

Annual Report Arab Educational Institute

Continuing the Sumud

1/9/2015-30/8/2016

Sumud

The Arabic concept of *sumud*, literally steadfastness, guides the youth' and women's work at AEI. At the time the concept started to become widely used in the Palestinian national movement in the occupied West Bank, at the end of the 1970s, its meaning was rather static. *Sumud* primarily meant the determination to stay on the land, not to leave, despite the Israeli occupation. Over the years the concept has come to increasingly stress the *inner* strength of people to cling to their home, not in despair but in dignity - with the feet standing on the ground and the head kept high. How to strengthen this inner power in the face of a never-ending occupation which leaves diminishing living space for the Palestinians who are surrounded by no-travel zones, settlements, checkpoints and borders? How to hope against hope? This was the question which AEI again faced in the school/academic year 2015-6. We addressed it in four programs each of which deals with a combination of different target groups:

1. Inter-religious (Moslem-Christian) and community program
2. Youth and children
3. Women and family
4. Visitors and events.

In all the programs AEI builds upon the power of bringing people together and communicating their voices and stories.

Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together

In the central West Bank, with its significant presence of Palestinian Christians among a majority of Moslem Palestinians, one strategy we applied has been the strengthening of living together among the *religions* in Palestine. At present AEI collaborates with the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority at some 30 schools in the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas on a project called "Citizenship and diversity: Christian-Moslem living together." Moslem and Christian teenagers of 14-16 years share religious lessons to learn about each other's religion. They visit each other's celebrations, take part in fieldtrips to both Moslem and Christian sites, and write stories about how Moslems and Christians in Palestine express solidarity and have supported each other in daily life or in time of emergencies. The students are encouraged to appreciate the land, its religious sites and communities, to have faith in the future, and to foster individual and community *sumud*. They collect and write down stories of generosity and hospitality across religious borders.

The following table shows the main activities of this program:

Type of activity	Number of activities	Number participants	Explanation
Joint religious studies lessons	At least 6 lessons a semester at 30 schools	938	Having joint inter-religious lessons is unique in the Arab world and helps respect and understanding
Joint planning and evaluation workshops	One-day teacher workshops in Bethlehem and Ramallah at the beginning and end of the school year	60 + officials of Ministry of Education	Giving a chance to Moslem and Christian religious studies teachers to discuss the project and socialize
Teacher workshops on methodologies of teaching (inter-)religious studies	60 workshop hours, in Bethlehem and Ramallah	60, all teachers + official Ministry	Focusing on student-centered methodologies, like drama-in-education, Read-Reflect-Communicate-Act, and playing out moral dilemmas
Development materials	Development of a book with 70 student stories	Students with best stories participated	Book tells stories of Moslem-Christian living together in the home, among neighbors, at school, in the community.
Fieldtrips to Moslem and Christian places	11 fieldtrips for students and for teachers, as well as staff of Ministry of Education Separate teacher fieldtrip	1349 students and 123 accompaniers 38 teachers and officials	At the holy sites, the youth performed brief acts of creative learning, such as storytelling, drama, discussion, and filming.
Joint religious ceremonies and festivities	4 times, at Christmas, Ramadan, and the Prophet's Birthday	400-500	The ceremonies featured cultural performances, choir singing, socializing and hospitality.

The interreligious and community program was made possible last year by subsidies of: Misereor, Kindermissionswerk, Cafod, Church in Action, Archdiocese Munich, and Solidariteitsfonds.

Youth Media House

AEI has two premises in Bethlehem: the Youth Media House in the center of town, and the Sumud Story House.

Some 50 youth came on weekly base together In the Youth Media House to discuss issues of Palestinian youth life and share communication projects in the fields of arts, nonviolent communication, and physical activities. Important was the activities moving beyond the normal school patterns in the West Bank and Gaza which often require students to learn by rote. Instead, the youth were challenged in the Youth Media House to develop inner strength by thinking critically, acting creatively, and communicating effectively.

