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“... AND HE PUT HIS ARMS  
AROUND THEM...”

Mark 10:16

## CHILDREN UNDER OCCUPATION

by Jehan Helou

“[Human] kind owes to the child the best it has to give,” states the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child. The UN has played a major role in promoting children’s rights, with the establishment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and the convening of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Children. In addition the UN established prominent specialized bodies, like United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict. Unfortunately, children are still the main victims of modern wars. Around two million of the world’s youngest have died as a direct result of armed conflict in the last decade only. Millions of children have been seriously injured or permanently disabled.

This paradox was reflected by Graca Machel, an educator and champion of children’s rights and wife of Nelson Mandela, who was appointed by the U.N. Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive study of the impact of armed conflicts on children. She said in her 1996 report:

“I have always believed it is our responsibility as adults to give children futures worth having. In the two years spent on this report, I have been shocked and angered to see how shamefully we have failed in this responsibility. [...] This report is a call to action and a call to embrace a new morality that puts children where they belong - at the heart of all agendas”.

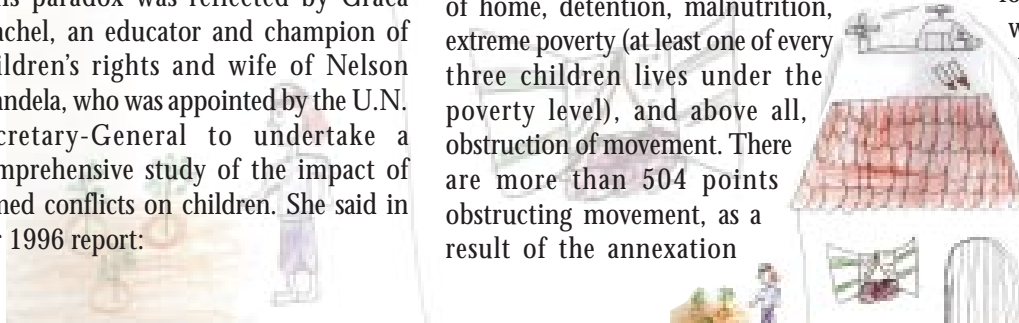
Palestinian children are a stunning example of the UN’s failure in many places around the world. They are the tragic victims of a ruthless occupation that is limitlessly supported by the USA administration, leaving the UN just a crippled witness to daily atrocities and violations of the basic rights of Palestinian children!

Palestinian children often lack proper health care<sup>1</sup> and education. They are exposed to death (19% of all Palestinian deaths are children), loss of beloved, loss of home, detention, malnutrition, extreme poverty (at least one of every three children lives under the poverty level), and above all, obstruction of movement. There are more than 504 points obstructing movement, as a result of the annexation

wall, closures, and flying and permanent checkpoints.<sup>2</sup> In a recent article, Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether<sup>3</sup> says, “It is this system of separated Palestinian enclaves, turned into prisons surrounded by Israeli military who invade or bomb at will - enclaves cut off from each other, whose means of daily life have become increasingly restricted and impoverished - which Israel plans to institutionalize permanently.”

To really understand what rights our children are missing, let us reflect on some of their experiences under occupation in the West Bank. The Tamer Institute for Community Education, as part of its programs of empowering children and initiating some hope, conducted last year a series of workshops aiming for children to learn about their rights through non-formal education such as creative writing, drawing, group discussions and games. These children were shocked when they found out that children all over the world have rights! However, when they discovered that children have rights, they wondered why they could not enjoy them.

When asked to identify what rights they thought they had, the children responded, “To



live without occupation; not to be transferred out of Palestine; not to be hurt by soldiers; not to be handicapped; not to have our homes demolished; not to be attacked at a checkpoint while going to school; for our fathers to have work; to be able to visit relatives; to visit Jerusalem [they live a few kilometers away]; to go to the sea [Palestine is a Mediterranean country]; to keep our olive trees [thousands of trees have been uprooted]; not to have the zoo destroyed by the military.”

The question that torments us Palestinians is, when will international law be applied in Palestine so that children will be protected? Graca Machel summed the sad reality. When asked by Palestinian children who attended the UNGASS in 2002 what the UN can do to end their misery, Machel was very frank and emotional, saying that the UN can do nothing, because the only superpower controls the situation!

The majority of us question whether compassion is dying and whether humanity is losing ground to the ruthless power of the military monster and the multinational corporations. We fully affirm the saying of psychologist and writer Erik Erikson, “We ought to regard the breaking of a child’s spirit as a sin against humanity.”

However, seeds of optimism grow when we recollect the solidarity movement around the world and the struggle of human rights activists, grassroots organizations, and religious institutions in support of Palestinian children’s rights and the rights of every child in the world. Another reason for hope is the struggle launched by the Palestinian community to try to guarantee basic education and all means of learning (formal and non-formal), in addition to remedial education and psycho-social activities. Palestinians believe that the struggle for education is a struggle for liberation, and that Palestinians are not only victims but also social activists struggling at different levels



to bring social transformation to their people.

One prominent institute that cherishes programs that empower children and youth is Tamer Institute for Community Education. Two of its main programs are the reading campaign, and the development

“  
Every child comes  
with the message that  
God is not yet  
discouraged of man.

”

*Rabindranath Tagore*

of children’s literature and the publication of quality books. “By promoting the habit of reading among children and youth, we will be contributing to developing their knowledge, their skills in the field of language, expressive writing, imagination, perception, critical thinking, and reasoning,

thus contributing to their empowerment.”<sup>4</sup> Tamer has great success with an annual competition where children write and illustrate their first book; the best stories are published each year. Another empowering process is a bi-monthly supplement published in a daily paper, *Yara’at* (youth magazine of creative writing), whose editorial team is the youth themselves. Already this magazine has resulted in a mushrooming of young writers.

In addition, activists for children’s rights in Palestine have been calling for an “International Campaign to Protect Palestinian Children” by enforcing the implementation of the CRC and the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, and supporting the struggle to put an end to Israeli occupation. We are confident that the catastrophic situation in Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories will motivate all human rights activists to embrace and respond to this vital appeal.

*Jehan Helou is President of the Palestinian Section of the International Board of Books for Youth.*

1 Palestinian children are short for their age; they are anaemic, have iodine and vitamin A deficiency, according to Najwa Rizkallah, a Nutrition Officer at UNICEF.

2 OCHA, April 2006.

3 Rosemary Radford Ruether, “ ‘We have No One to Talk To’: Israel’s Targeted Assassination Policy”, public lecture, May, 28, 2006, Ramallah, West Bank.

4 Jehan Helou, “The Struggle for Books is: A Struggle for Liberation,” This Week in Palestine, Feb. 2005.



# IN THE OLD CITY OF HEBRON

by Christina Gibb

Mark 9:42 "If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea." (NRSV)

A two-year-old boy runs down a slope to greet us. We call "*Marhaba, habibi*" ("Hi, little one"), and he takes my hand, kisses it and touches it to his forehead, then runs back home again. When we visit families we meet many lively and engaging children.

