

NEVER GIVE UP – AND NEVER STOP CARING

Sumud advocacy by Palestinian Youth

*Engaging, empowering and equipping diverse and marginalised youth and amplifying
their voices for peace*

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Never give up – and never stop caring

How can young Palestinians in the occupied West Bank contribute to strengthening society when that society's under so much pressure? How can they foster a sense of inner peace, not just for themselves personally but for their community as a whole, despite the enormous odds against which they and other Palestinians struggle?

The present book contains narratives written by young Palestinians – a mixture of school-going teenagers and young women up to 35 – who are active in their communities in the southern West Bank. The narratives were written during a training course in advocacy as part of the project *Engaging, empowering and equipping diverse and marginalised youth and amplifying their voices for peace*. This project, implemented in the period 2018-2020, was made possible by the European Union and the British international development charity CAFOD, with the Arab Educational Institute (AEI) as the local West Bank coordinator. During the coronavirus crisis in spring 2020 the project continued to function while looking for new ways to amplify the young people's voices.

The project's subtitle is *Sumud advocacy by Palestinian youth*, so let us explain the relation between peace and Palestinian *sumud*, which in English means steadfastness, resilience. For many years a leading concept in Palestinian discourse and AEI's activities, *sumud* points to a well-known inner Palestinian determination to keep going on and not give up despite occupation, discrimination, exclusion and poverty. *Sumud* mobilizes a range of individual and collective properties needed in times of oppression and disaster: long-term patience, a steeling of will, a capacity to improvise, mutual support in the community, and a leading role for the Palestinian family – both nuclear and extended. Recently many Palestinians have been saying how the many curfews they suffered from over the years have increased their survival skills – their capacity for perseverance and improvisation – which are now so relevant under the new lockdowns due to the coronavirus outbreak. Residents of Gaza have remarked that now the rest of the world has had a taste of what Gazans have experienced over the last decade and a half.

The narratives in this e-book celebrate people's *sumud* through a series of snapshots from Palestinian daily life as noted down by the young people during their advocacy training and actions during 2019-20. The narratives are simply divided according to the different burdens Palestinians have to carry. Individual and community *sumud* is typically shaped by those burdens, along with the individual qualities of people who uphold their will always to affirm life. While the narratives give space to the burdens, they often contain, even as just an afterthought amidst the pain and struggle, a declaration of hope and *sumud*.

The first few chapters in Part A deal with the burden of Israeli occupation in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas. Some of the stories find their setting in Hebron downtown where Palestinians live under direct occupation and have to cope with the presence of Israeli settlements which frustrate daily life since many years. The authors indicate various challenges of occupation: the difficulties living with the intimidation and humiliations such as when passing checkpoints; the arrest and imprisonment of family members, and dealing with the expropriation of land and the demolition of houses built without the occupier's permission. A well-known example of *sumud* is narrated in the cases when elderly Palestinian citizens try in person to defend land and house against the bulldozers. *Sumud* is about resisting for life: "existence is resistance" as the slogan goes, so applicable to Palestinian life.

Sumud is typically about defending home and land against oppression. But also when the stressors are of a different nature than occupation the concept of *sumud* is helpful to understand the human will to choose the hard way of perseverance and not giving up.

Part B of this compilation, about *sumud* in society, contains a chapter of stories about the need for reconciliation, such as leaders calling for reconciliation between families, or calling communities away from the road of revenge. For many years internal reconciliation has been a challenge on the political level in light of the entrenched political gap between the main Palestinian political parties Fatah and Hamas.

In another chapter, young women involved in the project tell about confronting the multiple burdens arising from the conservative patriarchal values of some of their family members. Many women work on their own improvement through education as well as on the improvement of their community by advocacy and showing a strong example.

Part C of the compilation tells of families dealing with disasters in the home or on the street - especially the disaster of the coronavirus pandemic as it deeply affects Palestinian life, showing its vulnerability as well as its strength through mutual support.

The examples show that the instinct of survival, the capacity to endure testing and trial, does not in itself cover the full meaning of *sumud*. *Sumud* is after all very much about values. Just staying strong does not tell you for what purpose people stay strong. The narratives bear out these values. The stories show that *sumud* is social and is about mutual support and cooperation and solidarity in the society - so that not just individuals but the community can keep going. *Sumud* is also very much about citizenship values of respect, rights and dignity, and advocating for human rights in the sense of not giving up on individual and Palestinian-national rights enshrined in international law. *Sumud's* stress on social and political justice obviously implies that women should have equal rights. Steadfastness is not only about protecting the present situation but also about making needed changes in Palestinian society. Some of the women's narratives make a clear case for doing so.

Working on these values and rights is important to establish a sense of internal peace in the communities. This is all the more important in the absence of a larger peace as the overall political situation has been negatively affected by American president Trump's 'deal of the century' which in practice seems to pave the way to further Israeli colonization and annexation of (parts of) the West Bank besides maintaining the harmful status quo of Gaza. The internal peace is essential for Palestinians and Palestinian society not to become more fragmented, alienated from the land, or people and youths becoming more desperate. A functioning community peace based on *sumud* is an essential condition for any larger peace, distant as it is - though more needed than ever.

More than only about making sacrifices in the light of the many burdens, *sumud* can celebrate a human inner peace and joy in appreciation of the beauty of cultural expressions. *Sumud* is sometimes symbolized as *sabr* or cactus: this relates to both the cactus' capacity to endure and the sweetness of the fruit.

Religion plays an important role too in nourishing a sense of inner peace. A term associated with *sumud* such as perseverance is to be found in wide use in both the Quran and the Bible, referring to God's supreme will to connect to people's struggles for life and new life, and the faith required of the believers. In one of the stories, a prisoner finds his peace through the religious songs he hears from elsewhere in the prison.

Except in one instance, all the stories are from the period 2018-20. In the chapter about "going abroad" we've included an interview AEI held way back in 2004, and this is a story which we want to re-tell because it elaborates on the cultural heart of *sumud* in a way which helps to understand many of the other stories. In essence, *sumud* is about giving and caring for each other, for the home, the family and the land. *Sumud*, in its highest standard, is the inclusive culture of hospitality, opening up the home for the vulnerable and excluded. In

that sense, *sumud* is very much about a healthy way of life characterized by caring for the community and environment.

The discussion about *sumud* is relevant to the emerging global discussion about the future of economies and societies which for many has been too long too much oriented towards short-term profit-making and creating inequalities and exclusions. The neo-liberal system's fragility is exposed worldwide by the coronavirus crisis. Many have written about the disastrous consequences of not taking care of the earth nor of the communities living on it. Some point to the potentials and relevance of the *sumud* concept for peace, social justice and environmental activism (eg the Canadian intellectual and activist Naomi Klein or the British feminist theologian Mary Grey).

AEI thanks the authors of the narratives for their willingness to write and bring out their stories. We asked the school youths (aged 14-16) and young women (aged up to 35) to write a story which reflected their feelings of hope or despair. The story could be about themselves or about others, about the project or events outside the project, including the coronavirus outbreak. A few older, experienced women showed interest in the project and we let them participate in the writings as well. AEI does not claim that the stories are examples of objective, fact-checking journalism. They are rather written down from the heart. We respect the wish of many not to have their name mentioned.