The Youth Media House hosted the following groups for weekly meetings outside the holiday periods:

Group	Age	Main activities	Size group
Kids	6-12	Weekly meetings with crafts and arts, celebrations at religious and national days, drama training.	25 - 30
Teenagers	12-17	Weekly training on different topics, discovering the Palestinian Christian mission, Q & A contest, celebrations on different social, religious and national occasions, Moslem-Christian living together, BBQs.	15 - 20
Students- young professionals	18-30	Weekly training on different topics, Neuro-Linguistic Prgramming course, Wall Info Center, Q & A contests, celebrations different social, religious and national occasions, BBQs.	15 - 20
Choir	14-17	Training on the different musical instruments, composing lyrics and music, performing in different occasions such as Christmas, in meetings with visitor groups and at the Wall.	10

A major activity in March 2016 was a three-day educational workshop about the meaning of Palestinian Christian life in the Holy Land, and why it is important for the younger generation to keep the connection with the land and the community, to stay *sumud*. Is it possible to develop a positive spiritual life mission, with all the odds

seemingly against you? Each of the youth wrote down a mission statement, and talked about the stories of their life.

Another youth group of 10 teenagers used traditional Palestinian music and lyrics to communicate the vibes of present-day Palestinian life. The music group had their training sessions with music trainer Jeries Babish. They performed 3 songs in front of the Separation Wall near Aida Camp. After a while, the youth started to compose their own songs and music.

During the summer, the youth and children program developed a two-week activity program for the kids groups as well as groups with teenagers, postgraduates and young professionals in cooperation with the Greek-Catholic school in Beit Sahour. The participants included 90 kids (4-12 years) from the school and AEI kids group, as well as 20 participants from AEI's other youth groups (15-30 year). Three weeks of different activities and workshops were offered by 5 specialist trainers covering the fields of sports, drama, music, modern dance, *dabkah*, Arts, social media use, and English language courses – the last offered by two volunteering nuns from India. Six local and international volunteers were around to assist in facilitation.

The Youth Media House developed several media products for the different programs such as videos for the abovementioned 'Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together' project. See the end of this report for an overview of videos developed during the school year.

In an activity started the previous year, AEI's group of teenagers organized 4 radio programs together with the local station Amwaal. Guided by Bethlehem University teacher Ussama Khaliliyeh the youth discussed various subjects relevant to their life, such as freedom, smoking and drugs, politics, and teenagers and sexual education.

The following organizations supported the program: Friends of Young Bethlehem, Children Stamps, small projects budget SCR 1325 in the Netherlands, and Association pro Terra Sancta.

Sumud Story House

The Sumud Story House is located near the Bethlehem-Jerusalem checkpoint and the Wall around Rachel's Tomb. (Rachel's Tomb is a holy place in north Bethlehem annexed to Israel and walled in, made practically inaccessible for Palestinians).

At the Sumud Story House 5 women groups including a large choir as well as a family group came again regularly together for their weekly meetings dealing with a wide range of social, cultural, psychological and religious topics. Like the youth groups, the women groups have a mixed Moslem-Christian composition, and focus on community building and developing voices and stories.

Some background is in need here. Initially the Sumud Story House started in response to the building of the Wall in the Rachel's Tomb area in 2003-5. Several women members of AEI lived there and asked themselves and AEI what to do about this terrible Wall which not only separates and robs Palestinians from their land but also creates an ongoing psychological experience of being under siege. Around 2007-8 AEI staff went in the neighborhood from door to door to invite women to join the groups at the House, and to ask for mutual solidarity vis-a-vis the violence of the Wall.

In the context of the ongoing three-year international project on '*Women and Youth against Violence*' – with partners from the Netherlands, Palestine and Iraq –the women of the House linked up this year with women in the countryside of the Bethlehem area, especially from the village of Al-Walajah. They jointly dialogued with local Palestinian authorities, police, security people as well as Moslem and Christian religious authorities and challenged them to give higher priority to women's rights and security.