Every day during school term we are out on the street in Hebron making sure that the children are getting to school safely. They have so much to contend with, which has become normal for them. We see them threading their way between concrete blocks and army vehicles at intersections. Little kindergarten children, with their small, brightly coloured school bags, dwarfed by army personnel carriers, jeeps and humvees. We see them stopped to go through a cabin with a metal detector. The boys emerge with their belts in their hands, as the buckles set the alarm beeping. The girls, supported by their teachers, have often protested and said they will not go through. Once the soldiers stopped every child and searched their bags there, as well as making them go through the cabin, so that there was a build-up of 70 boys waiting - and finally getting through late for school. We see their teachers detained to have their IDs checked for half an hour, or even an hour, although the soldiers recognise them, as they go through every

day at the same time.

On Shabbat (Saturday) when the Israeli settler children have no school, settler boys and girls are on the 'settler-only' street. The Palestinian children have to cross this street and run the gauntlet of stones thrown at them by settlers. Up the street on Tel Rumeida, old, established Palestinian families live next to settlers, who have moved in during the last 25 years. Settlers habitually throw rubbish into their Palestinian neighbours' backyards; cut down, break or poison their grape vines; stop their access to their homes with razor wire; and turn the walk home from school into a daily hazard.

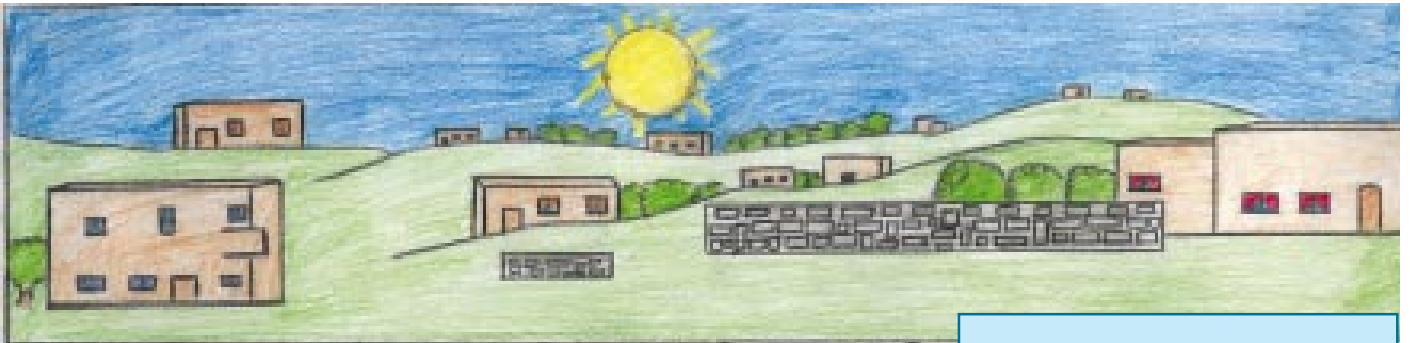
One little girl we met last week was afraid to go home because a soldier had chased her with his gun pointed at her. A boy was beaten up by settlers who wrongly accused him of stealing an air pump. A seven-year-old boy had been in hospital with bad bruising and a broken arm after a beating by settlers. He still has

nightmares four months later. Often we are told about soldiers invading people's homes at night. The family is herded into one room while the soldiers either trash the contents of the house, or search for arms, or spend the night on the roof, or make themselves at home inside for several hours. The soldiers have been doing this more often, we have heard, since the Hamas victory in the elections, as they are afraid that even if there were no arms last week, or ever before, there might be now.

One of the effects of the continuing occupation and oppression is the breakdown of normal social mores. There have always been Palestinian street boys who harass us internationals as we come and go from our apartment and up to the market and shops. Everything from calling out for a shekel, or a dollar, to cries of 'Welcome - f...k you', to blocking our way, grabbing at bottoms, even muggings, taking cameras or cell phones. Recently this seems to have become worse.



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## THE SEPARATION WALL AND THE ISRAELI ARMY'S ATTACKS ON THE 'ANATA SECONDARY BOYS' SCHOOL

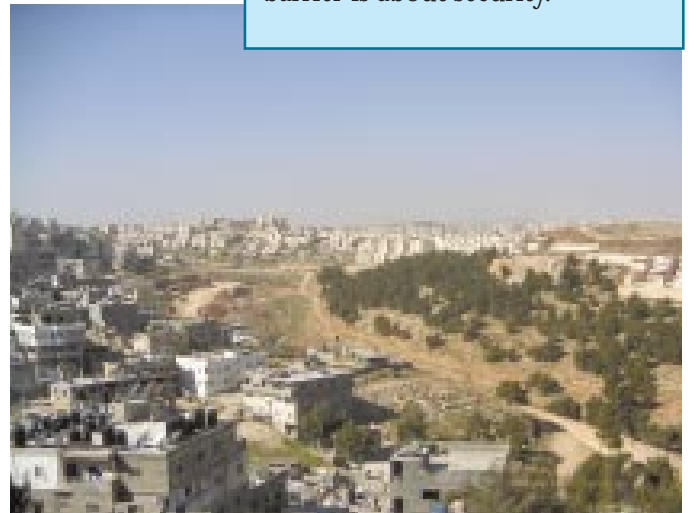
The erection of the separation wall was completed on September 28, 2005 under the pretext of security. The question arises: how can there be security when the wall is built on the grounds of an educational institution where children are seeking education and knowledge? In order to build the wall, the Israeli army confiscated almost 75% of the school playground. Many legal and humanitarian

organizations (both local and international) tried to stop the building of the wall through the school playground, but to no avail.

On December 15, 2005, which coincides with International Human Rights Day, the 'Anata Secondary Boys' School held a Day of Solidarity with the school against the building of the wall. Students expressed their rejection

### HISTORY OF 'ANATA

Once a flourishing agricultural village, 'Anata is one of the twenty-six villages that were annexed, together with East Jerusalem, to Israel after the war in 1967. Two-thirds of its land has been confiscated for the building of four large Israeli settlements around what is left of the village. Directly across the valley from the 'Anata Boys' School looms another large settlement, Pisgat Ze'ev. From their school windows, children can see the neat, new buildings of the settlement, which contrast greatly with the poor homes of the Shu'afat refugee camp, on the adjacent hill. In this context, it is difficult to imagine that this barrier is about security.



of the wall through speeches and drama that portrayed the extent of the violation of their right to education, freedom, security, and peace of mind.

A large number of people were present. They came from government (Palestinian) and civic organizations, from human rights and legal organizations, from the Palestinian Ministries of Education and Higher Education, from local NGO's, and from the families of some of the students. Everyone expressed shock and disbelief at the erection of the wall.

