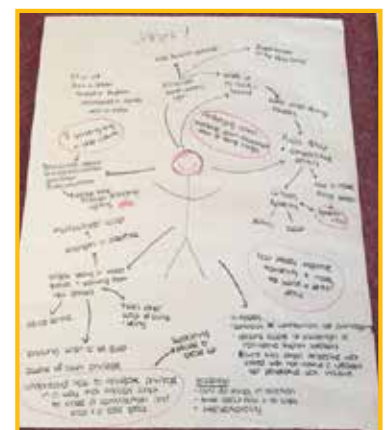
Following the World Council gathering and as part of the collaborative peace and justice project between the YWCAs of Ireland, Britain, and Palestine, we came together in Ireland for a three day sharing of ideas and strategies. Our YWCA of Palestine youth were given the chance to talk about their lives in Palestine in a global context and to learn from youth from other countries about conflict and post conflict. We explored how a military occupation is different from a conflict. This gathering and the project in general has allowed all of us to deepen concepts of peace, conflict, and human rights. It has allowed all of us to understand how our context is part of a global desire for peace with justice and that we can learn from each other and build solidarity. This project strengthened and built new partnerships that YWCA Palestine will continue to work on for building peace and justice for Palestine and ending the occupation.

The project made UNSCR 1325 foundational to its work. We used participatory methodologies to create a safe space where young women's lives were at the centre.

Participants were strongly encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences and take ownership of their ideas and achievements. One indicator of the success of the safe space approach was a spontaneous exercise whereby participants articulated and celebrated their own and other achievements and qualities in terms of leadership and peace building.

The group was divided into groups of three and each to tell about the leadership life cycle as a story telling, which was a brilliant way of how each one of the participants felt after telling her story.

The training of the young women was also participatory and included such activities as mapping exercises of conflict in national context. The women learned about the whole history of Palestine from 1948 on through the occupation including how the YWCA helped with the refugees. The young women also learned about all the human rights violations and breaking of both humanitarian and international laws. The participants also learned about the peace and justice tools that have been created by the national office. In particular they learned about the Fabric of Our Lives project with its focus on refugee rights and the Right of Return and the Joint Advocacy Initiative's (JAI) Olive Tree Campaign. They also learned about the boycott, divestment, and sanctions global movement as a tool of nonviolent resistance.



As part of the Task Force's ongoing work they organized a YWCA Youth Day on the occasion of International Youth Day on Friday 12th August 2016. Sixty (60) young women and men from all the YWCA's of Jerusalem, Jericho, Ramallah, and Bethlehem attended this day full of energy, willing to learn more about the YWCA of Palestine's important advocacy work, training programs and youth work.



The day started with an overview of the history of the YWCA of Palestine, and the youth involved in national and international work on women’s rights. We followed with an activity to learn about the needs of the gathered youth and ended with a tour of images from recent conferences, trainings, and gatherings.

Although the partnership project ended, the work of the Young Women’s Peace and Justice Task Force in Palestine will continue. The YWCA of Palestine has funds from the United Methodist Women to continue with training of young women in peace and justice, and is planning for an International Peace Conference to be led and managed by the youth members themselves in 2017. All this is a continuation of these partnership efforts.



Just Peace also includes our support for the Joint Advocacy Initiative’s Olive Tree Campaign which demands that Palestinian farmers have the right to farm their lands and feed their families. We advocate for these rights by speaking against the building of the Wall, the demolition of homes, and the confiscation and destruction of agricultural land.

Just peace means standing up for our refugee families; their rights for safety and protection and the Right of Return that has been guaranteed Under UN Resolution 194. We also stand against the forced removal of people in the Jordan Valley and East Jerusalem that is happening now as it violates the Geneva Conventions.

We have created a number of advocacy projects and tools to address some of these issues. In 2013, and with support from the Global Ministries/ United Church of Christ, we developed The Fabric of Our Lives Project to educate people about the lives of the women in our camps who were made refugees in 1948. To honor their lives and stories, we made five olive wood dolls in the name of the five women interviewed. In addition, we provide yearly updates about the Nakba and the



Mariam from Beit Nabala

ongoing forced displacement practices and policies that are creating new internally displaced people (IDP) or refugees. In 2014 we made a film about the forced displacement of Christians from the village of Iqrit and created a calendar focused on refugee rights and our women in the camps. In 2015 we added bookmarks about the women and their stories.