The particular strength of this project has been the opening up of platforms in which common women, Moslem and Christian, can meet, dialogue with, and challenge authority representatives some of whom in their turn became ambassadors of the project. The overall purpose was the implementation of UN security council resolution 1325, which urges UN members to support women's participation and leadership in the context of conflicts and security issues. As output, a series of 5 radio episodes on women and security was prepared and broadcast over 3 months twice a week by Radio Mawwal (101.7 FM) in Bethlehem, facilitated by AEI and the women's groups members.

In addition to the women's groups, AEI hosts a family group which convenes on monthly base and in which the women of the House bring their male family members.

In overview, the Sumud Story House hosted the following groups:

Group-background	Main activities	Group size
Experienced women's group	Meetings and workshops on life skills, communication skills, Moslem-Christian living together, gender relations, parenting, current news	30
Young women's group	Meetings on life skills, communication skills, gender relations, Moslem-Christian living together	9
Teacher women's group	Methodologies of teaching and learning	15
Rachel's Tomb area's women's group	Meetings and workshops on life skills, communication skills, Moslem-Christian living together,	20

	current news, parenting, gender relations	
Women's choir	Rehearsals and performances (9 during last school year, mainly in the larger Bethlehem region)	20
Violence against women project	Dialogues with religious leaders and security authorities about gender and human security	27
Family group	Meetings on life skills, communication skills, Moslem-Christian living together, gender issues, parenting	60

Note that the 'violence against women' group and the choir consist of members from other groups. The family group consists of women from the experienced women's group who bring their male family members, including spouses.

During 10 days in September 2015 AEI hosted for a week two social counsellors from the Netherlands, Janny van Heerbeek and Geraldien Blokland, who gave several training sessions about parenting for women's groups at AEI and in some villages and camp.

Ghada Zeidan of Palestine Link (Netherlands) gave a three-day training in January to women and youth volunteer activists in the context of the new Wall Information Center (see below, under the visitor and events program).

In April-May, members of AEI's youth and women groups followed two 4-day courses on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). The courses were given by Sytse and Marlies Tjallingii, two Quakers from the Netherlands with a long experience in giving such courses in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and elsewhere. NLP aims to help participants to communicate effectively and to reach goals in life.

The following organizations supported the women's and family program: Church in Action, Cordaid and PAX, small projects budget SCR 1325 in the Netherlands, and Children Stamps.

Visitor and events program

All AEI groups – youth, women, family, school communities – helped to prepare and organize the events which are part of AEI's last program: encouraging meetings with visitors and organizing community events.

Besides weekly meetings and workshops on non-violent communication and arts work, the women and youth of AEI met some 15 foreign visiting groups interested to learn

about daily life in Bethlehem. This year we received groups from Germany, Netherlands, Austria, and the UK.

As a peace organization, AEI has over the years been particularly active in developing symbolic protest activities next to the Wall. Inspired by the example of cultural protest movements against the Wall in cities like Berlin and Belfast, AEI has undertaken many public activities challenging the Wall, often together with international visitors and in collaboration with other Palestinian Christian organizations. Examples: a piano concert under a military watchtower, prayer and silence sessions, a living Christmas star of people carrying torches, a musical dialogue across walls from roofs and balconies (RAP music, trumpets, drums), an Arab coffee play expressing hospitality in an inhospitable environment, choir singing, and since 2009 an annual Sumud Festival. This year the festival, with various cultural performances, was held during an evening in June next to the Wall near the Sumud Story House, with an attendance of all AEI groups and some visitors and interested people from the neighborhood.

In 2011, AEI started to develop a 'Wall Museum' made up of large thin-metal posters on the Wall with human stories of Palestinian *sumud*. The stories, sponsored by donors abroad, narrate the strength to outwit soldiers, not to succumb to occupation, a life mission of raising a family, or keeping dignity in humiliating situations. In 2015, AEI expanded the Wall Museum on the other, western side of Rachel's Tomb, near Aida refugee camp, with lively youth stories and photos as well as children fantasies.