In addition to the building of the separation wall, the Israeli army interferes with the educational process on an almost daily basis. There are attacks on students and teachers, tear gas, percussion grenades, arrests, beatings, attempts at breaking into classrooms, and various kinds of harassment. The school principal and the staff very often have to act as human shields to protect students on their way to and from school. There are always rumors of closing down the school altogether and even of shelling it.

This plea is sent out by the student council of the 'Anata Secondary Boys' School. "We ask people of goodwill to intervene on our behalf and to stop this aggression which is now taking the form of disrupting the final exams.

*by members of the Student Council of the 'Anata Secondary Boys' School*

# CHILDREN IN GAZA

*by Allyn Dhynes*

On Friday, June 9, Huda Ghali, a 12 year old girl, lost seven of her family members as shells hit while they were picnicking on the Gaza beach, . Tragic news such as this is all too common in Gaza. While the outside world looks on to such events and becomes inured to them, it is rather with outrage and an incensed attitude that such events should be received. The following is a call to action to end the senseless bloodshed that children in the Holy Land are experiencing, for the sake of Huda and all children crying out for us to find a way to wipe away their tears. "Huda: 'They should stop shelling us with shells and missiles. We want to play just like the [rest of the] children in the world and feel free and safe.' She then burst into tears and could not continue speaking." [Translated from an Al-Quds Newspaper interview.]

Children in Gaza are growing up in one of the harshest settings in the world. Their situation, just as it was for several generations before them, is impacted by the effects of military occupation and very tight external restrictions on movement of people and goods. Elections, redeployment of troops, and political posturing reap very few benefits for these children. On the contrary, while "peace in the Middle East" is talked about, rarely does it translate on the ground as these children have much more practical things to worry about. They go to overcrowded schools without

breakfast in their tummies and play outside with a real fear of rockets falling on them from the sky.

In addition to the violence, children have experienced the brunt of the humanitarian crisis. According to the World Food Programme one out of two people in the occupied territories are food insecure, meaning they do not know where the next meal is coming from. With over half of the Palestinian population below the age of 18, this disproportionately impacts children most. In Gaza where bird flu has been found, many families have not had poultry in months and more than 65 percent of its inhabitants live under the poverty line of less than \$2 per day and cannot afford other meats. Children lack the necessary protein for proper growth, and chronic malnutrition has increased by 10 percent since last year.

The worst may be yet to come. The recent budget crunch on the Palestinian National Authority (caused primarily by a boycott by international government donors) has caused tremendous financial strain on the people of Gaza, and most severely impacts the children.

It is obvious that humanitarian responses must be found to address these growing needs of children. World Vision, like other non-governmental, local and international agencies, are working to deal with the most immediate needs

caused by vast unemployment, lack of medical supplies, scarce basic food supplies, and violence. But equally important is addressing the root causes of these problems and calling on the diplomatic community to find a solution that considers the needs of every last child in Gaza as if they were their own. Right now parents can really only think about their daily survival rather than long-term opportunities for their child to thrive. We should not forget that even in their dire circumstances these parents share what every parent in the world wants for their child: every opportunity to grow up happy, healthy and fulfilled.

Let us exercise our instinct as parents and protect, nurture and work for what is a preferred future for children's rights in this land. A principled stance seeking justice, peace and ultimately redemptive reconciliation should be a driving factor in helping us adults take the right path forward. It is for all children of this conflict that we work towards that vision of a 'new Jerusalem' mentioned in Revelations 21:4 where God will "wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain..."

World Vision has consistently tried to highlight the impact the conflict is having on children in this land. We welcome all moves made towards the protection of Israeli and Palestinian children assuring that they are kept out of harms way. It is imperative to act to reverse the trend that has resulted in the deaths of approximately 121 Israeli children and approximately 724 Palestinian children in six years of conflict - remembering each soul is blameless and precious in the eyes of God.

*Allyn Dhynes is Advocacy, Peacebuilding, and Communications Team Manager for World Vision Jerusalem-West Bank-Gaza.*

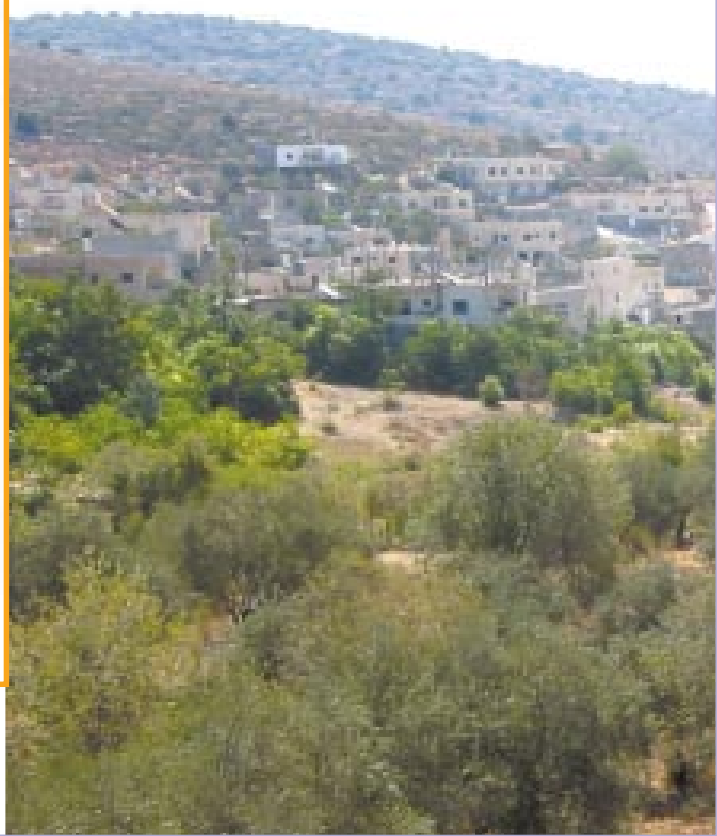


Wisam, Gaza Strip

## WADI FOUQIN

Once the breadbasket of the Bethlehem area, the lush, West Bank village of Wadi Fouqin sits just a few meters away from the Green Line. In 1948, the Israeli army forcibly evacuated the village, and in 1953 an Israeli border patrol unit destroyed all but a few houses in the town. Many villagers had taken refuge in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, which became extremely crowded in the early 1970s. In 1972 the refugees from Wadi Fouqin were told to go home.

Now, in 2006, the residents of Wadi Fouqin are concerned that their village will be destroyed again with the building of the Israeli separation barrier. The route of the barrier is planned to include a complex series of electric fences, razor wire, military patrol roads and trenches cutting off Wadi Fouqin from Bethlehem, nearby villages, and the rest of the West Bank.