This fall we have added a new item-- embroidered bracelets highlighting the key images found on the dresses. Each bracelet will be accompanied by a bookmark. These same designs are also being used in headbands and Christmas ornaments we have designed for PalCraft Aid in the United States. It is our hope that by buying and wearing the embroidery associated with our women and their stories of displacement, people will begin to understand that forced displacement began long before 1967 and this current and long military occupation.



Mariam from Beit Nabala Solidarity Bracelet

Using the Fabric of Our Lives Stories in Your Sermon

Rev. Jean Doane

Stories from Palestine was a sermon preached September 7th at Wavely Heights United church of Christ by Rev. Jean Doane. Jeanne began her sermon by talking about her recent trip to Israel and Palestine with Jeff Wright's group in *the Footsteps of Jesus*. She stated she did not feel the presence of Christ so much in the traditional places but rather more in the "alternative" portions of the trip. Her sermon then moves to talking about the Fabric of Our Lives dolls.



Most preachers use sermon illustrations when preaching. Rev. Doane used three stories from the Fabric of Our Lives project to illustrate the call to walk with God and advocating justice. Before telling the stories of Fatima, Miriam, and Zuhdiyah she introduced the topic of the Nakba. She made two important points. After the introduction about what the Nakba was she shifted to the present and said, "Much of the Nakba occurred between 1947 and 1949. It continues today with land confiscation, home demolition, the separation wall and checkpoints, and the constant construction of more and more illegal settlements on Palestinian land. She goes on to say that those responsible see these actions justified by the bible because they believe that the land was given to their ancestors. Then she says, "I would like you to hear these stories of the Nakba and decide for yourselves where the Bible and the God of Liberation fit into this history and the ongoing suffering of the people, the need for justice, and the hope for peace."

I would like to share with you one of the stories Jean used from our Fabric of Our Lives Project so that you can see how you too could use one or more of these stories in your sermons. This is how she tells Fatima's story:

“I would like you to hear these stories of the Nakba and decide for yourselves where the Bible and the God of Liberation fit into this history and the ongoing suffering of the people, the need for justice, and the hope for peace.”

First I will tell you Fatima's story. Fatima is now 71 years old. She lives in the Aqbet Jaber Refugee Camp located in the Jordan Valley, just west of Jericho. Fatima was born in the village of Dayr-Al Dubban in the foothills of the Hebron Mountains. She was the only girl in the family, and she had five older brothers. The 730 people of her village were farmers and raised animals. On October 23, 1948, Fatima's father lifted 6 year old Fatima up on his shoulders and carried her as the family fled Dayr-Al-Dubban with their animals. They were fleeing from the guns of the soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force who were taking over their village. Fatima remembers wandering for some time through the fields eating only dates. Eventually her family came to the village of Ajjur where they lived in a tent for four years. Then they were moved to the refugee camp set up by the United Nations near Jericho, where Fatima still lives 65 years after her family was forced from their village at gun point. You will not find Dayr Al-Dubban on a map. All that is left of Fatima's home village is the remnants of buildings and the thorny plants. In 1955 Jews from Morocco created a town named Luzit near the ruins of Dayr Al-Dubban. Fatima and her parents and her brothers were never allowed to go back to their village, even though the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 guarantees them that right. A refugee's right of return is also part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The government of Israel continues to refuse to acknowledge this basic human right.

Later in the sermon she talked about her other visits with the church's partners and why she is standing up for Palestinian rights. She ended her powerful sermon circling back to the stories:

This morning, I have lifted up for you a portion of the Palestinian narrative through the stories of survivors of the Nakba. Now you carry these stories in your minds and hearts. Knowing these stories, we have an opportunity to take action to make a difference. We can support the BDS resolution. But even more importantly, with God's guidance and help, we can begin to interpret the Bible in ways that lead not to violence, death, and exile, but to life, compassion, peace, and justice. The words and deeds of Jesus and of the prophets who came before him are a light to our path as we journey forward. We have the Holy Spirit to equip us and uphold us in the work of advocacy for the oppressed. Let us be servants of the God who liberates the captives and proclaims healing and blessing for all people. Amen



The YWCA of Palestine thanks Rev. Doane for her powerful witness and the creative way she has woven the stories from our women into her sermon on liberation. We hope you are inspired by Rev. Doane and will find your own unique way to include these stories in your preaching or advocacy.





