

# Development Plan Arab Educational Institute

30/8/2018 – 30/8/2021

## Basic data

Full name of the organisation	Arab Educational Institute
Acronym	AEI
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 House Hebron Rd near checkpoint, Sumud Story House
Director	Rania Murra
Co-presidents	Fuad Giacaman, Elias Abu Akleh
Telephone n°	+972-2-2744030 (YH), 2746595 (SSH)
Fax number	+972-2-2777554
E-mail address	<a href="mailto:info@aeicenter.com">info@aeicenter.com</a>
Website	<a href="http://www.aeicenter.org">www.aeicenter.org</a>
Identity of organisation	Church-affiliated (member of Pax Christi International)

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

## Background AEI

After a period at the end of the 1980s, when it offered courses by teachers against payment, AEI developed itself as a Palestine- and Bethlehem-based educational NGO dedicated to empowering youth and women in Palestine, especially the West Bank.

Over the years, AEI has been working through community education and advocacy, the celebration of Palestinian culture and narrative, and the facilitation of local and international bridge building and exchange.

In 2004 AEI became a member organization of Pax Christi.

AEI's present-day expertise is in the field of training Palestinian groups in communicative and advocacy skills that strengthen individual and community sumud or

perseverance. AEI is also experienced in organizing small- and large-scale events for visitors and the community, including in-depth conversations, advocacy events, choir and music performances, story-telling, festivals, retreats, and symbolic non-violent actions.

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

## **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 2,5 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 is Christian. There is an ongoing tendency of Palestinian Christians to leave the country, though the emigration rate has differed 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 130 settlements primarily located in area C, which is fully controlled by Israel and covers some 60% of West Bank lands. The colonization process and expansion of settlements is still going on, and legal annexation of areas C by Israel may happen in the coming years.

The emergence of ISIS and other extremist movements in the Middle Eastern region in recent years has fueled 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 fears about the immediate future, 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 to come into reality, 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 negatively affects the development potential of Palestinians in the West Bank.

Given the Arab context in which sectarianism rather than democracy and civic values have been on the rise, hopelessness amongst youth may lead to radicalism and a deepening of social divisions in society, both weakening the cohesion and strength of the Palestinian community.

## **Mission**

***In this context, it is AEI's educational mission to support the sumud of Palestinians.***

Sumud, literally steadfastness or perseverance, has two general meanings for AEI:

(a) the strengthening of the moral fabric and internal cohesion and living together of a Palestinian society rooted in the land of Palestine;

(b) the Palestinians' capacity to raise their voice in support of human dignity, human and women's rights, and a just peace.

Sumud is a concept grounded in Palestinian historical and cultural awareness but is also connected to broader social movements that emphasize solidarity among peoples and communities nonviolently struggling to keep and develop a worthy living on ancestral lands. Sumud is rooted in the values of peace, justice, nonviolence, and inter-cultural and inter-religious respect. AEI wishes to foster a long-term inner peace-making strength among Palestinian youth and women as well as within the communities in which they live. This strength has an important spiritual side, that of hope.

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 surrounded by no-travel zones, settlements, checkpoints and borders? How to hope against hope? Important will be to preserve the human and civil values Palestinians and Palestinian society need in order to cope with and to challenge the dehumanizing consequences of occupation and rights violations.

***AEI's long term vision is that Palestinians, through their sumud, will actively and publicly participate in a future Palestine that is cohesive, free, democratic, and pluralistic and in which civic rights including women's rights and the rights of religious communities are respected.***

AEI's beneficiaries are Palestinian youth (6-30 years) and women. They are Moslem and Christian, and come from all backgrounds including town, village and refugee camp.

## **Educational objectives**

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

1. Developing sumud leadership, citizenship and life skills
2. Developing communicative competences including small group skills and media use
3. Promoting respectful inter-religious and inter-cultural living together in Palestinian society
4. Promoting in-depth knowledge of Palestine, Palestinian sites and Palestinian popular culture and arts
5. Advocating and educating on Palestinian cultural identity, youth rights, women's rights, human security, and national and cultural rights
6. Capacity building by developing human and financial resources and raising publicity to AEI's work
7. Developing suitable monitoring and evaluation systems.

These objectives are linked to the overall results and impact as mentioned in the table that follows here.