During the school year 2015-6, French and Dutch volunteers helped together with AEI's youth groups to clean up a certain area of the Wall Museum near Aida camp. During a human rights day in May besides the Wall, they helped to have youth doing cultural and sports activities next to the Wall to express their right to freedom of movement, and to fix some wish boxes on the Wall ('wishing the Wall away') next to a section with a display of wishes by international Pax Christi members. In addition, Pax Christi International asked to have the conclusions of the 2015 PC Assembly in Bethlehem on Wall posters in English and Arabic.

It is maybe interesting to add that it recently happened that the Israeli army came at 2:00 in the morning to document the Wall poster stories nearby the Sumud Story House. Over a period of two hours, a soldier read the stories in English, another translated them into Hebrew, and a third kept the recorder in his hand.

In the long run, it is AEI's objective to further develop educational activities about and near the Wall.

Wall Information Center

A new initiative in 2015-6 was the establishment of a Wall Information Center at the Sumud Story House, staffed by youth and women volunteers. The Center supports the implementation of security council resolution 1325 on women participation and

leadership in conflicts and in issues of human security. It was prepared by research and training on advocacy strategies on SCR 1325, Palestinian advocacy strategies in relation to the Wall, and the development of innovative educational and cultural activities which are potentially interesting for visiting groups and individuals, including guiding the Wall, learning/training, and cultural activities on or besides the Wall.

Ghada Zeidan of Palestine Link from the Netherlands gave a 20-hour training in advocacy approaches and methods to 10 youth and 10 women members of AEI and some members of Al-Rowwad Center in Aida camp, with the support of AEI staff. In April four of the members went for a week-long advocacy journey to the Netherlands during which they spoke with members of parliament, journalists, church communities and others.

The Wall Information Center provides information about the impact of the Israeli wall in the occupied Palestinian territories. It gives attention to people's narratives of loss as well as *sumud* [steadfastness, resilience]. The Center is designed to advocate the right to protection, human security and human development in accordance with principles of human rights and international humanitarian law. Following Security Council Resolution 1325, it will amplify the voices of Palestinian women living in the shadow of the wall and support women's participation and protection at all levels.

For next year, 2017, the Arab Educational Institute (AEI) together with Palestine Link (PL) will invite international artists to show work on the wall in Betlehem. The exhibition will be part of an arts *sumud* festival in Bethlehem in the beginning of June 2017 when 50 years of occupation will be commemorated. To prepare for financial actions, AEI's Toine van Teeffelen followed at the end of 2015 two sessions in the Netherlands, together with Jaap Groeneveld of AEI's support group Friends of Young Bethlehem, to learn about methods of crowd funding. This training was made possible by a subsidy of Church in Action.

The visitor and events program was supported by Small Projects SCR 1325 (Netherlands) and Spielart (Germany).

Cultural tourism

A last development at AEI is an economical one. It is self-evident that *sumud* must have an economic base. In order to strengthen the financial position of youth and women, it is our intention to start up in the future a one-year long vocational training to support home-based economies in the sphere of cultural tourism: home stays, cafeteria, Palestinian snacks on delivery base, workshops for tourists, and accompanying tourists. The long-term perspective is the development of a cooperative in the service of tourists who want to explore Palestine beyond the land marks and want to visit Palestinian homes - the base of community *sumud*. In preparation, AEI's women and youth came together to discuss options for a home-based tourism program, made possible by a subsidy of Fair Sharing in the Netherlands.

