

Strategic Plan Arab Educational Institute

30/8/2016 – 30/8/2019

Basic data

Full name of the organisation	Arab Educational Institute
Acronym	AEI-Open Windows
Date established	December 1987
Nationality	Palestinian
Legal status, official registration number	NGO Non-profit organization QR-0034-F
Official address	P.O.Box 681, Bethlehem
Visiting address	Paulus VI Street (Madbasseh), Youth Media House Hebron Rd near checkpoint, Sumud Story House
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Identity of organisation	Church-affiliated (member of Pax Christi International)

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

AEI: summary

At the end of the 1980s, AEI developed itself as an institute run by teachers and educational leaders offering courses against payment. From 2000 on, AEI–Open Windows developed itself as a Palestine- and Bethlehem-based NGO dedicated to empowering youth, women and educators living in Palestine, especially the West Bank. AEI works through community education and advocacy, the facilitation of local and international bridge building and exchange, and the celebration of Palestinian culture and narrative.

In our educational approach to empowerment, AEI fosters opportunities for Palestinian voices to be heard beyond the separation Wall and promotes the development of *sumud* or perseverance.

AEI's work is rooted in the values of peace, justice, nonviolence, and inter-cultural and inter-religious respect, especially Moslem-Christian living together.

AEI is a member organization of Pax Christi.

AEI's present-day expertise is in the field of training project groups in a great variety of subjects. In almost all cases communicative skills play a significant role, such as listening and conversation skills in the organization and performance of cultural events and intercultural exchanges and in the learning of language skills. AEI is experienced in organizing small- and large-scale events for visitors and the community, including choir and music performances, story-telling, a festival, and symbolic non-violent actions.

Context

AEI's work is in the occupied West Bank, especially the larger regions of Bethlehem and Ramallah. The number of Palestinians living in the West Bank amounts to around 2 million, of which about 98% are Moslems and less than 2% Christians. Palestinian Christians in the West Bank live mainly in the Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah regions. In the Bethlehem region about 10-15% of the population are Christians. There is an ongoing tendency of Palestinian Christians to leave the country, though the emigration rate differs from period to period.

The West Bank is directly or indirectly occupied by Israel. The cities and their direct surroundings are governed by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The West Bank is dotted by over 200 settlements primarily located in area C, which is fully controlled by Israel and covers some 60% of West Bank lands.

The emergence of ISIS or Islamic extremist movements in general in the Middle Eastern region has fuelled religious and political tensions. There is a sense of hopelessness among many, not just because of the Israeli occupation but also because of the fact that Christian families and youth as well as liberal Moslems feel uncertain about the future of Palestinian society. The atmosphere is broadly characterized by fear, a lack of national cohesion, an obsession with external appearances of religiosity, and a tendency towards violence and extremism in a context of partial lawlessness due to the absence of a state.

In the field of formal education, the PNA's Ministry of Education is responsible for the Palestinian curriculum followed by pupils in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Although rote learning is still the rule, there are limited possibilities for student-centered activities at school. NGOs have an encouraging role to play here, like also the private schools which in general have a bit more freedom than government schools to follow special subjects and approaches. The overall school system is heavily dependent upon foreign aid which is not always forthcoming.

Palestinian youth below 22 years are the majority of the population. They often do not find suitable study and work opportunities, among other things due to traveling restrictions imposed by the occupation. According to various estimates at least 40% of youth find no work after their studies, while many more do not find suitable work according to their qualifications. Also due to a lack of cultural and leisure opportunities, a great many youth would prefer to leave the area if they have a chance. Certain groups are especially vulnerable in the job market, such as women and youth without work experience.

Because the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is in limbo, there is no perspective of a stable peace with concomitant study and work opportunities. Instead, the situation is deeply uncertain: the Palestinian Authority may even face collapse under financial and political pressures, with further instability and violence as a result. The hierarchical nature of the Palestinian Authority allows only limited levels of social and political participation.

The two-state solution – a Palestinian state besides Israel - is less and less likely, given the impotence or unwillingness of the international community to create conditions or start up an effective peace process. The Separation or Apartheid Wall is a major hindrance to the functioning of present-day and future Palestinian society. It violates the human rights and development potential of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Given the Arab context in which sectarianism rather than democracy and civic values are on the rise, hopelessness amongst youth may lead to radicalism and a deepening of social divisions in society.