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CONTENTS

Part A: Sumud and Occupation

1. Intimidation, checkpoints, and settlements
2. Arrest and imprisonment
3. Expropriation of land and demolition of houses

Part B: Sumud in Society

4. Need for reconciliation
5. Women and society
6. Going abroad

Part C: Sumud in Times of Crisis and Disaster

7. Disaster strikes
8. Coronavirus crisis

PART A: SUMUD AND OCCUPATION

1. Intimidation and checkpoints

Checkpoint Fear

I am a school girl from Al Shurfa neighborhood in the village of Battir. This neighborhood is closer to our school [in Beit Jala] than to other schools in Battir. A problem, which caused me fear and delays and absences from class, was that when going to school early morning I had to pass a military checkpoint.

I joined our school project about non-violent communication, advocacy and *sumud*. My teachers gave me advice about how to talk about the problem with the school counselor so as to help me in my psychological situation. The PNA [Palestinian National Authority] police stationed next to the Separation Wall in front of our school participated in the sessions and workshops. They helped me and other classmates to cross the checkpoints and other barriers. My school delays and absences stopped. My fears and feelings of shock decreased.

Teenager, Bethlehem area

The bird

Last week, I headed to Ramallah to do some necessary procedures for a visa. On my way I was stuck in the traffic at Qalandia and the nearby Israeli checkpoint. The area is well-known for its horrible traffic jams. While waiting, I looked through the window of the car and suddenly saw a beautiful small bird descending from the sky to land on one of the walls. Then it started to fly freely from one place to another. I thought about the life of this bird, how it moved in freedom. I wished to become a bird and fly and move freely without any barriers or walls standing in the way. Now I stand in front of the wall telling you my story because I am able to express my feelings and raise my voice through this story.

It is a story of a Palestinian woman who does not want to mention her name. She is 35-year-old and lives in Shuhada Street in Tel Rumeideh [in Hebron downtown, directly occupied by the Israeli army], where she was born and raised. While telling her story she cried every now and then, and said, "My parents and relatives request me not to leave the area as they are afraid about what could happen to me." The woman then started to talk about her daily suffering. Two years ago, it was 1:00 o'clock after midnight, a settler threw a burning substance at the door of her house. The flames started to move toward the windows. The woman and her children felt terrified. Her son, a 9-year old, said: "Let us pray and leave our life in God's hands." The woman tried to extinguish the fire in the house while calming her children. Then their neighbors saw the fire, and rushed to help and save them. From that time on her children suffered daily from the memories of the pain and the horror, and they were afraid about what would await them in the future.

Then the woman moved on to talk about her small daughter's story. She was eight year old when she was attacked by an extremist settler, named Ofer, who threatened to run over her by his car. She was lucky that the headmaster of her school saw the car and ran to take the girl away. The daughter suffered afterwards from convulsions in her legs; she wet the bed at night from the fear and refused to go to school for 35 days. An organization helped her to overcome her psychological problems, but until this day she still suffers from fear of settlers.

The woman also told that soldiers had once arrested her son. She was locked in her house for 40 days as her name was not at the checkpoint nearby [in Shuhadeh Street inhabitants need to show their ID to passing soldiers or in case they leave or enter the street]. At the end of her sad talk, she affirmed her conviction to resist all difficulties and said that she waited for relief and hope.

Young woman, Hebron area

Filming

A 30-year-old lady who lives in Shuhada Street in the Tel Rumeideh district was on her way home with her son when Israeli settlers spat on her, assaulted her, insulted her, beat her son, and even stepped on his face with their shoes. The way they beat him showed they were full of hatred.

A young Palestinian woman witnessed the aggression and filmed parts of it. When the settlers noticed her, they tried to attack her as well, but she managed to escape the area quickly, as she feared for her children.

In the middle of the following night, soldiers entered the young lady's house to be sure that it was her who had actually filmed the horrific incident. She showed them the video to prove that she had documented it. They then interrogated and put pressure upon her to discourage her from testifying. The young woman was however persistent and strong, and she told them that she would testify despite their efforts to intimidate her.

Young woman, Hebron area

Hebrew (1)

I will tell you a story to demonstrate how important it is for Palestinians to learn Hebrew. My son has a grocery store in an old house where he sells milk and yogurt. One day, my son's friend came to the store and told him what had happened to him at an Israeli checkpoint. He said that while standing at the checkpoint and waiting for his turn to be checked, he saw two Israeli soldiers speaking and conspiring in Hebrew. He overheard their conversation and could understand what was said as he speaks the language. The soldiers planned to do my son great harm.

When it was his turn to be searched, he walked forwards showing confidence. He spoke in Hebrew and told them, “good morning,” flashing a big smile. The two soldiers were greatly surprised when they heard him speaking in Hebrew and retreated somewhat as they realized that he had understood what they were planning. They then left my son alone and did not hurt him. I heard this story while I was at the shop of my son. I was so surprised that my son had survived a soldiers’ attack on him.

Woman, Hebron area

Hebrew (2)

From my personal experience, I firmly urge everyone who lives in areas under Israeli control to learn Hebrew. My son’s friend, who speaks Hebrew, was crossing the checkpoint one day when he heard Israeli settlers discussing their intention to harm the barbershop owner, my son. He quickly went to the barbershop and warned my son. My son closed the shop and came home to stay safe. He might not have made it alive if his friend did not speak Hebrew and had not alerted him of the plot.

Woman, Hebron area

Sneaking into our home

My mother is originally from the town of Fallujah in Gaza. She moved to Hebron with her family when she was ten years old. She later got married and lived in Shuhada Street where she had six daughters and five sons. I lived there until I got married and moved to [neighboring] Tel Rumeideh. My husband passed away four years ago and I have six boys. I am also a sister of two martyrs. I like to do the harvest each year in my small olive garden beside the house. Unfortunately, every harvest season, I face harassment from the occupation. One day, a soldier released his watchdog on my land and it stole all what I had harvested. However, I followed the dog, pushed it aside, and took back my bag with olives.

Although the Israeli occupation has constantly harassed me throughout my life, I remain steadfast and strong. My life experiences taught me to be strong. I have not had a single good day – all I witness is violence and aggression. Whenever we defend ourselves against settlers, the Israeli occupation either hauls us in military courts or demands we pay a fine. My children have to sneak into their own home by passing through the olive trees. They are afraid of the settlers. Despite all the challenges, the Israelis are cowards and we are strong; we must not fear them but instead confront them and defend ourselves.

Young woman, Hebron area

Good morning

A woman told me her daughter's story who was harassed by an Israeli soldier while crossing the checkpoint in the Tel Rumeideh area. This soldier is well-known among the people for his cruelty. While she was on her way to the university, this soldier grabbed her hand and obliged her to look at his face and say, "Good morning." However, the girl refused to say anything. The soldier then put her aside at the checkpoint and let the girl wait for a while so that she missed her lectures at the university. Then he told her: "Next time you have to tell me good morning, or I will stop you from crossing this checkpoint."