## Objectives of AEI related to result and impact 2018-2021

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Impact</b>
1. Developing sumud leadership and life skills	<p>Palestinian youth and women 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 and women
2. Developing communicative competences to open up and strengthen relations within society	<p>Palestinian youth and women trained in communicative competences (a combination of expressive skills, creativity and arts, language use, intercultural communication, critical thinking, world knowledge, advocacy)</p> <p>Palestinian educators trained in skills of student-centered teaching for living together and sumud</p> <p>Palestinian parents gaining knowledge of parenting</p>	<p>More public participation of Palestinian youth and women</p> <p>Strengthening creative/critical modes of teaching and learning in Palestinian education</p> <p>Acceptance of new models of parenting in Palestinian society</p>
3. Promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural living together in Palestine	<p>School students trained in inter-religious knowledge and skills</p> <p>Teachers trained in applying inter-religious methods</p> <p>Sources of moral inspiration for living together identified</p>	Fostering of moral and spiritual values in the Palestinian cultural identity
4. Developing knowledge and skills related to Palestine, Palestinian sites	Palestinian youth and women trained in popular Arts skills, including	More acceptance of Arts-centered methodologies in Palestinian education.

<p>and Palestinian popular arts</p>	<p>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>Deeper understanding of Palestinian cultural and historical identity</p>
<p>5. Educating and advocating to local and international audiences issues of Palestinian sumud, youth identity/rights, women's rights, human security, civic rights, and national and cultural rights/identity</p>	<p>Palestinian youth and women trained in sumud advocacy skills</p> <p>Palestinian youth and women, as well as teachers, more knowledgeable about sumud and associated rights</p> <p>Stronger networks with local sumud and peace-oriented NGOs and institutions (youth, women and educators)</p> <p>Stronger networks with international peace-oriented 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</p>	<p>Conducive climate for constructive conflict advocacy initiatives by youth coming out of morally vigorous Palestinian communities</p> <p>More public participation of Palestinian youth and women in sumud causes</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</p>

	<p>cultural rights</p> <p>Local and international audiences informed of AEI activities</p> <p>Better quality methodologies for training in communicative and civic competences</p> <p>Palestinian teachers trained in methodologies for teaching communicative and civic competences</p>	<p>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>Broader acceptance of student-centered methodologies in informal Palestinian education</p>
6. 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>Participants of the cultural entrepreneurship training able to set up home-based cultural tourism businesses</p>
7. Developing a monitoring and evaluation system	The programs monitored and evaluated	Stronger organization

These objectives are addressed in four programs each of which deals with different target groups:

1. Community
2. Youth and children
3. Women and family
4. Visitors and events.

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

### ***Program 1: Community***

AEI will continue the project 'Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together', implemented in the West Bank in collaboration with the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority. The project, running now for 20 years, promotes inter-religious living together of Palestinian Moslem and Christian teenager youth at 30 West Bank schools. While the project focuses upon schools, it also enters broader local communities. Annually 30 classes at government and private schools will conduct 6 specially arranged inter-religious classes to learn about Islam and Christianity. Some 750 students in the regions Bethlehem and Ramallah will annually contribute an essay, story, piece of drama, interview, poem or research presentation.

Both Islamic and Christian religious education teachers, working in couples, develop, discuss and implement inter-religious student-centered lesson plans. Teacher workshops will be held about methodology, including discussions on the new Religious Education curriculum of the Palestinian Authority, and a range of methods used in the project: moral dilemmas, oral history, storytelling, Socratic dialogue, as well as a home-grown AEI approach: Read Reflect Communicate and Act (RRCA). Fieldtrips to Moslem and Christian holy places will be conducted by both teachers and students. An annual community campaign will spread the project message, as well as joint Moslem-Christian celebrations.

A new track for AEI is that Palestinian schools and youth will be directly involved in sumud advocacy activities. These activities promote local community engagement in non-violent actions for a just peace, with a focus on issues which are relevant to those communities' sumud. In those communities AEI will engage with socially active youth leaders and educational teams. The targeted teenager youth will develop creative conflict advocacy actions and campaigns in their localities and beyond. Local media will be contacted, especially local TV and radio, to create publicity to the actions and disseminate the project message. Equipping youth with tools and strategies to amplify their narratives through media and social media enables them to influence decisions and policies of leaders leading to greater local support for non-violent actions for sumud and a just peace.



Stakeholders like the Ministry of Education and the parents of youth will be kept informed and involved. In communicating their sumud, participants learn skills to represent local communities and become ambassadors of Palestinian youth towards decision-makers and the world.

### ***Program 2: Youth and children***

Several Palestinian youth groups from different age levels will be encouraged to communicate Palestine and its environment to local and international audiences in various creative ways, including wall posters, debating and music. Sumud does not only demands sacrifice, but also encourages joy through culture.