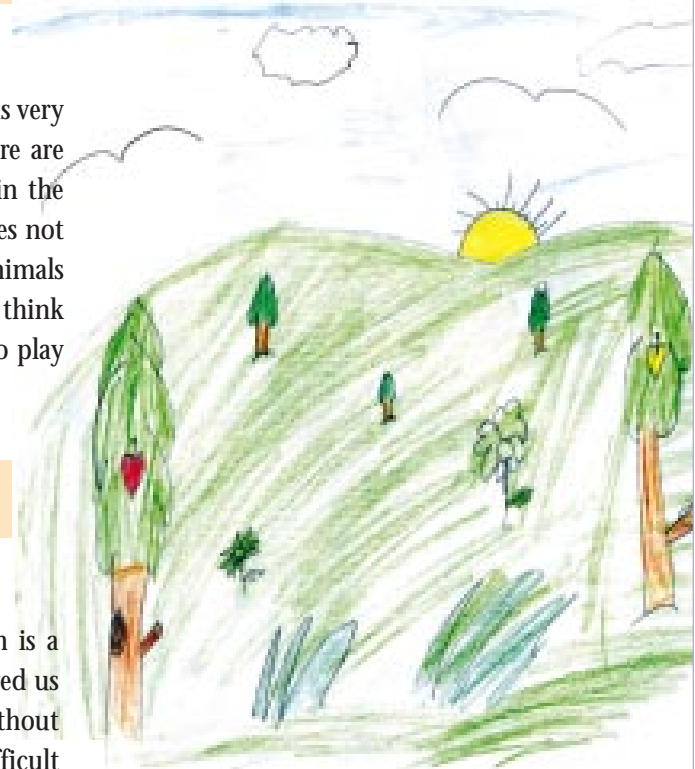


## STORIES FROM WADI FOUQIN

Muhammed, Wadi Fouqin

*by Wi'am*

My name is Wi'am. I am 9 years old, and I live in Wadi Fouqin. My village is very beautiful. It is sometimes called the green valley. Around my village there are beautiful hills and many springs of water. I love swimming and walking in the orchards around my village but cannot do that because the Israeli army does not allow us. In our village we have many house animals and also many wild animals and birds in the hills around, like gazelles and canaries. I love my school and think it is beautiful. I also love to watch children's programs on television and to play games with other children.



## THE OCCUPATION

*by Wala'*

My name is Wala', and I am 13 years old. I live in Wadi Fouqin, which is a Palestinian village. Our problem is the Israeli occupation, which has deprived us of a normal childhood like other children elsewhere who can enjoy life without fear from the Israeli army. When we are ill we need a permit - which is very difficult to acquire - to be able to visit a doctor. Many homes around here have been demolished and many children have been killed or have lost a parent or relative. Many people are in prison because of the occupation. Still we try to live our lives as best we can and get as much education as possible. Recently, the separation wall has started to be built around our village. We cannot even visit our relatives anymore. But we shall overcome and regain our freedom and live a normal life like other children of the world.

*by Raghda*

My name is Raghda. I am 9 years old, and I live in a little village called Wadi Fouqin. I am happy living with my parents and grandparents and with all my relatives nearby. I am also sad because my village is near an Israeli settlement. The settlers do not allow us to leave our village and so we are unable to go anywhere. We know very little of the outside world. I dream of going to the sea, the Red Sea or the Mediterranean. But I know that this is not going to happen because the Israeli army will not allow it.

I love my school. It is a beautiful school and we have very good teachers whom I love very much.



## Yara's Hopes and Dreams

by Yara, age 7

I am a little girl, having dreams  
I live somewhere in the world  
And have a mother,  
father, and brothers.  
Trying to learn from this life,  
Wondering is there any part  
of love...

Is there hatred and killing?  
I need freedom and hope.  
I love people and they  
got to love me.

I care for others so they  
got to care for me!

I want to enjoy playing  
with my little toy,

to go walking with no fear or cry.

I am a child and do not care  
about elders' affairs.

I want a teddy bear,  
to hug while sleeping on the stair.

With a smile

I care for my brother,

I don't like seeing my grieving  
mother.

I like to dream  
for a better future,

And I don't like killing or torture.

I love people everywhere,

I dislike those who find  
war and fear.

We can live in peace,  
if we have wisdom and real love.

- from "Children of Biblical Lands,"  
General Board of Global Ministries, the  
United Methodist Church, 2005, p. 11.



## JOINT EVANGELICAL ARAB SCOUTS, RAMALLAH

All children need places to play and have fun, outlets to express themselves, and teachers to discipline. Then the Israeli occupation of the West Bank threatens Palestinian children's experience of all of these things that comprise a normal and healthy childhood. The Joint Evangelical Arab Scouts seeks to address this vacuum created by the occupation.

*Yassu' el-maseeh noor el-'alam,* (Jesus Christ is the light of the world), declares the motto of the

Joint Evangelical Arab Scouts in Ramallah. Internationally recognized in 1997, this Anglican and Lutheran association of over one hundred boy and girl scouts seeks to develop in people of all ages: discipline, gentle leadership, love of the land, love of God and country, respect for elders, and service to others in every circumstance. These values are demonstrated in the Scout oath: "I swear to do my duty towards God and my country, to help people in all conditions, and to obey the rules of the scouts."



Activities of the Joint Evangelical Arab Scouts include summer camps, volunteer work, and participation in the annual Palm Sunday Procession from the Mount of Olives to the Old City. In recent years, the Scouts have held summer camps in Jifna village near Ramallah, in Gaza, and in Amman, Jordan. In 2001, two scouts traveled with a scout leader, Hani Jildeh, to Norway for an international summer camp. International activities such as these are especially important for children under occupation, who otherwise would not know any kind of life other than that of the occupation. This is one of the ways in which leaders of the Joint Evangelical Scouts encourage normal, healthy childhood experiences for Christian youth in Ramallah.



## THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE LIFE OF CHILDREN

*by Rima Nasir Tarazi*

As I approach this topic so close to my heart, several memorable images cross my mind. I can never forget the reception I used to be met with by the preschool children of Ina'sh El Usra<sup>1</sup>, to whom I was teaching music for several years. It was a veritable demonstration of enthusiasm which made me feel like a hero being hailed by a victorious army!

One day, two year old Samir, a toddler at the Day Care Center in the next room, was awakened by the singing of the kindergarten children. Barely awake, he started calling my name with a lisp, declaring in his own manner his intention to join the older children in their singing and

rhythmic movements. In his excitement he rushed to the music room with only one shoe on, refusing to wait for the assistant to put his other shoe on, and limped charmingly and rhythmically in the midst of the circle of the older singing children. This was an unforgettable moment!

Another memorable image is of those hundreds of children lugging their musical instruments and rushing after a long day at school to take a class or an exam or to join a serious music competition. Several years ago, this was a dream to be fulfilled and an idea to be advocated. Music was a luxury amidst the tribulations of a beleaguered people.

<sup>1</sup> a women's organization for support of the family





It took major steps and a great deal of effort to bring about change in this attitude and to convince the public that one of the most vital roles of music is precisely to enable human beings to face tribulations and to stand up to the challenges and difficulties of life.