In 2015 we began a new advocacy tool called *Breaking Down the Wall*. The tool is a five piece olive wood wall with an accompanying booklet to illustrate how the Wall can be used in a variety of ways for educational or liturgical purposes. The Annexation Wall affects the life and livelihoods of all Palestinians within the West Bank, and Occupied East Jerusalem. The International Court of Justice ruled against the Wall in 2004.

The World Council of Churches has made the Wall and barriers a focus for its World Week of Peace: Dismantling Barriers for 2015 and 2016. Our mini wall can also be used with our refugee women dolls from our Fabric or Our Life Project to illustrate how they are still imprisoned by either real cement walls or walls of injustice and prejudice or it can be used with our other two advocacy tools. It was used at Saint Andrews Scotts Memorial Church during our World Week of Peace service.



Service of Word and Prayer at Shalom United Church of Christ:

Transforming the Wall for Advent

by Rev. Allie Perry

The format for each advent liturgy included lighting the advent candles at the beginning of the service and then removing a section of the wall at the end. We had made a booklet of the reflections, photos and prayers that the YWCA of Palestine had pulled together, so everybody had a copy of that throughout Advent. And over the four weeks, we also incorporated into the liturgies readings from the Kairos Palestine Christmas Alert 20

For every service the center table was arranged with the wall sections in the center, removed one by one each week and then returned, transformed. The advent candles were placed amidst the circle of stones and holly.



We continued the devotions to the Sunday after Christmas so the wall sections were down and transformed.

From the Liturgy

Each week a section of the olive wood wall will be removed representing our desire and prayer to tear down the walls and barriers which divide us, separate us, and keep us locked up and locked in. Watch for that section to be transformed the following week.

All: He came down so we could have joy
Fill us and give us joy enough
to knock down the walls and barriers
that divide and separate us
Let us travel to Bethlehem
where God is born anew each day



CLOSING HYMN Leilat al-Milad (Night of the Birth) refrain

Lay-la-tal mi-lad, yum-ma-hal bugh-du
Lay-la-tal mi-lad, tuz-hi-rul-ar-du
Lay-la-tal mi-lad, tud-fa-nul-har-bu
Lay-la-tal mi-lad, yan-bu-tul-hab-bu
During Christmas night, no more hate
During Christmas night, the soil flourishes
During Christmas night, war is buried
During Christmas night, love grows.



Using the Breaking Down the Wall project

Text and pictures by the Methodist Liaison in Jerusalem

For the past four years the Methodist Liaison office in Jerusalem has offered devotions during the Christian seasons of Advent and Lent. Last year was the first time we used the Wall panels from the YWCA project. The panels of the wall represent the wall of separation, apartheid, or security which is built on Palestinian land by Israel.



The Advent 2015 devotions were written in English and then translated into Spanish and Portuguese. The Lent 2016 devotions were written in English. Each of the devotions were posted on the blog site of www.methodistliaisonjerusalem.wordpress.com and shared through Facebook via Methodist Liaison.

During Advent, we incorporated the wall as part of the wreath; each panel of the wall covered a candle. Each week as the candle was lit, a panel fell and by Christmas Eve all parts of the wall were down, and the light of Christ was shining.



The season of Lent is a little longer, we began with Ash Wednesday and continued each Sunday and the part of Holy Week, for a total of 10 devotions. We used two sets of the wall from the YWCA wall project lined up as a wall. Each Sunday and during Holy Week, a panel of the wall came down, by Easter Sunday the wall had fallen.

Sadly, as the real wall continues to be built around many parts of the West Bank of Palestine... we will continue to look for ways to be creative in order to share about the reality of how people live behind the wall and the injustice of occupation. How the Christian community continues to be a witness from Bethlehem and Jerusalem to the world. The 'sumud' or steadfastness and resilience of the Palestinian people, continues to teach and inspire people who come to the area as pilgrims and friends.

If you have a set or two of the YWCA wall project, you can be creative in how you use it, at home, work, church, with a bible study group or in other ways. We invite you to join us again during Advent and Lent to follow the devotions we will provide as a witness.



For the Christian holiday season we have created a new tool which is a statute of the Holy Family taking Flight into Egypt. In this time of mass movement of refugees across the globe, we are reminded that the Holy Family was made refugees when they fled the persecution of Herod. This statute of the Holy Family reminds us that we have a duty to protect all refugees and their human rights including Palestinian refugees.