Young woman, Hebron area

Troublemaker

I am a woman who lives inside an area barricaded on five sides [in Hebron downtown, in an area closed by the Israeli army]. It is extremely difficult for me to exit and enter as I have to pass through settlers and the Israeli army.

One day, Israeli settlers prevented me from going to visit my family. However, I refused to give up, and instead walked all the way to the Kiryat Arba checkpoint. I was surprised to be confronted there by a group of Israeli settlers [near Al-Bahtoun]. They pointed their guns and knives at me and told me: "You are a troublemaker. You love creating problems." They then detained me for two hours, making me stand under the strong sun and subjecting me to continuous verbal abuse.

Despite what I experienced, I will not surrender and neither will I leave my home. It is my home.

Young woman, Hebron area

2. Arrest and imprisonment

Songs of Praise Entering the Prison Cell

This is a story of a political activist who was imprisoned by the military authorities. He was kept in a solitary cell. He felt hopeless and frustrated while listening to religious songs and praises to God coming from a nearby prison cell. After days of being annoyed these songs singing God's praises began to console this prisoner.

When he kept hearing those praises, they started to support him in his *sumud* [steadfastness] and suffering. A sense of calm peace and joy entered his heart and mind. Throughout his imprisonment of many years, the prayers and songs of praise compensated for his despair, frustration and suffering.

Teenager, Bethlehem area

Obligated to Pay the Taxes

My grandparents and their sons, including my father, lived in a simple house. My grandfather owned a game store for his livelihood. This provided for the educational and health needs of his family.

However, after 1967 the occupation oppressed the Palestinian people on a daily base. In 1987 the first intifada started and people went to the streets demanding their freedom and independence.

The occupation did not response positively. Their forces began to arrest the stone-throwing youth and put them in jail. The Israeli army imposed curfews for days, weeks and months. High fines were imposed on people due to their refusal to pay taxes. At the time the occupation requested my grandfather to pay taxes like others but he rejected. After his refusal his house and shop were confiscated.

My grandmother stored some products at our relatives' and friends' places. In the meantime, she was worried about my father and uncle after their graduation from high school. Both were active in the resistance. Before my father and uncle had the chance to leave for Greece to continue their higher education, the Israeli army arrested them and kept them for two weeks. My grandparents were obliged to pay the taxes in order to have them released.

Nowadays we live with our relatives in Beit Sahour in a quiet steadfastness, in spite of the ups and downs due to the unresolved political situation.

Teenager, Bethlehem area

Oh Mum, Where Are You Going?

I woke up to hear a terrible knocking and kicking of boots on our door. It was 2:30 in the morning. The noises were unusual. They came from Israeli soldiers. "Oh mum," I shouted in shock and fear. She replied, "It's OK, my dear son." Immediately, my mum put on her *hijab* while the soldiers shouted, "Open the door!" The kicks on the door damaged parts of it. My mum went quickly and opened the door.

The soldiers pointed their guns to my mum's chest. It was a horrible moment. The captain shouted, "All in the house must leave immediately." My mother cried: "There are small children. How can I bring them outside in such a severe and cold night?"

The captain had a sharp and loud voice. He ordered the soldiers to kick us all out and ordered the family to hold their arms on the back. Later on the captain ordered my mum to bring her ID card. He declared, "You are under arrest." I was shocked, like my two young sisters and older brother.

Shouting, crying and shedding tears – that was what we did. Our close neighbors rushed to us after the soldiers left. I started to cry, "Mum, Mum where are you going? Why are you taking my beloved mum after my dad's death?" Our dear neighbors comforted me and my family. We then read the Quran and prayed for the Almighty God to give me and my family strength, patience, *sumud* and hope.

Young woman, Hebron area

Arrest in the Night

It was eight-thirty in the morning. An Israeli car belonging to the department of the civil administration was circling around in our area, Makab El Samen [Khan al-Ahmar, a community on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho threatened with expulsion, 2018-2020].

Suddenly the Israeli vehicle went straight to one of the houses in this neighborhood.

The father of the house said: "It's early morning, who could be knocking on the door?" And the mother said: "Oh God, what is going on?"

The father opened the door and saw Israeli soldiers standing in front of his house. He asked: "What is wrong? Why are you here?"

An Israeli officer got out from the car and said: "We are here to inspect your house." The father and the mother said: "Why? What is going on? We didn't do anything." They did not know what was happening.

The soldiers entered the house without asking and looked everywhere. Then the officer started to interrogate the parents, asking, “Where are your children? What kind of work do they do?”

The mother answered: “They all work in Khan Al Ahmar, except my son Ahmad, he sleeps inside.”

Then the officer asked to see Ahmad in order to ask him why he did not work. The mother told the officer: “It is only recently that he doesn’t work because there is no work.”

But the officer insisted to see Ahmad. He took two soldiers with him and went to Ahmad’s room. They woke him up.

Ahmad was surprised and shocked when he woke up seeing soldiers around him. Before he could say anything they tied his hands and took him away without him even allowing to change his clothes.

They thus arrested Ahmad without telling the parents their reason of doing so. They left them afraid and wondering what might happen to their son.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Battle of Life

She is the example of a persistent, successful woman and a role model for those who look up to her. She got married at an early age, had two daughters, and was pregnant with her third child when her husband was arrested by Israel’s occupation army. Then her battle with life began. Today she is regarded as a mother and father at the same time, and a support and source of strength for her children. With her husband in an Israeli prison, she started to confront the battlefield of her life by taking a first bold step — completing her studies at university. She did not stop after receiving her undergraduate degree but proceeded to pursue a master’s degree.

After her studies, she began to work as an employee and a lecturer at the same university where she had studied. Due to her persistence, she decided to continue her education and pursue a PhD. She did not give up on her dream despite facing many difficulties.

At the time she received news that her son was critically injured because of an Israeli shell. This required her to stand by her son.

She then was told that her husband would be released from an Israeli prison. She forgot about all the suffering she went through during his detention. When her husband was released, he found to his surprise and joy that his wife had been able to take responsibility for the kids and the house to the fullest extent possible. He embraced his children in utter happiness and love.

This woman's life shows that whoever wants to succeed will resist, challenge, and overcome all difficulties and that whoever wants to live a dignified life full of achievements should begin by improving and looking for success herself.

Young woman, Hebron area

My son Ahmad

Ahmad is a married man who has two boys and one daughter. He was part of the resistance in the 40-day siege of the Nativity Church. When the siege was over, the Israeli army released him and allowed him to return home. On his arrival home, he asked me, his mother, to sleep lightly that night and to watch the house door in case of any noise outside. I could not sleep well and stayed up all night. All of a sudden, I heard voices outside our house. Someone tried to open the door, then broke it. Israeli soldiers entered our home and inspected it inside-out, looking for my son Ahmad. They found him and arrested him while sleeping in his bed.

Next day, we followed up on my son's case and learned that he was detained because he was accused of being responsible for a major problem during the siege of the Nativity Church. They found him guilty and he was sentenced for life imprisonment. When I heard this I got into a deep depression. I refused to see anyone anymore, and I even distanced myself from my other kids. After a while, my husband passed away and my depression even worsened. Everyone tried to help me out of this mental state but they were not able, especially because the occupation prohibited me from visiting my son in prison for seven consecutive years. A bit later I was diagnosed with diabetes.