The establishment of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM) in 1993 was very instrumental in propagating this vision, and in advocating music as an educational tool and as a means of enhancing children's mental and psychological development. The community, and especially parents, were soon to recognize this reality by witnessing the great impact music was having on the lives of their children.

Watching five-year-old Rand handling a cello almost double her size and six-year-old Sari blowing his lungs away with his trumpet is an unforgettable sight. Listening to nine-year-old competitors in the Marcel Khalife Music Competition, May on the flute, Sama and Carole on the violin, Jamila on the cello and Issa on the trumpet, all so full of the

joy of music, with the intent and seriousness of professional musicians, is one of the most heartwarming experiences.

“One of the most vital roles of music is, precisely, to enable human beings to face tribulations and to stand up to the challenges and difficulties of life.”



The power of music has been acknowledged by human societies since time immemorial in healing, in deepening religious feelings, and in communal ceremonies expressing a wide range of human emotions. Its power as an educational tool is being increasingly recognized and highly valued by educators and psychologists and cannot be overemphasized. Besides giving children the opportunity to express themselves, music inculcates several skills and qualities in children which

enhance their learning in all other fields. It teaches them coordination, discipline, cooperation, precision, the art of listening, and the perseverance and hard work necessary for producing or creating beauty. Moreover, through songs which deal with a variety of topics, children are inadvertently improving their linguistic capabilities, their sense of values, and their general knowledge.

It remains a great challenge for us, in Palestine, to train music teachers for our schools. This will demand huge financial and human resources which are scarce, especially at these times, when basic needs of food and medicine are hardly being met. Let us hope that sense and wisdom will one day prevail, so that both the physical and educational needs of our children will be fulfilled.

*Rima Nasir Tarazi, is President of the General Union of Palestinian Women .*



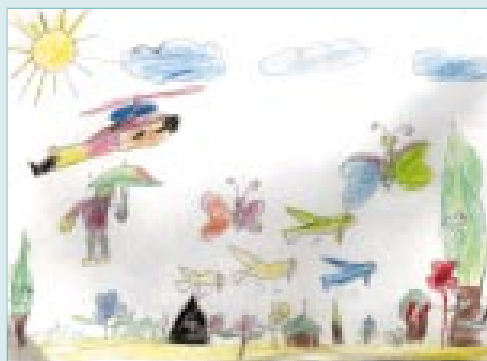
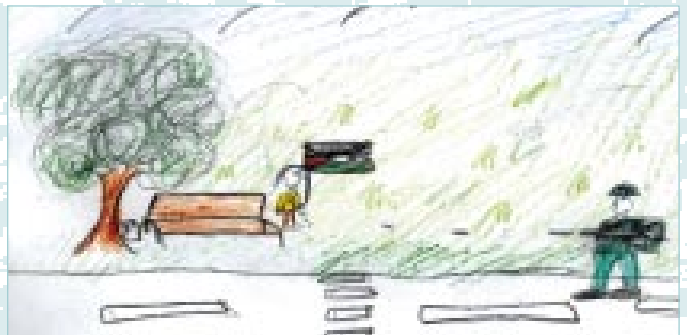
# CHILDREN'S IMAGES OF PEACE



## Prayer of Peace

Oh God,  
 Lead me from death to life,  
 from falsehood to truth;  
 Lead me from fear to hope,  
 from despair to trust;  
 Lead me from hate to love,  
 from war to peace;  
 Let peace fill our hearts,  
 our world, our universe;  
 Salaam, Shalom, Peace.

*Anonymous*



# A Biblical Reflection

## Jesus and the Little Children

by Naim Ateek

*Some people brought children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples scolded the people. When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)*

Children are the most vulnerable sector of every society. They are dependent on others and need protection and care. In Jesus' day and throughout history until recently, children had no rights legally. In war or in peace, they are the first to be abused and traumatized, at times even by members of their own family. Social sciences have alerted us to the horrendous abuses to which children are subjected and the lasting psychological and social damage it can cause.

Life under occupation and prolonged years of deprivation leave deep scars on children. Many Palestinian children have seen their parents and teachers insulted and humiliated by Israeli soldiers in public - something that is unthinkable in a traditional patriarchal society. The occupation is the great abuser. It has denied them their childhood. It has interrupted their education and obstructed their normal lives. It has brought fear and fright to their lives as they watched soldiers barging into their homes, searching, vandalizing, arresting, and even killing their loved ones. It has shaken the very

core of their beings with massive bombardments of their towns and refugee camps, the screeching of missiles and tank shells, fake air raids, and the frightening sound of sonic booms that leave them trembling with fear. The violent occupation has forced on Palestinian children a culture of violence that will take many generations to change and undo. The list of injury and damage to children and the denial of their rights has been endless and severe. The occupation has, simply put, destroyed their future.

Children are unable to deal with such traumas emotionally. They are hurt, afraid, angry, and bewildered. Such feelings can be repressed in a child's psyche for many years and leave indelible psychological scars that affect his/her personality and behaviour vis-à-vis others. In the context of Palestinian life, we need to remember that the Israeli occupation has been going on for the last 39 years. Every Palestinian 39 years of age or younger was born and brought up under an oppressive occupier's rule and its ramification. Many of them were

traumatized as children. It is likely that today some of them make up the core of the so-called extremists that defy, oppose, and resist the occupation violently.

I am sure that Jesus was aware of the vulnerability of the children in his society, whether as a result of the Roman occupation or from the social environment around. He was, therefore, indignant when he saw that the disciples turned the children away. Jesus asked them to come close to him. He took them in his arms, embraced them, and hugged them. He also blessed every one of them. What Jesus did is immeasurably more important and effective than any profound sermon one can preach on the importance of loving and caring for children. By putting his arms around them he communicated the greatest lesson the disciples as well as the men and women who were standing there needed — the importance of love and affection, care and protection, respect and worth of every one of those little ones.

Looking at the people around them, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15). In light of what is happening these days in Palestine, and the hurt and suffering of children, what does it mean for us adults to become like a little child? Ched Myers wrote, "To become like a child is to acknowledge the place and condition of the most vulnerable ones in our midst - our children. To be in compassionate solidarity with

children is to confront the roots of violence in our society.... To construct a truly non-violent life, we must weed out the structures and practices of violence at their roots in the most basic level of human community...we must rededicate ourselves to the struggle to convey God's blessing of children, so that children may have the life that they deserve" (Myers: Orbis, 1996). These words aptly apply to the situation in

Palestine. We believe that the root causes are the restricting, abusing, and oppressive occupation of the Palestinian community by the Israeli army. The traumatizing of Palestinian children is severe and the best environment for healing and wholeness is that of freedom. We must continue to insist and work for ending the illegal occupation.



*The Rev. Naim Ateek  
Director of Sabeel.*

## SABEEL'S 6TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

# “THE FORGOTTEN FAITHFUL: A WINDOW INTO THE LIFE AND WITNESS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE HOLY LAND”

November 2-9, 2006

Through lectures, workshops, worship, and excursions in the Holy Land, Sabeel's 6th International Conference will provide a unique opportunity to encounter the realities of Christians in Palestine and Israel.