Palestinians compose one of the largest refugee populations in the world. The displacement of Palestinians from their homes in 1948 and continues to the present. Of the 11.6 million Palestinians dispersed throughout the world, 4.5 million live under a military occupation.

In addition, the Holy Family is said to have stopped in Bir Ouna, Beit Jala, on their flight out. Mary is said to have drunk from this ancient well. This holy site is now the site of daily prayer and demonstrations because of the Annexation Wall's route to connect the surrounding settlements.

“ The YWCA of Palestine invites you to remember your sacred roots to this holy refugee family and to work for the rights and dignity of all families especially refugees and the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees. ”

All of these projects and tools are ways to help our international partners to address Palestinian rights in their faith communities or communities. You may purchase these advocacy tools at the YWCA office or online at this link: <http://www.uccresources.com/products/wise-women-dolls?s=recomatic>

Finally, as part of our Just Peace work, we support the end of the siege on Gaza and the rebuilding of its infrastructures and homes. We continue to educate and advocate for Gaza and hope to establish a partnership with one of the existing organizations in the near future.

Social Justice

Social Justice includes our work with women who are seeking representation and participation in all aspects of their lives from their homes to their government. We support women's rights to freedom, peace, and dignity as outlined in UN Resolution 1325. This resolution recognizes the right and need for women's participation in peace, protection and prevention from all forms of violence including gender based violence. We were instrumental in the development and now implementation of Palestine's National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR1325. This summer we participated in the official launch of the NAP with our women's coalition, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the UNSCR1325 Higher Commission, and UN Women and the EU.

Social Justice also includes participating in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations every year in New York. Gender equity, women's leadership and empowerment are important issues we continue to engage in with women from around the world. We are proud to be part of the Palestinian delegation and to support our young women in their growing leadership roles. We created a short video highlighting the CSW in 2015.

“ Sadly, as the real wall continues to be built around many parts of the West Bank of Palestine... we will continue to look for ways to be creative in order to share about the reality of how people live behind the wall and the injustice of occupation. ”

In our EU funded project, Shumous, civic engagement and advocacy were an essential part of the 100 hour training program which covered such topics as gender equity, participatory planning, human rights, how to lobby and do advocacy campaigns. Training was held for youth groups in collaboration with grassroots organizations within the village. The youth were trained in how to participate and take leadership in their village assemblies so they could demand their social and economic rights.

Most of the issues that advocacy groups worked on were societal issues affecting the local community or based on the needs of the village. In the Jordan Valley the advocacy groups dealt with issues related to water assess and pollution.

The Shumous Project counts as one of its successes that the communities have been mostly receptive to having youth participation in the village assemblies as they have come to see how important it is to prepare the next generation to be leaders so they can help share the responsibility of local leadership.

Right to Education

Wael Obeidi

Shumous Project Manager

In 1953 a school was built in southwest of Ramallah the village of Al Tireh, Palestine long before the Annexation Wall and settlements. It was built along the road from Ramallah to Gaza. Over the years the school has come under attack from both military forces and settlers. During the '67 War it was used as an army base. The school documents were burned and destroyed at this time. In different occasions, Israel offered to transfer the school to the other side of the road. The community refused the offer to willingly remove themselves from their land. They stayed in their over-crowded 4 room school. In 1988 they expanded their classrooms and in 2013 through the intervention of the quartet they were able to get a permit to renovate and build.



“When the bypass road was constructed from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv in the 1990’s, the children were forced to access the school through a tunnel. This tunnel was often full of mud and water in the winter making the trek to school hazardous. But the real danger were the attacks from the nearby settlers at Beit Horon settlement on students.”

Staying on the land and resisting forced displacement was one issue. However there was the ongoing issue of security for the children. In the early spring of 2016 under the YWCA’s Shumous Project, a partnership project with Y-Care International, YWCA-YMCA Sweden and co-financed by the EU, the young women of Al-Tireh began to meet and assess issues in their community that needed attention. They participated in civic engagement training workshops that included leadership skills, gender and advocacy sessions. Getting transportation for their children was just one of their campaigns; they managed to mobilize the community and succeeded to get donations for purchasing a bus to get the children to their school safely. That could not have happened without the support from the community leadership, the village council and the charitable society in the village in addition to the school principal, and the facilitation and support from the YWCA.