Then I was encouraged to join an association for elderly women. My membership and interaction with the people in this association helped me to improve my mental health and it helped me get out of my depression. As of now, eight years after my son's unjust sentence, I feel alive again because I am allowed to visit him. I feel like life has returned to me despite how far he is. Whenever I see his kids, I feel like he lives amongst us. I hug them, I nurture them, and look after them because they are a piece of my son who is far from me—they give me a reason to continue living; they are my hope in life.

Woman, Hebron area

3. Expropriation of land and demolition of houses

The Stone

Ali is a 12-year old boy. He is the oldest in the family. He used to take care of the sheep when coming back from school.

His mother used to say: "Ali, Ali... Wake up my beloved... Wash your face, prepare yourself and come to have breakfast, it's ready." Ali then answered: "Okay mum." Afterwards he took the sheep to graze.

Grassed areas have become day by day more difficult to access because of the confiscation of lands by the occupation. It happened that while Ali was tending the sheep and singing a Bedouin song, the sheep started to run away quickly. An Israeli vehicle came towards Ali. One of the soldiers got out and told him: "Go away from here or I will shoot you."

The soldier held his gun and threatened Ali. Ali caught a stone from the ground to hit the soldier, but he then remembered that these people took his land and nothing could stop them except God. So he threw away the stone and went back home.

Maybe he gave up, or maybe he believes that God has a plan for everything, and that the sun of freedom will rise one day.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

A grandfather's will

Years pass. Every night I attempt to speak but the words in my chest struggle to come out.

I was still a child, racing to hold my beloved grandfather's hand, asking him to take me to his land. He would look at me with a look full of life and hope. I used to accompany him to his green land, where I would play, pick flowers, and make a crown of flowers to put on my grandfather's head, saying: "Oh God of this earth." The sound of laughter from the both of us would start to rise.

Then my grandmother would come and say with kindness and affection, "Enough playing, the food is ready."

Afterwards, my grandfather would carry me and we would smell the sweet smell of delicious food prepared on the fire and eat it under the shade of the olive trees.

But with the beauty of these moments and memories I am also reminded of that devastating day during which the occupation authorities issued a decision to confiscate our land. As soon as my

grandfather received that paper, expressions that I could not exactly comprehend appeared on his face. I could not tell whether they showed emotions of sadness, hurt, resistance, persistence, or patience. Then a few Israel soldiers came and drove their cars on our land. They ran over our flowers without even blinking an eye.

A few moments later, a tall, broad-shouldered, green-eyed, blond soldier stepped out of the army jeep. I remembered thinking: Who is he? He is not from our village. I yelled in his face, angrily: "What did you do to my flowers? You have destroyed my childhood dreams, move away from our land."

He replied, sarcastically: "Your land?"

My grandfather moved me away, fearing that something bad would happen to me, and shouted: "Yes, my land! Leave my land. You have trespassed on my land. I own this land; I have inherited it from my ancestors."

The soldiers replied, angrily, "Move away, old man," and ordered the bulldozer to cut down our olive trees.

At this point, everyone's voices grew loud. My grandfather started shouting, pleading not to cut down the olive tree, forbidding them to move any closer. He stood with his skinny, frail body in front of the bulldozer like a lion standing in its glory, saying: "Stop! Do not cut down the olive trees! Do not rob away my hard work, no. No... and no." He remained standing in front of the bulldozers until his weak body fell on the ground. He was an old man so he couldn't understand what happened to him, and he fell down dead due to a heart attack in front of the bulldozer and was martyred while repeating, "Our rights will never be lost if we keep demanding them."

Young woman, Hebron area

Planting again

Nothing is more beautiful than the fragrance of thyme and the taste of olive oil in the early morning accompanied by a cup of tea and a loaf of warm, crunchy bread made by my grandmother—all from our land's blessings.

Ever since his youth, my grandfather took care of his land. Still every morning he goes to work on it. He cultivates it, plows it, and takes care of it as if it is his own child. He still wakes up in the early morning hours as the rooster crows and he then immediately goes to his land. One day, my grandfather was shocked when he reached his land. His heart was broken at the horror of the scene. The vineyards and olive trees were cut down.

My grandfather stood in the middle of his land, shattered by the scene. He cried in silence and returned to his home, worried and broken-hearted. He became ill and was devastated. A week later,

he got up from his bed, asked us to come, and said, "Come on, get up all of you, we will all go to the land, and we will plant it again."

Up until today, this cycle remains and my grandfather continues his struggle. Israeli soldiers keep uprooting and destroying his work, but he keeps planting again. He has not lost hope and his life motto remains, "No matter how much you attack us, whatever you do, I will never give up my land. "

Young woman, Hebron area

Knocks on the door

One cold winter night as the rain poured down, hitting the windows, while the wind roared vigorously, I sat with my husband telling him how the fear suffocated me. I told him, "Life has changed ever since the order for our home to be demolished was issued. I am worried about you facing the oppressor." Afterwards, I got up and drowned myself in house work, hoping that the night would pass peacefully. But the silence was suddenly disrupted by knocks on the door and the noises of a foreign language. At that point, I realized that the time had come, and I quickly woke up my husband to open the door.

"We have an order to demolish this house, hurry up, evacuate the house quickly." The words from the soldier's mouth sounded like poison for anyone hearing it. My husband replied to him angrily and courageously: "This is my home, and this is my land, and if anyone has to leave, it is you."

The soldier angrily demanded other soldiers to drag my husband out of the house into the rain. They grabbed us out and our crying mixed with the sounds of thunder. The sound of yelling, our crying, the baby's crying, and our broken hearts were not enough to stop them. Their ears refused to hear and their hearts were hardened. A few moments later my husband stood in front of their weapons and tried to stop them. But the treacherous bullet of a soldier's gun went straight through his body. He fell to the ground as a martyr, and the bulldozers finished their work and left the site.

I looked at the rubble of my broken house and fell next to my husband and held his hand, saying: "Wake up, do not die. We are here alone, your son is crying, the weather is cold. Please do not leave us." Silence persisted, and the only audible noise was the sound of rain hitting the ground as I remembered my husband's last words to our son, "I have not given you any money as inheritance, but I have given you something worth a lot more - preserve it, and do not waste it. This land is the most valuable asset I own." As my son grew up, he continued to cultivate the land, nurture it, and defend it.

Young woman, Hebron area

Demolition

I am afraid that the occupation forces will demolish my home overnight. My house is under threat to be demolished. It is not a fancy or intricate home — it is only a building on soil without windows, but it is my home. When we first built it, we did not even have electricity or water. Over time, however, we have been able to secure both. The Israeli occupation forces come from time to time to threaten us with demolition and register the location of our home. I have assigned a lawyer to fight on my behalf against our home's demolition. Here we are, today, still standing strong and resisting. Thank God for everything.