While there are thus many challenges in the field of community education, AEI needs for its own sustainable future to diversify its sources of income, due to a decrease of funding opportunities in and outside Palestine.

Mission

In this situation it is more than ever needed that grassroots voices from the Palestinian community in the West Bank continue to call for an end to occupation and colonization, and find new creative ways of public advocacy in doing so. It is equally important that the Palestinian community strives to preserve and foster the moral fabric of Palestinian society and culture, which is traditionally characterized by the respectful living together between Moslems and Christians.

Several organizations in the Bethlehem area are working on bridge-building, cultural advocacy, community-building and value-related peace and justice programs. The special contribution of AEI-Open Windows is its strong educational element, the working with grassroots youth and women groups, an emphasis of creative forms of communication and advocacy vis-à-vis occupation, a strong school network, and Moslem-Christian living together as a grassroots value.

AEI–Open Windows is a Palestine-based NGO that is dedicated to empowering youth, women and educators living in Palestine, especially the West Bank. We work through community education and advocacy, the facilitation of local and international bridge building and exchange, and the celebration of Palestinian culture and narrative.

In our educational approach to empowerment, AEI fosters opportunities for Palestinian voices to be heard beyond the separation Wall and promotes the development of *sumud* or perseverance in insisting on individual and community dignity and rights.

In brief:

AEI supports Palestinian youth, women and educators in building community and voicing their cultural identity and human rights.

Our organization's work is rooted in the values of peace, justice, *sumud* or perseverance, nonviolence, and inter-cultural and inter-religious respect.

Vision

Palestinians actively and publicly participating in a free, democratic, and pluralistic Palestine in which civic rights including women's rights and the rights of religious communities are respected.

Comments

As a community education organization in the West Bank, AEI's target groups are *youth* (6-30 years), *women*, and *educators, including parents and teachers*.

In its educational efforts, AEI focuses on the development of *voice*. Acquiring an effective voice is important for Palestinians because many groups in the society have at present little chance to be heard. Developing a voice is also essential to animate people, to make them alive in the present deadening environment of Palestine. Moreover, gaining a voice is essential for leadership building and helps future participation of persons and groups in society and in the international community. For AEI, voice has two major dimensions: an *advocacy* dimension and a *cultural* dimension. Voice implies a cause to communicate and cultural forms and contents related to the Palestinian identity.

In developing effective voices, we involve two kinds of audiences: *local* and *international*. Advocacy towards *local* audiences serves the strengthening of the community, including the Palestinian culture and identity. Traditionally AEI wishes to empower voices in support of inter-religious living together in Palestinian communities. This advocacy is about the strengthening of wholesome relationships within and across religious communities. In our work with Palestinian women and youth, advocacy will

also emphasize the Palestinian cultural identity and women's rights and children's/youth rights, the realization of which is part of the public good and serves community strength.

In the *international* advocacy for Palestine AEI's focus is on communicating the Palestinian story, the urgency of realizing Palestinian national rights, the need to end the present occupation, and the call for the breakdown of the Separation or Apartheid Wall.

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?

Methodologies

To enhance individual and community-based *sumud*, we focus, as stated in the mission, on strengthening the voices of our target groups. In doing so AEI applies a range of methods or methodologies which share student and people-centered forms of learning.

In general, AEI prefers to work with *stories*, whether in drama, moral dilemmas, story/essay writing, or fieldtrips. Stories are attractive, concrete and effective in transmitting knowledge as well as in motivating participants. Good stories create an emotional bond.

Another aspect of AEI's methodology is *authentic*, community based education. This means that we want the students to engage not with abstract or artificial issues but with real-world, authentic issues relevant to the lives they are living within their communities.

Fieldtrips or excursions are an example of authentic community based learning. Fieldtrips allow students to get a feeling of context and roots, but also a chance to breathe and escape a suffocating environment and the frustrations associated with life in Palestine. During the fieldtrips, workshops on student drama and storytelling are organized. Fieldtrips help youths to connect to the land and the community in an open and direct rather than symbolic way. Environmental education approaches 'the land' and 'the community' in its concrete, earthly details.

Such excursions are helpful in team-building, like the joint celebrations of Moslem and Christian *occasions*, which AEI often organizes and which bring out a community-building message that inter-religious conviviality is both possible and enjoyable. In the case of AEI's Christmas meeting, also Teacher Day and Human Rights Days are celebrated (both are in December), so as to stress common values.