The young women leaders with the support from the community and the YWCA organized and facilitated many initiatives in the village in addition to the school issue; they worked together with the village council and the charitable society to make a festival for the children as part of Eid Al Adha celebration. It was very successful with over 400 villagers attending including 200 children.



Salwa, one of the women leaders in the village, also prepared to run for the village council’s elections. Getting a bus to transport approximately 100 kids back and forth to school was a huge accomplishment and inspired the ministry of education to get another bus for children from the surrounding villages.

Our young women have also inspired the young men in the village to reactivate their sports club. Their success in mobilizing their community to take action on social issues and civic needs has, inspired others and have earned the respect of both their families and community.

Launching and Implementing UNSCR1325

Suhair Ramadan - Gender, Peace, and Security National Officer

YWCA of Palestine



The Ministry of Women's Affairs together with the UNSCR 1325 Higher Commission, the UN Women and the EU launched the National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1325 in Palestine on Wednesday the 24th of August. The resolution was issued in the year 2000 by the United Nations Security Council calling for the protection of women in armed conflicts and conflict zones. The Palestinian NAP advocates for

the protection of Palestinian women from the Israeli occupation and its violations and demands accountability for crimes committed. The resolution also calls for the participation of women in decision-making without discrimination.

The Minister for Women's Affairs, Her Excellency Dr. Haifa Agha stated at the news conference that Palestine is the second Arab State to issue the operational plan for the implementation of the resolution, taking into consideration that the Palestinian women suffer more than others due to the different levels of violence ranging from domestic, cultural, social as well as political sourcing from the Israeli occupation.

Agha continued to point out that the lives of citizens in Palestine are not safe, especially Jerusalemite women and their families who are most vulnerable and are under attack by the occupation facing illegal expulsions and displacements, as well as unlawful seizures of homes and properties all the time.

The Minister expressed that the Ministry is working to expose the Occupation and its practices, as well as to ensure the promotion of the steadfastness of women by placing regional decisions and ensuring implementation around the understanding that women are the essential part in the development and advancement process.

Mr. Mohamed Naciri the Regional Director for the Arab States in the UN Women stated that the daily life of the Palestinian people is subject to the denial of their basic human rights. The Palestinians face violence and destruction, and violent oppression exasperated by the separation wall and barriers which isolate and fragment the areas.

Naciri added that amid all this, the Palestinian women took an important role in the struggle and political action, stressing that the United Nations supports the NAP and its implementation to ensure the achievements on the agenda of women's participation in decision-making of peace and security.

As for the Director of Cooperation in the European Union Ms. Alessandra Vizzier stated that, we must strive to achieve international commitment towards women so there will be principles for implementation of equality in all areas. "It is important that this plan, which is being launched today, does not remain dormant, but is implemented." She continued, "Please rest assured that on behalf of the EU, we stand here committed to support in our modest capacity the Palestinian advocacy efforts and other efforts for the implementation of the plan."

Vizzier affirmed that the lack of freedom of movement for Palestinians along with the settlement expansion and the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip are all obstacles that affect the way of life clearly the restrictions on movement, settlements, the closure of the Gaza Strip have made an impact on Palestine as a whole, but have more specifically had a strong impact on Palestinian women and their families.

The YWCA of Palestine continues to be an active member in the UNSCR 1325 National Commission and in the civil society UNSCR 1325 Coalition secretariat. Since the launch of the Strategic Framework of the NAP at the YWCA of Palestine international conference in Bethlehem “Women’s Freedom, Peace and Dignity in Palestine UNSCR 1325 for Accountability” in 2014, the YWCA continued striving towards formally assuring the launching of the National Action Plan in Palestine and will continue with the same determination towards the successful implementation of the UNSCR 1325 NAP in Palestine.

“ The General Secretary of the National YWCA of Palestine summarizes the launch and the role of the YWCA by stating, “This is an important milestone for women in their struggle for justice and equality. We are proud that the Government has dedicated all its efforts to formulate the plan, and have gathered so many governmental and non-governmental parties around this plan, to see to it that it comes to life. We hope that all partners will continue to support women as they struggle to create safe spaces for themselves, their communities and their children, spaces free of violence and discrimination” ”



As part of finding creative ways to link our focus on the empowerment of women and their leadership we created *The Wise Women Also Came*. By including the Wise Women and not just men, we link our sacred story with of women’s participation and wisdom to today’s women. The *Wise Women Also Came* reminds us that women’s wisdom and leadership are part of both the Christian story and an important aspect of Palestinian life today.