- \* **History:** Consider the 2000 year presence of Christians in the Holy Land
- \* **Present Realities:** Critically examine the impact of the Israeli occupation on the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of Palestinian Christians
- \* **Personal Stories:** Hear from Christians about their challenges and aspirations
- \* **Muslim-Christian Relations:** Understand the relationships of Christians with their Muslim sisters and brothers
- \* **Partnership and Bridge Building:** Develop practical tools and ideas to support and empower Christians in Palestine and Israel.

Traveling conference program will include lectures and workshops with local and international speakers in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah and Nazareth, and visits with Christian communities in Ramallah and Upper Galilee villages. Meet your Christian brothers and sisters, learn about their history and present struggle, champion their just cause and advocate for peace and reconciliation for all people of the land.

**Registration Fees:** \$350 USD (or equivalent)

**Make checks for registration payable to Sabeel.**

Registration begins May 1, 2006.

See website for registration form: [www.sabeel.org](http://www.sabeel.org)

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## IN PERSON



Johnny, Joanne, Najie and Jessica

Najie, Johnny, Joanne, and Jessica have been friends for a long time. These Christian youth come together weekly at the Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center for trainings, trauma coping, workshops and discussion groups. These four remarkable teenagers recently talked about some of the challenges that teenagers face each day in Bethlehem.

Joanne Jamal (17), Jessica Ballout (16) and Johnny Ballout (15) agreed that one of the most challenging things for youth is the monotony of the daily routine. "We have no where to go to have fun. We love our families and we don't mind to stay at home, but we are teenagers. We get bored and we get restless."

This pattern of staying home is also very much influenced by the current political reality. "Our parents are afraid for us to leave the home. Especially after dark, it is not a good idea to go outside." Because the Israeli Army enters the Bethlehem area daily, many teenagers here feel they must be extra

cautious if they want to go out into the streets or even walk over to a friend's house. One never knows when the army might appear. Johnny said, "My brother (who is 15) and his friends were walking around one night at about 9:30. The soldiers came and took him. They released him a few hours later, but still it was very scary for all of us."

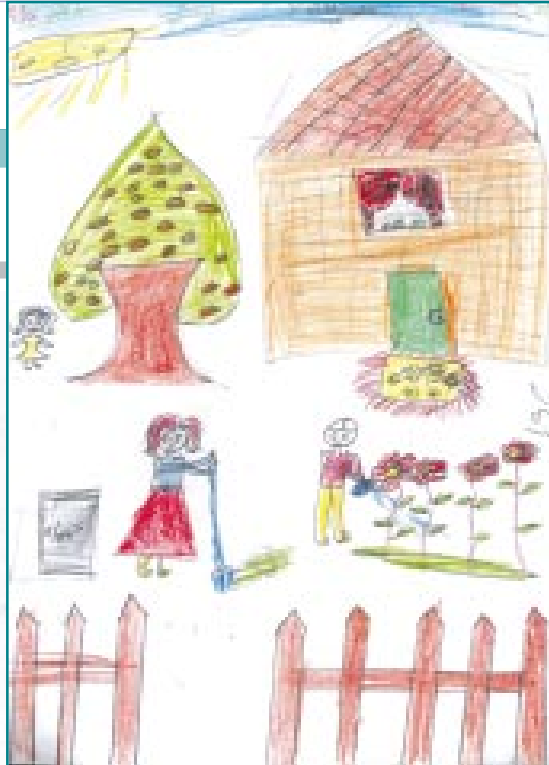
Najie Slaiby (17) agrees, "We feel like we are in a big prison. We cannot go anywhere. Even to try to travel to Jericho is difficult. It is like we are running inside of a wheel - always running, but always the same thing in front of us and nowhere else to go. The Israeli government says that only teenagers who are older than 16 need permits to travel to Jerusalem. But even if we don't need one, or even if we receive one, we still have to find an adult with a permit who can go with us." The boys last travelled to Jerusalem five months ago, but for the girls it has been much longer - one year for Jessica and three years for Joanne.

Given these difficult circumstances, they were asked about their hopes and dreams for the future. "People ask this question a lot, and it is good for us to talk about our dreams," says Joanne. "First of all, we want to live in peace. We want our freedom, and we want to live like teenagers do in the rest of the world. We want to travel, to see how other teens live, to see what it is like to live with your freedom. It is hard to

be hopeful here. Even though we dream of going to university, there are not that many opportunities after someone graduates here. Everyone graduates in all the same fields, so it is really difficult to find a job."

Johnny says that he wants to be an architect and he wants to study in Paris, "If we want to have more opportunities, then we have to go outside of the country." Jessica mentions that she dreams of travelling too one day. "But first we want them to take away the checkpoints so that we can travel in our own country. We want to visit other parts of Palestine," she states. "I think the future will be very bad here," Najie says. "Even if we study abroad, we cannot come back here and work in our field. We do not want to go away, but what will we do here? Where will we work? I don't really have much hope." Jessica adds one more important point, "We want people outside of Palestine to know that we are not terrorists. We are kind and loving and there are so many wonderful people around us."

Wanting to hear more about their impressions of friends and neighbors, we concluded our time together by talking about faith - personal faith as Christians, and the relationships between Christians and Muslims in Bethlehem. Joanne was the first to speak: "We are in the Christian family and it is all Christians together who teach us how to love one another. Our parents raised us to forgive each other. This is what we try to do. Sometimes it is hard because people do not realize that Palestinians are not just Muslims, but Christians too. But even though



we are the minority here, our Muslim friends are kind people... and they are suffering just like us.”

“In our faith justice is also important,” states Johnny. Jessica adds that all Christians in Bethlehem are very proud to live in the place where Christ was born. Najie explains that “many people need help here (in Bethlehem). We learn that the more that you give, the more that God gives. It is God’s will for us to help others... Most of my friends are Muslim and I like them very much. They help me realize how to face my problems and struggles. We learn from each other. Sometimes we place ourselves into groups of just Christians or just Muslims, but that is normal. We are all still friends.”

Joanne expressed in a beautiful way the experience of these teenagers. “We hope that other people will have the faith not to kill us or shell us or shoot at us... that they will have the faith to stop arresting so many people. I hope they will have the faith to know just what they are doing... because we are human beings and we have our rights... We are human beings too.”