The community-oriented line of working receives emphasis. A major way of reaching out to the community is through *music and choirs*. At present AEI facilitates two choirs and a youth music group, performing in community settings and at schools.

Debate – debating as a method is coming up in present-day education – may well be important to learn showing respect to the other, and can help to instill civic values. For instance, AEI finds it important that Palestinian teenagers discuss the influence of ISIS or Daesh. AEI does not shy away from hot and controversial topics. Doing so, however, we will always look for human and religious values which connect rather than divide, as well as issues which show the need for cohesion in Palestinian society.

Obviously *media* are nowadays more important than ever to motivate participants; especially social media. Media use comes back in almost all AEI's activities, including the use of radio. It helps to develop and disseminate cultural products and is an increasingly important element of effective advocacy.

Objectives

Following its mission, AEI develops voices for communicating rights and an inclusive identity, taking into account:

- Building personal skills and communicative competences.
- Attention to learning which type of messages to communicate: issues of rights, living together, attention to respect for diversity, knowledge of Palestine and *sumud*.
- The act of communicating and advocating to certain audiences: creative media use, and the conducting of various advocacy activities including cultural performances.

This brings us to the following educational objectives, aimed at Palestinian women, youth and educators in the West Bank:

1. Developing leadership and life skills
2. Developing communicative competences
3. Developing skills in creative media use and other narrative-visual genres
4. Promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural living together
5. Gaining knowledge about Palestine, Palestinian sites and Palestinian popular arts

6. Educating about the Palestinian cultural identity, and youth rights, women's rights, human security, and national and cultural rights
7. Advocating to local and international audiences issues of Palestinian cultural identity as well as youth rights, women's rights, human security, and national and cultural rights
8. Developing and applying student-centered methodologies of learning
9. Capacity building by developing human and financial resources and raising publicity to AEI's work
10. Developing a suitable monitoring and evaluation system.

These ten objectives are linked to the overall results and impact as mentioned in the table that follows here. In dealing with each of the programs further below we will detail the objectives and results.

Objectives of AEI related to result and impact 2017-2019

Objectives	Results	Impact
Developing leadership and life skills	<p>Palestinian youth, women and parents trained in general leadership and life skills (organizational and decision-making skills, initiative)</p> <p>Trained in skills of cultural entrepreneurship</p>	More public participation of Palestinian youth, women and parents
Developing communicative competences	<p>Palestinian youth, women and parents trained in communicative competence (a combination of expressive skills, creativity and arts, language use, intercultural communication, critical thinking, communicating Palestine, world knowledge, advocacy)</p> <p>Palestinian parents, especially mothers, trained in basic communicative skills of parenting</p>	<p>More public participation of Palestinian youth, women and parents</p> <p>Strengthening creative/critical modes of learning in informal Palestinian education</p> <p>Acceptance of new models of parenting in Palestinian society</p>
Developing skills in creative	Palestinian youth trained in	More acceptance of

media use and other communicative (narrative-visual) genres	<p>media skills</p> <p>New narrative and visual modes/themes of communication for Palestinian youth and women</p> <p>Stories in various genres/modes</p>	creative media methodologies in informal Palestinian education.
Promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural living together	<p>School students trained in inter-religious skills</p> <p>Teachers trained in applying inter-religious methods</p> <p>Sources of moral inspiration for living together identified</p>	Development of moral and spiritual values in the Palestinian cultural identity
Developing knowledge and skills related to Palestine, Palestinian sites and Palestinian popular arts	<p>Palestinian youth and women trained in popular Arts skills, including Palestinian Arts (singing, drama, poetry)</p> <p>Youth, women and teachers knowledgeable of Palestinian Moslem-Christian sites/locations</p> <p>Youth, women and teachers more informed of Palestinian culture and history</p>	<p>More acceptance of Arts-centered methodologies in Palestinian education.</p> <p>Deeper development of Palestinian identity</p>
Educating about Palestinian youth rights, women's rights, human security, national and cultural rights	Palestinian youth, women and educators informed about women (or gender) rights, youth rights, national rights, cultural identity/rights and human security	Awareness of human rights issues in Palestinian society
Advocating to local and	Palestinian youth, women	More public participation of