Wise Ones, what gifts will you bring
to ground hope during this dark time
in our history, in this place
that birthed the prince of peace?

Wise Ones, how will freedom, dignity,
and peace be born in you?

What alternative route home will you take
to avoid the Herods of this world
who threaten our families and children?

Economic Justice

Economic Justice includes our work against poverty and the promotion of economic sustainability for women entrepreneurs. We support women's rights to full economic participation in not just the informal sector but the formal sector. Vocational training and income generating projects are not enough to secure women's full participation. They need to know the labor laws and demand their equal rights.

Our Shumous Project had at its center the development of women entrepreneurs. The women who participated in this project not only learned about how to begin and sustain a small business but about their rights as workers including their rights as workers in Israel's illegal settlements.

Economic justice also includes our commitment to supporting the production of Palestinian products and the support of economic leverage to force Israel to comply with international laws and support of human rights. We, therefore, support the Kairos Palestine call for ending the occupation, equal rights for all living within Israel, and the Right of Return.



EU Bazar

To work on these advocacy themes and issues we design and provide workshops for our women and youth, promote studies, issue reports, produce Action Alerts, and provide online resources and materials. Part of our new communication plan is to make our website more interactive and reflective of the important work we are doing locally, nationally, and internationally.

Charting Our Advocacy Work in the Bethlehem Area

Rulla Sarras, *YWCA of Bethlehem Executive Director*



The YWCA of Bethlehem was officially established in late 2014 to provide services to Palestinians living within the Bethlehem Governorate, mainly the most marginalized areas which are affected by the Annexation Wall and threatened by massive settlement expansion. In July of 2016, the YWCA of Bethlehem carried out a mapping of services and enterprises in the Bethlehem area which included Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour and eight villages of the western rural area of Bethlehem : Hussan, Battir, Wadi Fukin, Al Walajeh, Al Khader, Artas, Wadi Rahhal and Nahaleen. The purpose of the mapping was to assess

the kind of services that exist as well as the needs that the new YWCA of Bethlehem could address. It was also an opportunity to gather information about the kind of advocacy work we need to focus on.

According to recent statistics there are approximately 200,000 Palestinians living in the Bethlehem area which in addition to the cities and villages includes three refugee camps.

According to the Applied Research Institute, Israel is implementing a plan to remove Palestinians from their land, to expand and connect all the settlement blocks. This is in concordance with Israel's grand re-shaping of the demographics to lower the Palestinian population to at least 20% in these identified areas. There are currently 24 illegal settlements located in the Bethlehem Governorate, with a total population of about 120,000. Each settlement appropriates land and resources from the

Palestinians, often taking prime agricultural land or forested areas on which to build. The settlement Betar Illit is the biggest settlement in the area; it had a population of 39,736 recorded in 2011 and was built in 1985.

“It was heart breaking to see how the illegal settlements are strangling these cities and villages especially those surrounding the villages of Wadi Fukin, Artas and Waid Rahal. Not only is agricultural land being confiscated but it is also being destroyed.”

Israeli settlements are dumping wastewater onto Palestinian villages, farms and agricultural lands. This practice is having a devastating effect on the health of the villagers and their livestock because it is contaminating the water supply, making it unsafe to drink. It is also literally destroying crops and trees due to contamination of toxins. The accumulative effect has resulted in an increase in disease and health problems and also poverty from farmers not being able to provide for their families. It is also forcing Palestinians to leave and move to other areas where they have more potential to make a living.

I would like to talk about Wadi Foukin as a horrible case study of all these elements coming together. Wadi Foukin has a sewage pipe which expels wastewater directly onto the Palestinian hills from the Betar Illit settlement above. It also has underground water well that is used for collecting wastewater but which periodically floods due to the quantity of wastewater being discharged into it from the settlement. The majority of the waste that is released is sewage waste, as can be seen in the photo below, and includes raw materials such as waste and paper which is highly damaging to the agricultural lands. The water itself has chemicals, bacteria and manufacturing waste which all serves to strip the minerals and nutrients from the soil.



