



## NECC DSPR *On a Visit to Gaza*

I was excited as I received permission from the Israeli side to leave for Gaza, one day before the planned trip. Finally, I get to know the region that is said to be the largest prison in the world. I had no idea what it was like to live there. In a place where 2 million people cannot move freely, where 1.2 million refugees live, where unemployment is 45 per cent and where the people have only 8 hours access of electricity a day.

I entered Gaza via the only border crossing Erez, from the Israeli side. My Palestinian colleague could have left immediately. Only for me as a foreigner was it necessary to wait for a telephone confirmation of my exit permit. After one hour I called the German Embassy. 10 minutes later we were picked up by a female soldier under apologies and led directly through the border. Then on the other side we were friendly received by the Hamas. We were led into a construction container in which a few officials sat at desks and looked through our papers. My colleague was asked many questions in Arabic as to why we were here and what we were doing. I was glad she had come with me.

The driver from the organization NECC DSPR drove us from the border to the office and I could collect my first impressions. Impressions of a country characterized by poverty and attacks but also by the will to survive and hope for a better future. Children on the streets, hand in hand. There are also some enterprising young car mechanics who catered to the customers who needed their cars to be fixed. Side by side there were older men who sheltered themselves from midday sun in the small parking lots where the cars were being fixed. After lunch, which consisted of fresh fish from the waters off Gaza, we were driven afterwards by young people in an old cutter on the sea, in order to be able to see Gaza from the sea side. In my trouser pockets my passport and my mobile phone and in my head the question, how I save these with a boat accident. And then there was my colleague in the boat, who couldn't swim at all. Fortunately we didn't capsize.

In the afternoon then the check-in at our hotel for the next three days, with beautiful pool. Too bad that I am a woman. For them it is not allowed to swim in public in Gaza. Later we could visit the YMCA Gaza. A wonderful and lively place, with a large courtyard full of laughing, playing children and lively entertaining parents enjoying chilled drinks under shady trees.

The next day together with Dr. Issa, the Executive Director of NECC DSPR Gaza, I had the opportunity to visit the psychological program run by NECC DSPR. Girls traumatized by the war have a safe place there to master life and come to terms with their experiences. Dancing with these girls and catching a glimpse of their world was very special for me.

I continue to the first of three NECC DSPR Medical Centers. The waiting room is overcrowded with families who get free examinations and medication that would otherwise fall through the healthcare system. The rooms are completely overheated. I admire the doctors and nurses keeping a cool head and doing a good job even in extreme heat.



Girls walk hand in hand along the street in Gaza



Fatima is waiting for her treatment in the waiting room of the Medical Clinic.

# ON A VISIT TO GAZA

We visit the second psychological program, where a bit older girls welcomed us warm and we are allowed to dance with them. There is a wonderful atmosphere of acceptance and security in this room. I would like to get to know every single girl.

An evening on the beach of Gaza. Just like the people of Gaza, we spend an evening in one of many wooden hand-made Hollywood swings on the beach, enjoying corncobs roasted over a campfire and the wonderful glowing red sunset. A lot of bobbycars decorated with fairy lights are driven along the beach by young children, who can get into them at any time and have a little adventure. It is a simple life there, full of creativity, laughter and the will to celebrate and make life special.

On the second day of my adventure in Gaza, I visited two of the NECC DSPR's three vocational training centers. I met a lot of adorable young men, full of life, who proudly presented their craft projects to me. There are the carpenters, the welders, those who specialize in solar energy, all trying to make professional progress in their lives and make the best of the given circumstances. Afterwards we visit Nerman, a former fashion design graduate of the NECC DSPR. She has now opened a small boutique with adjoining tailoring and mixes traditional Palestinian fashion with modern styles. Wonderful.

We end the evening of the second day in another restaurant. The food, the service, the ambience is awesome. Only the customers are missing like everywhere else. Because only a few can afford to eat in a restaurant.

All the time I feel welcome everywhere and absolutely safe. Difficult living conditions definitely encourage creativity. This is especially noticeable in Gaza. Thanks to the NECC DSPR in Gaza for the important work they do. Their commitment to their work did not prevent them from making my first visit to Gaza and that of Hanan, my colleague from central office, a wonderful and overall pleasant learning experience.

*Damaris*



Beachview Gaza



Hamza saws during his exam in the Vocational Training Center in Gaza



On the beach of Gaza small children can celebrate a small party and enjoy life a little bit.