<p>international audiences issues of Palestinian youth identity/rights, women's rights, human security, national and cultural rights/identity</p>	<p>and educators trained in advocacy skills</p> <p>Stronger networks with local NGOs and institutions (youth, women and educators)</p> <p>Stronger networks with international NGOs and institutions (youth, women and educators)</p> <p>Local community circles informed about youth identity/rights, women's rights, human security, national rights and cultural rights/identity</p> <p>Visitors informed about Palestinian national and cultural rights</p> <p>Local and international audiences informed of AEI activities</p>	<p>Palestinian youth and women</p> <p>Decrease in social distance among Moslem and Christian Palestinians in the West Bank, between countryside and town in the Bethlehem district; greater social cohesion among the civil population in the West Bank</p> <p>Broad public acceptance of joint inter-religious (Moslem-Christian) events/initiatives</p> <p>Broad acceptance of youth's and women's participation in Palestinian public life</p> <p>Deeper interest among international visitors in Palestinian social and cultural life rather than only standard pilgrimage sites</p> <p>Development of a more decentralized tourism structure in the southern West Bank, with more employment opportunities.</p> <p>A Palestinian "story movement" in which different kinds of narratives inspire people to stand up for their rights</p>
<p>Developing and applying training methodologies in these fields</p>	<p>Better quality methodologies for training in communicative and civic competences</p>	<p>Broader acceptance of student-centered methodologies in informal Palestinian education</p>

	Palestinian teachers trained in methodologies for teaching communicative and civic competences	
Capacity building by developing human and financial resources	<p>Vocational training in cultural entrepreneurship</p> <p>Staff trained in project development, monitoring and evaluation, and management (fundraising)</p> <p>Palestinian volunteers trained in group facilitation and management</p> <p>Strategic planning skills improved among AEI staff</p> <p>Sustainable funding or income generating sources</p>	<p>AEI becoming more sustainable and stronger as an organization.</p> <p>AEI members becoming able to set up home-based cultural tourism businesses</p>
Developing a monitoring and evaluation system	The programs monitored and evaluated	Stronger organization

We address the objectives 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.

Program 1: Inter-religious (Moslem-Christian) and community

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.

AEI's project *Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together* wants to invest into the future of Palestinian youth, Christian and Moslem. School education helps to instill values and attitudes that shape the students' later life. While there are many social fields in which Moslem-Christian living together and cooperation can be fostered, there is no denying that education is the cornerstone of all.

Private and government schools

After the project has operated for a long time only in private schools (since the end of the 1990s on), AEI found it important during the previous three years to enter government schools as well, for the following reasons:

- a) In general, private schools have already more freedom and means to start additional projects outside the standard Palestinian curriculum.
- b) AEI was approached by private school teachers and parents to also enter government (and UNRWA – United Nations) schools in order not to limit the message of Moslem-Christian living together to the private schools.
- c) In general, the private schools host a better educated and often middle or upper class student population - though the Palestinian middle class is economically vulnerable and often marginalized. The project wants also to reach out to economically more marginalized communities.

In general, AEI finds it imperative not to contribute to a greater educational gap between the private and the government schools but rather to work decreasing the gap, and provide an opportunity to private school teachers to disseminate the project message to government schools.

Ministry of Education

In targeting government schools, the project started during the previous three years (2013-6), a strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian National Authority. The Ministry connected with the project through the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'diversity' which are central to the subject of civics in the Palestinian curriculum. AEI finds it important that the vision of inter-religious living together is more concretely translated into civic rights and duties. The connection to civics makes it possible to broaden the project's impact into two directions: toward the Palestinian

curriculum as a whole and toward the students' daily life in the local community or neighborhood.

At present AEI collaborates with the Ministry at some 30 schools in the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas. 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*.

The following table shows the main activities of this program, for the coming three years:

Type of activity	Number of activities	Number participants	Explanation
Joint religious studies lessons	At least 6 lessons a semester at 30 schools	700 per year	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 project manual	Project committee and teachers	Manual brings all methods applied in the project together
Fieldtrips to Moslem and Christian places	Two fieldtrips for students and for teachers, and one for staff of Ministry of Education	200 students and 20 accompaniers	At the holy sites, the youth perform brief acts of creative learning, such as storytelling, drama, discussion, and filming.

	Separate teacher fieldtrip	30 teachers and officials	
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.