*by Ashley Wilkinson, United Methodist Mission Intern  
Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center*

## The definition of occupation...\*

*by Abdelnasser Rashid*

Occupied, terrorized, genocide - while the whole world is hypnotized,  
Sixty years, incessant tears - no day passes by without countless fears,  
For our lives, our wives, our children’s cries - yet the world turns away, and our spirits die,  
For my land, I do stand - but I remain hopeless without a helping hand,  
Oppression, suppression, depression - every aspect of my life, you’ve taken possession,  
Our weapons are stones, to protect our homes - but your bulldozers win and terror roams,  
Yours are tanks, helicopters, and military jeeps - to kill the young man, as his mother weeps,  
You control our electricity, you control our seas - you control our streets, and uproot our trees,  
You close our schools, our children can’t learn - you deny the refugees their right to return,  
Suffering orphans, under your persecution - when they rise up, they face execution,  
Families are separated, and farmers recall - the land they lost, by your Apartheid Wall,  
Through your ‘diplomacy’, and your foreign relations - you attempt to justify and give credence to your occupation,  
Palestine is my land, and I won’t let you take it - and while you put the world to sleep, I try to wake it.

*Abdelnasser Rashid is in 11th grade.*

\* This poem refers to the occupation using some strong language that Sabeel does not necessarily endorse, but it is one child’s articulation of his experience.





## STATISTICS

- From September 28, 2000 (the beginning of the second Intifada) to May 27, 2006: **746 Palestinian children were killed** in clashes, air and ground attacks, assassination attempts, open gun fire, closures, unexploded ordnances, and home demolitions.
- As of May 27, 2006: **388 Palestinian children are currently held in detention.**

*Defence for Children International - Palestine Section, [www.dci-pal.org/english/home.cfm](http://www.dci-pal.org/english/home.cfm).*

- According to the PNA Department of Planning and Statistics, **3,000 Palestinian children have been arrested** since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000.
- According to Israeli military orders, **Palestinian children are treated, tried and sentenced** as adults beginning from the age of sixteen. In practice, Palestinian child prisoners may be charged and sentenced in Israeli military courts from the age

of 12. Such orders violate international, as well as Israeli juvenile law, which define children as eighteen or younger.

- The PNA Department of Planning and Statistics reported that ninety-nine percent of child prisoners were subject to inhumane treatment including torture, solitary confinement and overcrowded cells. They are deprived of sleep, adequate education, medical treatment, family visits and recreational programs.

According to a Birzeit University Study (2004) on primary school students in the occupied Palestinian territories:

- 45% [of students] witnessed their school besieged by Israeli troops
- 25% witnessed their school exposed to firing or shelling
- 18% witnessed troops kill a school mate
- 13% witnessed the killing of a teacher in school
- 45% witnessed violence in school on a daily basis over the past year
- 37% were exposed to physical violence
- 51% used physical violence against school mates
- 44% of teachers used physical punishment against students
- 52% of fathers and 60% of mothers resort to physical punishment of children
- 55% of domestic violence victims said they'd keep it a secret

Palestinian children hope for a better future. In a survey of about 4,300 Palestinian youths aged 10-24:

- 58.9% say their first concern is education
- 13.3% use the computer and 5.8% the Internet
- 91% say they are optimistic about the future





*Continued from Page 3*

We realised we needed to take a positive initiative towards them to turn things round. An opportunity arose last week when there was a CPT delegation staying here, so there were fourteen of us, instead of three. We all went along to the park - the one big open space in the Old City - gathering up a following of children, as we went. Then the CPTers spread out and each started different games with a group of them. There must have been 70 or more children there, and we all enjoyed it immensely. There have been noticeably more genuine smiles and friendliness since.

The Palestinian economy has become so broken down that people are forced to take desperate measures to secure any income they can. Our street, once the lively chicken market, is cut off by a barrier fence and concrete wall just past our door. It is now a dead end where few people other than ourselves and our visitors come. The rooftops opposite are permanently occupied by the Israeli army, and those houses are empty. For some time, Palestinian boys have been salvaging copper from ancient abandoned TV sets, which they smash up in the street near our door. Then it started to escalate: they stripped wiring from the outsides of the empty buildings. Next they were on the roofs pulling down aerials and iron pipes.

Two days ago we came home to find them throwing the heavy metal window frames, which they had wrenched out of the empty houses, down into the street. The soldiers on duty on the roof were looking on. The boys told us: 'The soldiers said we can take anything we like'. Our neighbour remonstrated them, and said she would tell the owner of the house, but one boy asked 'If they want the stuff why don't they come and live here?' But the owners, who moved out when the army took over, cannot easily come into



the Old City, and don't have access to their houses. Palestinian police cannot operate in this army-controlled area, and Israeli police do not come in here either.

This evening as I write, I hear some loud crashes. Looking out from the balcony, I can just see where a boy is pushing a large square tank (a water tank, maybe) off a roof. They have found a good source of money: 500 shekels from one afternoon's work, we were told. Palestinian Authority funds are still cut off, and many families have had no pay since February - so I'm sure any income helps.

Who is putting stumbling blocks in the way of these children, turning some of

them from enchanting two-year-olds into tough, street kids a few years later? And are we, too, part of the problem, living in the midst of them, but not acting effectively to channel all their energy, and encouraging them in constructive directions? We have thought of our peacemaking work primarily in terms of the wider conflict - the Israeli Occupation, and violence by settlers and soldiers against the Palestinians. But there is also peacemaking work to be done right here on our doorstep, as we witness firsthand the breakdown of society that persistent oppression brings.

*Christina Gibb, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Hebron.*

Sabeel wishes to congratulate  
**The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek**  
 upon his receiving the Episcopal Peace Fellowship Sayre Award  
 on June 17<sup>th</sup> in Columbus, Ohio.  
**Mabrouk, Assis!**