Young woman, Hebron area

PART 2: SUMUD IN SOCIETY

4. Need for reconciliation

The Mukhtar's Mercy

Four years ago, a large truck crossed the center of my village carrying vegetables and fruits for sale. After the driver sold his goods to the village dwellers, he left a location near the "Ain" [spring]. When he drove up the hill, some boys jumped on the back of the truck. When the driver suddenly put on the brake in the middle of a slope in the road, the boys fell down from the truck. One of them, 12 years old, came under the truck's tires and was crushed.

He died immediately. The driver left the scene quickly as he was afraid for being killed by the child's family. He hid in a neighborhood of a village named Al Jouroon ["Treading Place"] and took refuge in a nearby house lest an angry crowd would follow and kill him.

The dead boy's father happened to be the chief of the village [*mukhtar*]. When his boy was brought dead before him, the crowd informed the *mukhtar* that the boy's killer was hiding in a nearby house. Quickly, the *mukhtar* went to the place and informed the owner of the house that he, the *mukhtar*, would be responsible for the safety of this driver.

The chief took him to his house and invited all family members and the local community to a meeting. When all were present including the driver's family and the village dignitaries, he brought the driver next to him and delivered a very short statement: "I forgive this driver for the sake of God."

A story of a catastrophe thus ended in forgiveness and generosity. It gave a good example to all the villagers.

Teenager, Bethlehem area

My Father's Example

My father has been a pious and religious man and practiced the virtues and values of mercy, love and tolerance. His love for God, neighbor and even the enemy was noticeable and much appreciated by the majority in my village.

Last year, some thieves attacked our house, stole money, shot down and killed my young brother and ran away. The killer was caught by the village dwellers, badly beaten up, and brought up in front of my father in his injured state. All my family members were angry and shouted, "Let us kill him as he killed our dear son." My wise father silenced them, then raised his hand to the sky, saying, "Leave him, God will judge him. From my side I will forgive him. I beg you to forgive him and God will judge him."

My dad's forgiveness made this killer into a human and peaceful man. My father's example was a great testimony to the principle of "Love One's Enemy" in the presence of all the people of our village.

Teenager, Bethlehem area

The Qur'an and the Key

He was a young student in grade twelve. After his first semester marks reached 96%, he came back home very happy. His father hugged him and promised him to purchase an expensive car if he would get a 98 grade in his *tawjhi* [matriculation exam].

Days passed by, the boy studied very hard, sat for the *tawjhi* exam, and scored 98%. He ran quickly back home shouting "My dad, dad..!" He did not find his father who was still at work. He kissed his mum's head and waited for his dad's arrival. His father got the news immediately. When he came, he told his son, "Take this gift."

The father gave him a box with a Qur'an. When the boy saw the gift he threw it in his father's face saying, "After all my hard studying, you are giving me a Qur'an?" He left the house very angry and sad.

After some days of absence and reflection, the boy repented for his wrongdoing and came back home. He was shocked to discover that his dad had died on the same day that he gave the gift. He entered his father's room and found the box open and the Qur'an thrown on the floor.

He began reading some Qur'anic verses. All of sudden he discovered a car key inside the box. This was what he had wanted to receive from his late father. He went into a shock, fainted, started weeping and crying. After hours of rest, his mum's family members came to accompany him.

Then he decided to begin a new life. He sold the expensive car and donated half the car's price to buy wheelchairs for those with special needs. His slogan in life became: "Don't judge quickly, stay respectful, have a strong will, and you will succeed."

Teenager, Bethlehem area

Inheritance

My younger brother approached me and asked me to close the door of the main room. He said, "We have to tell you about our father's death." I was sad and depressed. I moved to the sitting room to see my two other brothers. I saw my father's lawyer talking to them.

I was shocked when a loud discussion started. I looked at the lawyer, asking, "What's wrong? Do we have to arrange for any procedures? What do you want to tell us?" The lawyer said, "It is about the inheritance procedures. Your late father had many possessions." My younger brother said, "We want

to finish these procedures fast. I have some businesses and I need my share from the inheritance. My brother wants to get married and work with me in the business.”

I criticized my brothers, “The inheritance is our right but we just finished the funeral. Do you want people to talk about us?”

The lawyer spoke loudly and emphasized that all of us should sign the papers and that he later on would take over responsibility.

I responded to the lawyer, “Okay, that’s fine with me. I don’t want anything from the inheritance. I will sign the documents and concede in favor of my brothers.” I could not bear what was going on any longer and left the house angry and in a hurry.

I felt so bad, I went looking for a place to relax and try to accept reality. Hours passed. Then I got a phone call. I answered and heard the lawyer asking me to come quickly to the government hospital. I went rushing to the hospital as I wasn’t aware what was happening. After entering the hospital I saw the lawyer injured.

I was shocked, and immediately asked him, “What happened to you?” He replied, “After I left your home with your two brothers, we went into a car. After a couple of minutes we had a car accident because your younger brother was driving fast.” I asked him, “What happened to my brothers?” He replied, “They are in danger, and treated at the intensive care.”

Suddenly someone came in and informed us that both my brothers had died due to bleeding. The lawyer offered condolences to me and said, “They were looking to get their inheritance but fate gave you their inheritance, together with more grief.”

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Baby Ali

I am a girl from Walajeh village, west of Bethlehem. My neighbor was on bad terms with my family. Their conflict was a result of a quarrel about a plot of land. My dad went to the court and the case lasted for more than three years. All the family, including my brothers, my sister and I, stopped talking with our neighbors or accompanying their children to school. A hostile atmosphere prevailed.

Suddenly, one night my mum heard shouting and crying in our neighbor’s house. My dad rushed quickly in his pyjamas and entered their house. The neighbor’s wife was about to deliver a baby. Without a word my dad brought his car and took the wife to hospital because the family had no car.

My father stayed side by side with the neighbor until his wife gave birth to a baby. There was joy and a feeling of gratitude due to my dad's help. After hours, the neighbors and my dad came home safe and happy. The neighbor decided to name his new baby "Ali," after my father's name.

This new life contributed to the beginning of a very constructive dialogue. The neighborly relations returned. Now both families live side by side in harmony and respect. This was for me as a young girl a great and inspirational event.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Welcoming

Is there anything more beautiful than love and tolerance? Isn't it nice to live in peace and unity, away from sectarianism? Human beings were created differently by God. Since these differences add diversity to life, we ought to co-exist with those around us.

While sitting next to my grandfather one day, he was looking intently at a tree that a friend had given him. He began to tell me how he met his friend: "I was on the run for Israeli soldiers and they shot at me, injuring my foot. A village nearby was closer than my home. In the beginning I hesitated. I was unsure whether I should go to the village or not as I was a Christian wearing a cross. I was unable to walk anymore, however, and this was my only option.

When I rang the doorbell of one of the first houses in front of me, I was met by farmers and people who seemed to live a difficult life and were in a poor financial situation. Regardless, they welcomed me in their home, served me hot food, and provided me with adequate treatment for my injury. When the children returned from school, they greeted me warmly.

However, when one of the kids saw the cross on my chest, his facial expression changed immediately, and he clearly disliked my presence in the home. The kid didn't understand anything about Christians because his school had taught him that Christians are infidels, and that it is not permissible to deal with them. His family felt embarrassed when they heard this. I felt it necessary to explain to the kid that despite our religious differences, we are human beings, living together in the same environment and circumstances, and that there is no difference between us.