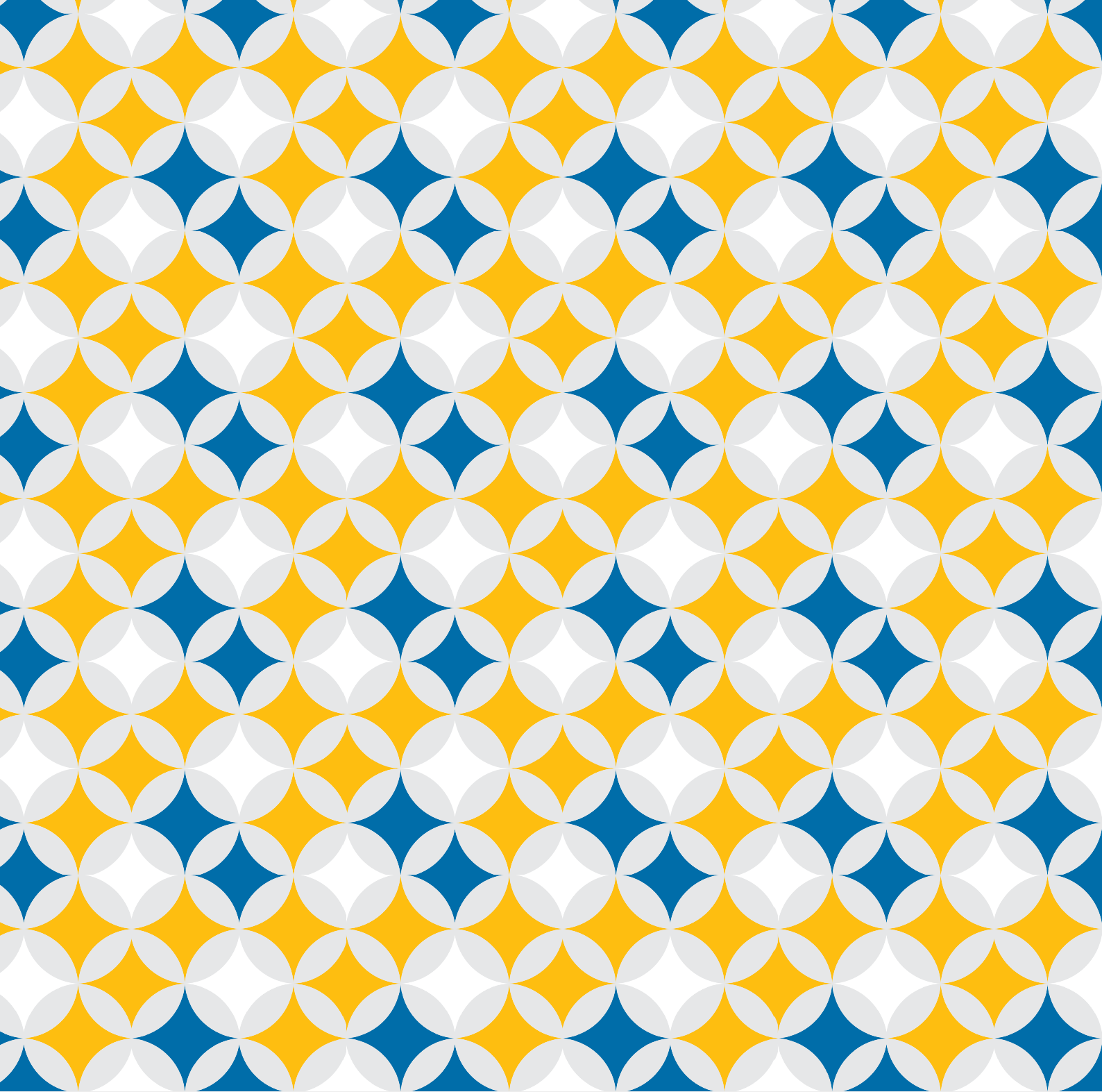
The wastewater pipe leading onto Wadi Foukin's lands complete with sewage remains.

Meeting the village council leaders, women working in small enterprises, and farmers I was a witness to the devastating situation they all are facing. This includes attacks by settlers to the agricultural lands---the uprooting of seedlings, trees, and plants and vandalizing of the land. The farmers indicated that they couldn't reach their farm land anymore, or were afraid of being attacked or shot at by the armed settlers. So it is not only a threat on the land but also on the lives of the people.

The advocacy work for the Bethlehem YWCA must work with its members, and rights holders to hold the duty bearers, including the Israeli authorities, accountable for the many violations we have observed and documented.



The YWCA of Palestine
invites you to join us
in risking the birth
of new possibilities
for peacemaking
in laboring for justice
growing hope
and finding new ways
to resist



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