As one element for an upcoming income generating project AEI developed together with Nes Ammim's Center of Learning and Dialogue, a journey for over 20 Dutch visitors organized from 9-18 March, 2016. See also: www.vorbijdemuren.nl

Conferences and visits

Toine van Teeffelen visited Germany to show the Wall Museum at the *Spielart* festival on *Art and Resistance* in the cultural center of the city of Munich, beginning November 2015. He also visited the Netherlands at the end of November/beginning December 2015 in the context of an *Advent Action* campaign organized by the Friends of Young Bethlehem to support student excursions in AEI's inter-religious program.

Fadi Abu Akleh visited a *Christmas market* in south Germany, for 2 weeks, to sell olive wood products as an income generating project for AEI.

Volunteer Maighdlin Ury (US) shared about the work of the Sumud Story House at the *United Nations Conference for Social Development* in New York on February 4/5, 2016. The theme of the conference was rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world.

Rania Murra, AEI's director, participated in the conference *Nonviolence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence*, which took place in Rome from the 11th to 13th of April 2016. The conference was sponsored by Pax Christi International, the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Pope Francis sent a message to the participants:

Fuad Giacaman, AEI's co-president and leader of its inter-religious and community program, and Tharwat Zeid of the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority, were invited to talk about AEI's inter-religious project 'Citizenship and Diversity: Moslem-Christian Living Together' at a conference organized by the Programme Mission Academy at Hamburg University, 11 April to 16 April 2016: *Justice as Hermeneutic Key for the Interpretation of Bible and Qur'an*.

In April 2016, Claire Anastas, Jennifer Salameh, Mohammed Sha'alan and Samia Salamaat presented information about the local consequences of the Wall, both written and visual information. The 7-day journey was coordinated and accompanied by Ghada Zeidan, director of Palestine Link.

Media and publications

Dutch IKON TV broadcast in December 2016 on national Dutch TV a 20-minute film by Rinske Bosch which showed the *Wall Museum* in action, showing a boy and his friends

from Aida camp writing his own wall poster story and fixing it on the Wall:
<https://vimeo.com/143601177>

A 2-minute video of AEI's children telling about *wall posters* appeared in a March 2016 program of Flemish TV, Karrewiet:
[Palestijnse kinderen hangen bordjes aan de Israëliische muur](#)

AEI staff prepared a 9-minute video about the *Wall Museum* which was shown during an exhibit in Munich's cultural center, about "art and resistance":
<https://vimeo.com/143457242>

AEI staff wrote an article for the magazine *This Week in Palestine* about a Facebook page in which common Palestinians are shown in a photo, with a quote that reveals their personal story: <http://thisweekinpalestine.com/>

In cooperation with ArtLab in East-Jerusalem, AEI facilitated during the previous academic year 2014-5 the making of two brief animation cartoons, in English, made by Palestinian children from the Bethlehem area. This was the result:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ttfKBifls>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu-yX5uEIXo>

AEI developed a video about *youth fieldtrips* conducted for the Citizenship and Diversity project, showing how they do cultural activities in Moslem and Christian holy places:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxLTAgZSeXg&t=12s>

A YouTube *video about AEI* was prepared:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xj6z3VTYIXU> (4 min).

A two-minute YouTube impression of a *workshop on advocacy* in preparation of the Wall Information Center at AEI, in cooperation with Palestine Link, an organization of Palestinians in the Netherlands: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF8By2xBfb4>

AEI developed a *story book* composed of student stories about Moslem-Christian living together. This story book (135 pp.) consists of some 70 stories collected and written by Palestinian school students in which examples of generosity and living together are narrated. The book has an English and Arabic version, to be ordered by writing to aei@p-ol.com

AEI continued *Facebook pages* about the AEI, the Sumud Story House, Humans of Palestine, and the Wall Museum. It issued a digital newsletter about the Wall Information Center, and issued 4 newsletters about AEI activities as narrated on AEI's website, www.aeicenter.org .

Volunteers

AEI hosted volunteers from Germany, US, France, India and the Netherlands, for shorter and longer periods. With Pax Christi Stuttgart a cooperation was started to have annually a volunteer staying at AEI for a full year.