I remember that I stayed with them for several days. In those days the head of the family and I became friends, and I helped him in his agricultural work. When I recovered completely, I had to leave, but they urged me to stay. My stay there was easily one of the most beautiful days of my life, and now the family and I are friends and dearest brothers."

Young woman, Hebron area

5. Women and society

A 'No' Characterized Our Relation

I was brought up in a family of a boy and me as daughter. My parents used to treat me and my brother differently. When I finished my daily studies, I was not allowed to visit my friends. I felt lonely and isolated despite my intelligence and very good academic marks.

I did my best to convince my parents to give me some freedom. However, they always said "no." This "no" characterized our relations despite our mutual love. My need was just to have good and intimate communication with others.

One day our school introduced a project in my class on *sumud* and advocacy, organized by AEI. I joined the training sessions and learnt some dialogical and non-violent communication skills. I started to approach my parents better, posing questions, listening and convincing. I had a number of meetings with one of my trainers who became close and helped me.

My trainer and I sat several times with my parents and things became clear. The "no" was because of family, society and religious traditions. Slowly my mum began to accompany me during the visits. A kind of new friendship with my mum developed and the traditional restrictions began to slowly melt. This became a positive turning point in my life, thanks to the new way of learning I received at school.

Teenager, Bethlehem area

Halla

Thirty years ago, a beautiful, innocent girl was born. She was named Halla. When eight months old, she got an infection and had fever. Due to her parents' ignorance and neglect, the fever caused a weakness in her hearing and speaking. When growing up, she suffered a lot because of this problem. Her classmates used to make fun of her, and her neighbors and relatives looked on her as a 'defective' child.

Later on she decided to leave school. After some years Halla started to feel that she became a burden to her family as she did not continue her studies. Halla faced many problems while trying to achieve her dream to find a job. She tried to improve her personality, depend on herself and face her physical problem.

She asked her family to help her go to a sewing center so as to learn sewing. She worked for 15 years in this field and became a skilled sewer. Through her work she supported herself and her family. She became a valuable person in an unjust society. Halla is now a girl full of hope and determination.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

My Brother Controlled Me

I'm an eighteen-year old girl. We were with three girls and one boy in the family. My brother was much spoiled by my parents. Everyone had to listen to his word in the house, particularly his sisters. My sisters and I suffered a lot because of him, as he did not give us freedom to do anything. I felt an inner conflict about whether or not to leave or stay steadfast in the house.

I decided to stay but without letting my brother control me anymore. Each time I argued with him I tried to change him and respect me, but my parents always supported him. That's what made me even more annoyed. I continued my life with a determination not to let my brother control me.

Later on, I got married. I decided to teach my children that males and females are equal in rights and duties. I will teach my son to respect his sisters and not to control them.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Designer Dream (1)

I am an optimistic girl and hope that one day I will be a designer. I want to be a famous designer and build a name inside and outside Palestine. Since I have a supportive family who all the time try to listen to me and encourage me to achieve my dream, I think nothing will stop me.

But many times when I hear my friends at school saying how difficult their families are regarding their future and what they want to study and where, I thank God that my family is different and open. I think parents have to educate their children well, specially girls, if they want to change society.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Designer Dream (2)

When I was in the last year of school, I told my teacher that I wanted to be an interior designer. The teacher smiled in an ironic way because she knew that I do not know how to draw and even don't like drawing. I told her that I liked this kind of study and that I wanted to work hard in order to succeed.

Then she asked me: "Does your family or your community [in Artas village] accept such a study for you as a girl?" I told her I knew they would initially refuse but that I could convince them to support me.

Thanks God I graduated with high grades. Now I am working as a designer and my family supports me. Nothing is impossible because where there is a will, there is a way.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Look at Life With a Smile

Once upon a time, I was looking at the window and saw a drop of water flowing on the glass. This image gave me hope and helped me to look at life with a smile and with love. I began my day recalling this image taking a cup of coffee and listening to the voice of the Lebanese singer Fayrouz. Then I prepared myself for my trip with AEI.

The trip allowed me to visit the village of Walajeh and see the beauty of nature despite the ugly wall and nearby settlement surrounding the village like a prison. This visit gave me the chance to learn to know new people from different background and hear their stories about their needs.

I was so happy to get to know them and feel the love and respect they share. It was not just a visit or a trip, it was a wonderful day that allowed me to understand and hear the other. It was a good experience to understand their way of living and what it meant to live in such village. I went home and re-told the stories to my family.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

I Succeeded in Convincing My Family

At first I was not convinced about the idea of the project, and to work on such an initiative as a woman. However, after I attended the training meetings I started to like the project's aim, especially the idea of doing something to help our village Artas. We decided to focus our initiative on the waste problem in the village.

As women we realized that our mission would not be easy and that we would face many obstacles, especially from the society's point of view. Initially my family could not believe that I would succeed in such an initiative. Despite this, I insisted to continue until the end. What encouraged me even more was that I succeeded in convincing my family.

I approached them by saying that the advocacy initiative was for the sake of the development of the village. Afterwards I began to work harder and more enthusiastic with the other women so as to make our village more beautiful and clean. Many other young men and women started to like our work. They were encouraged to cooperate with us which richness added to our campaign.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

First Initiative by Women

I'm a twenty-year old girl and a divorcee, living in a small village [Artas] in a patriarchal and male society where traditions restrict girls' ambitions. I was a small girl with big dreams and ambitions, successful in my study. My dream was to become a doctor to help poor and needy people.

I grew up and finished my school and here was the shock: Because of our financial condition I had to give up my dream of becoming a doctor. I decided to study computer systems. After my dad died I worked while continuing to follow my studies. Later on, I graduated from university hoping that I would find a good job in the field of my studies. However, I found a job in a school.

A year later, I got married, but I divorced from my husband a few months later. I was pregnant and had a baby boy. After passing through these experiences, I began to forget about my dreams and life became routine.

One day I took part in a project organised by AEI. My participation was the turning point in my life and in my village too because it was the first initiative started by women. We worked hard together and faced all the problems.

We succeeded to change society's viewpoint about women. We proved our people that women play a great role in society and that they can work in everything as they have all the abilities needed. Through this project we raised our voices and our case reached the responsible decision makers.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

The Day I Will Keep in My Memory

"After failure comes success." "When there is determination we can reach our goals." I did not understand the meaning of these words until I saw some powerful feminist models who showed determination, will, success, passion and strength.

I was a college girl. All my ambition was to graduate from university and get a job. However, after participating in the project presented by AEI, and funded by the European Union and CAFOD, I started to see things in a new perspective with a sense of strength, ambition and success.

When we created the Artas women's Initiative and launched the "Artas Deserves to Be Beautiful" campaign to solve the waste problem in the village, a sense of responsibility started to grow in me. I felt that I was responsible for my village, I wanted it to be the most beautiful place, and I increasingly felt a sense of belonging.

I have been watching success stories with these women. They entered the field of tax collection [going along the houses to ask inhabitants to pay their waste collection taxes] and achieved success. They

began going into people's houses to raise awareness about the problem of waste, and others went into schools to give training sessions to students.