Program 2: Youth and children

Youth Media 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 is the fact that the activities move beyond the normal school patterns in the West Bank and Gaza which often require students to learn by rote. Instead, the youth are challenged in the Youth Media House to develop inner strength by thinking critically, acting creatively, and communicating effectively.

The Youth Media House hosts 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 group of 10 youth will work together in 2016-2018 in a project about Moslem-Christian living together, using excursions and workshops to explore an inter-religious mission for Palestinian youth.

Another youth group of 10 teenagers uses traditional Palestinian music and lyrics to communicate the vibes of present-day Palestinian life.

During the summer, the youth and children program develops a two-week activity program for kids groups as well as groups with teenagers, postgraduates and young professionals, in cooperation with the Greek-Catholic school in Beit Sahour. The participants include kids (4-12 years) from the school and AEI kids group, as well as participants from AEI's other youth groups. Three weeks of different activities and workshops will be offered by specialist trainers covering the fields of sports, drama, music, modern dance, *dabkah*, Arts, social media use, and English language courses. Also local and international volunteers are involved.

The Youth Media House develops media products for the different programs such as videos for the abovementioned 'Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together' project.

The following organizations support the program: Friends of Young Bethlehem and Association pro Terra Sancta.

Program 3: Women and family

Sumud Story House (SSH)

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 come 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 reponse 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.

The women and family program have been involved for over 6 years in activities on women's rights, women's stories and the project '*Women and Youth against Violence*' – with partners from the Netherlands, Palestine and Iraq. Doing so the women of the House have linked up with women in the countryside of the Bethlehem area. They jointly dialogue with local Palestinian authorities, police, security people as well as Moslem and Christian religious authorities and challenge them to give higher priority to women's rights and security.

The particular strength of the SSH 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. Religious stakeholders like sheikhs and priests have become conveyors of the message of the House supporting gender equality. The wives have brought their husbands: another stakeholder group who became interested, and family group meetings are held on monthly base. There is a dialogue between the women and the security representatives, still another stakeholder group. Important in all the work is the implementation of UN security council resolution 1325, which urges women's participation and leadership in the context of conflicts and security issues.

The strength of the House is that women from different background have become motivated-activated, by connecting and mingling amongst themselves and with different stakeholders. Doing so they are changing people to become ambassadors of the project message.

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

Group-background	Main activities	Group size in 2016
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, current news, parenting, gender relations	20
Women's choir	Rehearsals and performances (9	20

	during last school year, mainly in the larger Bethlehem region)	
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.

In the coming years, AEI wants to continue with increasing human security and gender equality within the Palestinian family in the West Bank and East-Jerusalem. Gender equality in the family involves behavioral ethics/values, such as respecting each other’s dignity, respecting equal rights, and a mutual attitude of non-violence and open communication in the family. Human security makes gender equality possible, and the other way around. The project will work with young women and men, not men or women separately, and with partners/stakeholders who will be equal rather than function as lecturers. The trained young women and men, as well as stakeholders, should become ambassadors of the project and change in their turn their families and communities. The activities is planned to include groups of fiancées following a course on gender equality in the family. They will not be directly approached but through the mosque and the church. The assumption is that fiancées can be influenced more than married people because they are young and their outlook on gender roles is not yet ‘stuck’ in a fixed marriage practice.

Another planned track of working will be the following: school students following lessons in civics about family relations and gender equality. The long term strategy is to support changes in the curriculum at Palestinian schools, in cooperation with the PNA Ministry, to allow for more gender equality in the family. Like fiancées, teenagers are more open to a change of traditional gender roles within the family as they are not yet ‘stuck’ in a fixed practice.

AEI will continue to host social counsellors from the Netherlands, Janny van Heerbeek and Geraldien Blokland, who will be giving training sessions about parenting for women’s groups at AEI and in some villages and camp in the surroundings of Bethlehem. AEI’s youth and women groups will also keep following courses on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), given by volunteers 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.

Program 4: Visitor and events

All AEI groups – youth, women, family, school communities – help to prepare and organize the events which are part of AEI's last program: 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 are regularly meeting foreign visiting groups interested to learn about daily life in Bethlehem.

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.

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 donators 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 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.

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 2017, the Arab Educational Institute (AEI) together with Palestine Link (PL) will invite international artists to show work on the wall in Bethlehem. 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.