# THE IMPACT OF ISRAELI OCCUPATION ON THE EDUCATION OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN

*by Jacqueline Sfeir*

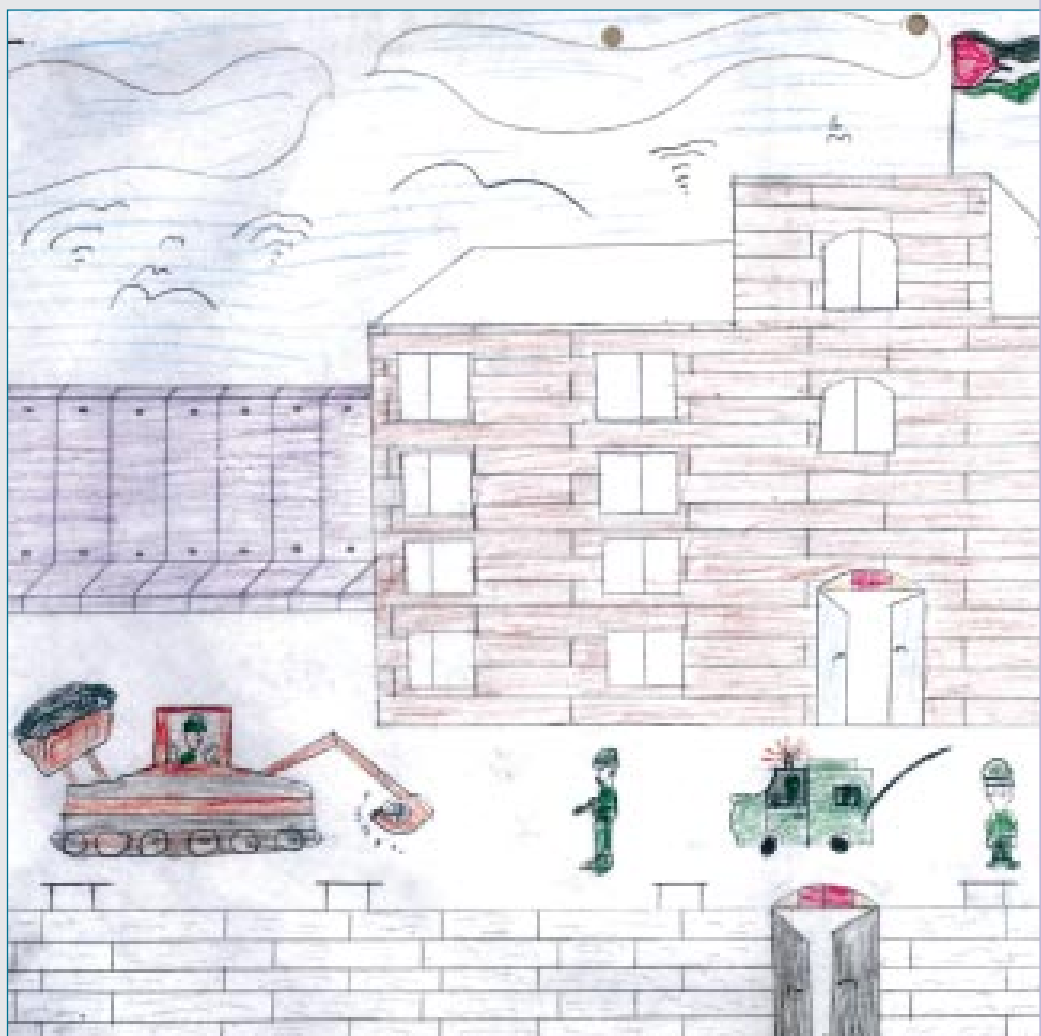
The impact of the Israeli occupation on the education<sup>1</sup> of Palestinian children can be best described through how it is affecting the personality development and identity of the Palestinian children living in the Palestinian territories (borders of 1967 - Gaza and the West Bank).

Culture and education have been targeted over the thirty-nine years of occupation. The first plan of attack on the "Palestinian Identity" was directed at the culture. Israeli raids on bookstores and never ending list of "banned books" characterized the first decade of Israeli occupation. Most of the bookstores in the occupied territories (including East-Jerusalem) have since been converted to stationary shops. Homes as well as cultural centers were raided, books confiscated and people sentenced to prison or exiled for owning "banned books..." In less than two decades the detrimental impact of this policy (as well as the increasing and diverse forms of harassment of the Palestinian Intelligence) produced what was later labeled as the "Palestinian Brain Drain".

Palestinian educators in the late 1980s commented on how the

Intifada<sup>2</sup> served to expose the extent to which the Palestinian school system had deteriorated. They reported how through the first two decades the Israeli occupation acted to impede the quantitative and qualitative development of the

school system. The extended, recurrent and arbitrary school closures were characteristic of the Israeli policies to thwart the first Intifada, while road closures, occupation of schools and the cantonization of the Palestinian



territories are characteristic of the second Intifada. The accumulated effect of all these strategies left the Palestinian education system with more than it can handle.

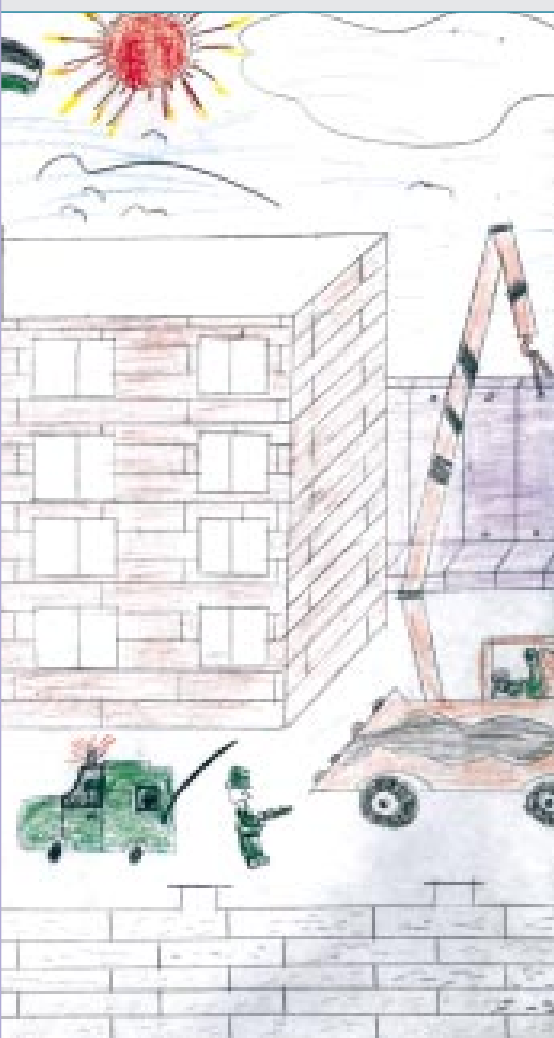
Automatic promotion<sup>3</sup> was enforced to defuse the problems that would be caused by retention (the infrastructure of the schools could not cope with the increase in numbers), and no remedial plans were drawn to make up for the



students' lack of academic readiness to proceed. The deterioration of the students' level of knowledge and skill; the lack of enrichment activities, and the absence of a "cultural life" all come together to create the extremely challenging task that the Palestinian system of education has to cope with under the duress of an occupation determined to fulfill its objective of annexing the land without the people. The separation wall comes to consolidate this long term strategy which is

aimed towards silently eroding what remains of the "Palestinian National Identity", and reduce it to an incoherent sense of belonging to an entity that does not really exist outside the immediate geographic area of residence. The violence hidden behind the political smoke screen is vicious and is eating away every hope for a peaceful and just peace for Palestine.

*Dr. Jacqueline Sfeir, is the program director of Madad.*



by a student of 'Anata school of the schoolyard

1 Education in the broader sense refers to the formal and informal levels of education; it can be perceived as the process through which a culture perpetuates itself (the traditional approach), or as the process where the adults support the overall growth and development of the child (the constructivist/social constructivism view of education).

2 The use of the Arabic term to refer to the "Palestinian popular resistance movement" has served as a double edged sword. On one hand it

unified the Palestinian front, on the other it left an opening for Israeli and the Pro-Israeli media to give it the "illegitimate" slant associated with "anarchy" and violence targeting the Israeli society.

3 Automatic Promotion is a term used to refer to the promotion of pupils from one grade level to the next regardless of whether or not they have succeeded in achieving the minimum level of success at the particular grade level.

## Purpose Statement *of* Sabeel

*Sabeel* is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

*Sabeel* also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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