They explained to the students about the tools of advocacy and campaigning. As a result, they won over some students and teachers as supporters and volunteers in a cleaning campaign.

We faced many difficulties and challenges, whether due to traditional attitudes or a general social tendency to treat us with suspicion and assume it was wrong what we were doing. . In spite of these challenges and others, there were some beautiful moments when we saw the people, especially the young in our society, slowly changing and joining us in our campaign.

The date 21/12/2018 was the day that I will keep in my memory and heart. It was the beginning of success. I saw some young people who used to be our opponents or neutral bystanders coming to help us and participate in the ceremony.

This campaign didn't only change the village, but also changed the people and society's perceptions. Above all it changed me. I have become a girl with ambitions seeking a better future.

Many thanks to those ladies who are filled with hope and belonging, and to the AEI that helped us to start our journey of achievement.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

Marriage

A lady I know once told me: "I live in Al-Jaber neighborhood, near the Israeli checkpoint. Not a single car is permitted to pass through the area. If there is a case of a woman going into labor, the residents of the area must first coordinate with the occupation to allow the ambulance to enter.

As for marriage, parents barely ever agree for their daughters to marry someone living in our area due to their concerns about Israel's aggression and restrictions. Even if my son wanted to get married, he would not be able to finish building a house, nor would he be able to transfer the necessary building and construction materials. I hope that he will be able in the future to live outside the area so that he will not have to suffer the same way we currently suffer.

The situation is similar for women living here. If my daughter wants to get married in the future, the man's parents would be worried about their son due to concerns about the area we live in. This is exactly why early marriages are so widespread here. If a good husband comes, parents will let their daughters marry even if she is young as this opportunity may never come again.

Educational opportunities are also really minimal. Families are afraid to allow their daughters to go to school and university due to the presence of checkpoints, barriers, and the abuse they are subjected to daily."

Young woman, Hebron area

Competition

During my employment as a kindergarten teacher in Hebron, I heard an announcement about a small project competition for young Palestinians. I had already prepared a project plan for developing a stationery shop when I pursued my bachelor's degree in computer science a few years ago. I was really excited about this competition, and as a new graduate and ambitious woman, I immediately submitted my proposal. Two days later, I received a call informing me that I was short-listed for the competition. I presented my idea to the judges and successfully convinced them of my project!

Afterwards I was asked to participate in an intensive course on project management with other selected candidates. Thankfully, I succeeded in this course, won the competition, and received funding to implement my project! Just like when any dream moves into the action phase, I ran into several obstacles, especially finding the right location for the stationery shop. People from my community were really supportive as they helped me find an amazing location.

Soon afterwards I partnered with my sister who studied accounting and we opened the largest stationery shop in the area —Al-Ibrahimiya Stationery and University Services. We chose this name to honor my father who had always helped us make our dreams come true despite difficult circumstances throughout our lives.

This achievement, and anything else that I accomplished in my life, I owe to my parents' support and love. They insisted that my siblings and I obtained an education and they sacrificed significantly for us to let us continue our studies. My father always taught me that it is a girl's right to have an education because it is her biggest weapon in this challenging age. I now know that this was the best advice I ever received.

Young woman, Hebron area

The youngest environmentally friendly farmer in Palestine

In November 2017 I enrolled in a course about sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices. It was about a planting method that avoids using any chemical fertilizer or pesticide. During the course I developed a passion for farming and started on my path towards becoming one of the first environmentally friendly farmers in Palestine. I began to employ the method in our house garden in northern Hebron.

Our land is quite small for farming. This made everyone around dubious about me. They constantly told me that they thought I was ruining the soil, that I applied strange methods. They even asserted that I would barely produce enough produce for self-sufficiency. Their incorrect ideas however did

not discourage me; I tried not to care about their opinions and instead focused on remaining anchored and persistent in my vision of success.

My positive mentality definitely helped me succeed and thrive. During the first summer season we produced 1000 kilos of vegetables, a really large amount for a plot of only 200 square meters! Throughout, my parents, especially my dad, were my number one supporters. My entire family helped me in planting and cultivation because all are unemployed though we are university graduates.

With this success I decided to create a Facebook page to advertise my products and inform people about sustainable agriculture. I gained more and more followers, and as people learned about my products, orders and sales increased! I then decided to develop my products even more and obtained another piece of land to grow trees and fruits. I want to continue growing and finding ways to improve.

This is me, Bayan, and this is my story. We should be together and unified for green innovation. We should be together for a better future, and unified for agricultural sustainability and a better and healthier way of living.

Young woman, Hebron area

6. Going abroad

Bethlehem in Germany

A while ago, I was in Germany visiting my daughter who lives there. One day, I went to the gym and started exercising next to a German woman. I greeted her, said “good morning” which led us to start talking. She asked me about my country of origin and I told her that I am from Palestine. She seemed very surprised and confused, and asked “Palestine?! Where is Palestine located?”

I replied: “Do you know Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah...” She replied: “Yes, it is in Israel.” I looked at her full of surprise and asked her, “How come that you know that these cities are Israeli and that you do not know anything about Palestine?” She replied curtly: “I only know Israel.” We conversed more briefly after that, then I said goodbye and left the gym.

As I was walking back to my daughter’s flat, ideas were raining on me from all directions: Why does no one know anything about Palestine? What happened to the Palestinian cause? Where did the Palestinian people go? In that moment, I realized that Western media play a big role in the selection of the news and what they want to publish, and that they do not tell our Palestinian story.

Woman, Hebron area

When you come back here, you feel a magnet (interview, 2004)

[...]

I don't know why I had that feeling at the beginning of my return back home [from a visit abroad] that I just wanted to leave this country. But all of a sudden after three weeks and after unpacking and running around and doing the dozens of things which you have to do after traveling, I felt that there is this magnet here that attracts me. It makes you feel that you are attached. I don't know what it is exactly. After all, you can only scratch the surface of your life. You don't know what is beneath that surface.

But there is that feeling that captures you, in a brief moment. When you ask me about the reason, I can't really spot it. First you think, there's here nothing to do, and you can't bear your life any longer, as there are dozens of problems on your head, and then all of a sudden, something comes like this [snaps with the finger], maybe it is a smile of a friend, maybe it's a word from an old lady, maybe it's a cup of coffee with your relatives, or your relatives coming to help you. Maybe it is our family life, maybe it's our friends. You can't find an exact answer to the question why you want to stay here. It's just a feeling that you can't resist. It's strange, but that's how it works.

After this trip, I had this feeling at the moment when I was completely at rest with my family again, with my friends and family. I was back in our normal prison life [laughs]. And I thought: So why do I want to leave? I shouldn't. I don't have so many choices here but at least I have better choices than other people. I have a job, I study at a university, I have friends, I have my social life. What do we need from life, in general? We need respect, we need to be able to afford a household, we need our friends. It's not so complicated.