As part of the Wall Information Center, AEI will encourage human rights-in-education activities for Palestinian teens, designed to actively learn about the reality and impact of the Wall in the occupied West Bank. AEI foresees that the participants will be engaged in extracurricular activities outside school time, including excursions and interviewing. Learning about the Wall and the people affected will help students to develop skills of advocacy, such as giving presentations, political-geographic map-reading, the use of 'human rights English', debating, radio interviewing, and the organization of arts and advocacy activities near the Wall.

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 coming years 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.

While there is a range of academic tourism courses in the Bethlehem area, there are few vocational training opportunities in the administrative and communication-oriented professions. This reflects the general bias in Palestinian higher education towards the more prestigious academic field. There are few options for those who do not wish to follow or do not have the qualifications for an academic education. There is presently in the Bethlehem area for instance no vocational training in the field of modern administrative and secretarial skills. The vocational training offered will meet this need. Most training and education in Palestine does not take into account the practical skills needed in the workplace. It is a common complaint among graduates that most studies are too theoretical to fit the demands of the workplace. The knowledge transmitted in existing vocational and academic education alike is almost always offered in standardized ways.

A feasibility study of AEI supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation (EU) in 2012-3 showed that there is a need among tourists in the Bethlehem area and Palestine for more varied programs "off the beaten track" and for tourism activities aimed at meeting people and experiencing life and culture. At the same time, there is a need in Palestinian tourism, as stressed by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism, to have more tourism programs outside the seasonal bottlenecks and also in other places than

crowded tourist landmarks such as the Church of Nativity. The feasibility study proposed to encourage the following tourism-related services:

- small-scale hospitality services (B&B, cafeteria, small shops)
- the communication of personal, family and community stories to visitors when hosting or accompanying them
- practical support in arranging day-trips in the West Bank including hikes
- the organization of small-scale tourism events or activities such as home-based embroidery, mosaic, cooking, singing and mural or stone painting workshop
- the sale of creative, non-standard souvenirs, as the large souvenir shops usually offer much of the same.

The vocational training will focus on these small-scale tourism services, with an emphasis upon the Palestinian home and family as the center of Palestinian culture.

To facilitate and strengthen the network of home-based businesses to be set up, a cooperative will be established for the development of joint publicity and marketing, the serving of Palestinian foods and drinks to visiting groups, and other income-generating activities. The cooperative will aim at the 'new' tourist or pilgrim interested in Palestinian and Christian (or Christian-Moslem) social life in the area. The project and cooperative are designed to create long-term sources of support for AEI and its members and sympathizers.

The project will involve Palestinian youth and women with an entrepreneurial mind set, practically oriented, and willing to patiently work for setting up a cooperative network of tourism-oriented businesses in the broader Bethlehem area.

As one element in an upcoming income generating project based on cultural tourism AEI will continue its cooperation with Nes Ammim's Center of Learning and Dialogue, to bring Dutch and German groups to Palestine/Israel. See also: www.voorbijdemuren.nl

AEI staff

Name	Type of involvement	Qualification
Mrs Rania Murra	Coordinator women group meetings at AEI, advise community campaigns	Director of AEI, many years experience in setting up and coordinating women groups, monitoring and evaluation
Mr. Fuad Giacaman	General coordination of inter-religious program, monitoring and evaluation	Former headmaster and teacher at several Bethlehem schools, former AEI general director, many years experience in project coordination, monitoring and evaluation

Mr Elias Abu Akleh	Financial management, accounting, part-time, pay role staff, monitoring and evaluation	Experience in financial administration and accountancy of dozens of AEI projects.
Dr Toine van Teeffelen	Educational adviser, development affairs, author of manuals, educational advise, monitoring and evaluation	Experience in developing, monitoring and evaluating dozens of projects at AEI and elsewhere, author of teacher manuals and books on Palestinian daily life stories, culture and identity.
Mr Roger Salameh	Project secretary and AEI teenager youth group coordinator	Experience for over years in youth project coordinating and secretarial work.
Mr Fadi Abou Akleh	Filmmaker and media development	Experience for years in making brief films on various projects

Volunteers

AEI hosted volunteers from different countries, for short periods or half a year/1 year. With Pax Christi Stuttgart a cooperation has been started to have annually a volunteer staying at AEI for a full year.