I once had a problem with my car, a small accident. I phoned and suddenly, three cars arrived, full of guys, my brothers, friends, saying: What do you want? Is everything OK? The guy who made the accident was even afraid because he thought that I brought all those people to make a problem for him. Wow, whenever you need them they are there for you. Maybe family life is better outside, I've never tried it, but I sometimes hear from my father that he doesn't see my sister in the US for two days, although they live together. She works different hours; she studies at night, gets up early. Money-wise, they say it's better there. But if you work a lot without having the time to enjoy your life, what will happen to you after a certain number of years? It's not easy when you are under stress.

Sometimes I just want to sit with a big family around, drink a cup of tea. When they ask me: What do you consider an off-day, a holiday? After having visited six countries this summer, I say: I am completely free when I am away from the world, and when I am in my pajamas drinking coffee with my mom, with nothing to do. It's such a therapeutic feeling.

I reached the positive point that I said, without hesitation, "I am so lucky to be in Palestine and Bethlehem." This was after going to Lebanon, for a workshop. I went to the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. There I met a lady, she is in her late sixties maybe, and we were holding flowers to go to the collective graveyard made in commemoration of the massacre. She asked: "Where are you coming from?" I said: "I come from Bethlehem, Palestine," and she started to hug me and kiss me, she even wanted to kiss my hand. She started to cry. She didn't want to leave me and she said, please take me with you. We, the visitors, came from six Arab countries, about sixty people in total, and all of us were crying that moment. The refugees have this strong desire to see their land. When I asked them: "Where are you from?" they said "from Safed," or "from Acca," and they mentioned names of villages that I even don't know.

When I went home and saw my family around me, and we had a party in the front yard, I said that despite the fact that it is very difficult here and you have to struggle, I remain here. In fact, the struggle makes me stronger. I have been through a lot. If you have everything, a tiny problem becomes a big problem and you get frustrated by it. But if you face a lot, if you face a really tough experience, it makes you stronger, it gives you a challenge. So I said to myself, it's either me or life, you know, life is not going to get over me. So I say now that I am here since I do have certain choices, better choices than others have here, and I must stay here in order to save my home, to save my life, to give people ideas.

Young woman, Bethlehem area (2004, interviewer: Toine van Teeffelen)

PART 3: SUMUD IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND DISASTER

7. Disaster strikes

Struck by an electric shock

Mohammad tells his story about how he lost his feet and consequently the ability to walk as he looks at many of his friends who complain about their lives and their families although they have everything they need.

“My father died in a car accident when I was in the fourth grade. My mother used to go to work every day to secure a living for us as we lived on the bare minimum that entire year. I even asked my mother if I could leave school to help her, but she refused and insisted that I completed my education. One day in the cold winter, my mother was at work while my brother and I were home. We were really hungry, so I tried to look for food in the house. I found some food that needed to be heated, so I turned on the gas to heat it and serve it to my brother.

Meanwhile, my mom came home with an electric heater given to her by the woman for whom she had worked that day. We rejoiced because we had been cold at night the entire winter season. I remember how we used to sleep close to each other to keep each other warm. When my mom plugged in the heater, an electricity short circuit happened. Our house conditions were horrible: we had water seeping into the electrical wires, there was falling cement, and humidity on the walls. All these factors interacted together, causing the electricity to hit my body. I was struck by an electrical shock and I lost my ability to walk.

I remember that night very well. After I plugged in the heater, I heard the sound of my mother and brothers crying as they asked for help from the neighbors. It was only after the fire overtook our house that the people gathered to help. Afterwards I just remembered waking up in hospital. My life changed for the worse ever since. I try to stay positive though, I am trying... “

Young woman, Hebron area

Disposable beings?

I know a family of a father, mother, an infant, and three children. The Israeli army raided their home and arrested the father, leaving the mother responsible for the house and children. One day, she went to the pharmacy to buy medicine for her children because they were very sick and she left them alone at home. She forgot to turn off the heat and by the time she returned, the house was burning with her children inside.

The neighbors rushed to help and were able to evacuate the building. They saved the three children and their condition was stable, but the infant was in critical condition because she was in the middle of the fire. When they tried to transfer her to the hospital, the soldiers prevented them from passing,

causing the infant to die. Where is humanity when our children are killed and treated as disposable beings?

Young woman, Hebron area

8. Coronavirus crisis

A Birthday Party in Quarantine, Bethlehem

Doctors and nurses of the Bethlehem Health Directorate were the real heroes during the coronavirus crisis in Bethlehem. A coronavirus patient was under lockdown in her own hotel. Though she and her husband were reluctant to move from their rooms toward a special place for staying in quarantine, she was obliged by the health authorities to do so to prevent the spread of the virus.

There she received the direct health care and preventive measures she needed. She and other patients felt sometimes lonely and needed their families' attention and love. Her husband, sisters and friends, in cooperation with the doctors and nurses, looked for an initiative to support the patient and create a family-like atmosphere to reduce the worries and anxieties that were part of the new normal.

The lady's birthday gave them an opportunity. They prepared cake, sweets, cookies, and refreshments. With much care and attention to photos and music, the birthday party was celebrated. Joy and a spirit of love and a sense of human help prevailed over fear and loneliness.

Young woman, Bethlehem area

The stamp

[In the time of coronavirus] my teacher spoke with me in my capacity as a youth leader in a project. He invited me and my classmates to an online learning lesson organized in the wake of the schools' closure. He instructed us how to take precautionary measures. The first lesson was about how to wash our hands 20 – 30 times a day. He put a mark on his hand like a stamp and showed us how after washing the mark disappeared by the end of the day. He promised us incentives if we succeeded doing this ourselves. My family members, neighbor and friends appreciated the initiative and started applying it to keep life safe.

School teenager, Bethlehem area

Providing services

I am a member of a Charitable Society in Bethlehem. I do care with my colleagues for the welfare of the women in the elderly house. During this coronavirus crisis, the women were in urgent need of good health care, along with food, medicine and psychological care. Most were suffering from a combination of ailments including high blood pressure, heart problems, disabilities and respiratory problems.

Due to these concerns they were in need of help during this critical period. Over many nights, my two daughters and I, together with another volunteer, provided services such as preparing hot meals and sending them through a delivery service to the women's society.

Woman, Bethlehem

Arrest in times of corona crisis

I am a student from Dheisha refugee camp near Bethlehem. During the coronavirus lockdown in the night of Wednesday March 18, I watched in my house the latest news on Palestine TV about the virus. Suddenly, I heard shots nearby. My parents and I rushed out to see what was going on.

The Palestinian security forces prevented us from moving around. I asked them what was happening. They told me that the Israeli occupation forces had put them on a distance at the entry to the camp, although they were preventing people there to enter or leave Bethlehem in order to counter the spread of the virus.

Then Israeli soldiers crossed the street and stormed the house of a spokesperson of the PNA government. They entered his house, damaged much of the furniture, and arrested his nephew and two other youths.

This violent action happened while we were struggling to combat the coronavirus epidemics. It happened during a night when Palestinians from all sections cooperated in a harmonious and respectful spirit, performing acts of love, mercy, solidarity and care for those suffering from this unseen enemy called coronavirus.

In spite of all these difficult trials, I and my family and people are determined to go on facing the challenges of occupation and coronavirus in a spirit of *sumud*.

School teenager, Bethlehem area