An important artistic project of the Youth House will remain the professional development of the Palestinian teenager music group Sawa in Bethlehem, Palestine. The aim is to engage youth in educational activities outside school so as give them experience in sumud life skills and raise their voices through music. At the beginning of 2016 AEI started the training of the music band who all have a background in music and were chosen for their talents in music and singing. The team presently consists of 5 male and 5 female, Moslems and Christians, the members coming from Bethlehem as well as the surrounding villages and camps.

Another activity to be continued will be a debating society for youth, with two objectives: learning how to argue, and learning how to speak in front of other people, youth and adults. The debates will be held both in Arabic and English. A German volunteer (coming through Pax Christi Stuttgart) and AEI's staff will coordinate the society.

### ***Program 3: Women and family***

The Sumud Story House is located near the Bethlehem-Jerusalem checkpoint and the Separation Wall around Rachel's Tomb in north-Bethlehem. Rachel's Tomb is a holy place annexed to Israel and walled-off, made inaccessible for Palestinians. Initially the Sumud Story House started in reponse to the building of the Wall in the Rachel's Tomb area in 2003-5.

At the House 3 women groups including a choir (the Bethlehem Sumud Choir) will come regularly together for their weekly meetings and training sessions dealing with a wide range of social, cultural, psychological and inter-religious topics. The women groups will have a mixed Moslem-Christian composition, and focus on community building and developing voices and personal stories on justice and peace. During the summer, they follow an intensive program.

The women of the House have previously linked up with women in the countryside of the Bethlehem area, and this will remain an emphasis. They jointly dialogued with local

Palestinian authorities, police, security people as well as Moslem and Christian religious authorities and challenged them to give higher priority to women's rights and security.

The women will remain creatively involved in nonviolence vis-a-vis the Wall in Bethlehem, such as the further development of a Wall Museum with hundreds of weather-resistant story posters attached to the Wall. In 2016, it coordinated a Wall Information Center. In cooperation with women clubs in the occupied West Bank young women will, like the school youth mentioned above, be involved in sumud advocacy projects to promote community engagement in non-violent actions for a just peace. In each community AEI will engage with politically active youth leaders and educational teams to develop together with the targeted young women creative conflict advocacy actions and campaigns in their localities.

#### ***Program 4: Local and international visitors***

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 and sumud 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 the abovementioned 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.

Sumud advocacy can also be conducted out of the home and in a hospitality context. AEI started a new vocational training program in the academic year 2017-8, with 16 participants from the Bethlehem area to support them finding a job in the local tourism sector. The training followed a one-year curriculum of four courses of each 80 hours:

1. Organizing and accompanying day programs for visitors including the setting up of workshops and small events to show Palestinian culture.

2. Oral communication with visitors, tourism English, and the effective presentation of one's personal, family and community stories.
3. Effective use of Internet and social media in relation to tourism: the appropriate use of Facebook and Twitter, how to update a website and present oneself and one's business/office to international audiences.
4. Basic administrative and communication skills in computer use, handling emails, Word and Excel, and financial administration.

The courses were provided by a team of excellent local specialists. AEI will look for further financial support of which the future of the training depends.

A planned women's sumud cooperative led by AEI will

- raise publicity to the network of businesses and their services
- arrange Palestinian (Arab)-type drinks and meals
- organize programs for incoming individuals and groups, small or larger
- protect quality of services
- arrange traveling for visitors, including accompaniment
- develop small events for visitors
- explore the development and selling of souvenir articles.

**Bethlehem, November 2018**

## APPENDIX 1: AEI STAFF

Name	Type of involvement	Qualification
Mrs Rania Murra	Coordinator women group meetings at AEI, advise community campaigns	Director of AEI, many years of 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 of 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.

### Volunteers

AEI hosts international volunteers for short periods or half a year/1 year. A cooperation with Pax Christi Stuttgart involves annually a youth volunteer.

## APPENDIX 2: ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

### Advisory board

- Dr. Walid Mustafa, former Dean of Arts and lecturer at Bethlehem University
- Dr. Adnan Mussallam, Associate Professor, Bethlehem University
- Dr. Sawsan El-Hadweh, Beit-Jala
- Miss. Susan Atallah, School Teacher, St. Joseph for Girls, Bethlehem
- Mr. Ismael Muqbil Al-Jawabri, School Principal, Hebron School for Boys UNRWA
- Miss Sana' Abu Ghosh, Former School Principal, Battir Basic School for Girls UNRWA
- Mrs. Ilham Hamad, School Principal, Government School For Girls Bethlehem
- Mr. Muhammed Al-Hurani, Ministry of Tourism, Bethlehem
- Mr. Yousef El-Hreimi, Lecturer, Bethlehem and Jerusalem Universities
- Mr. Michael Abou Ghazaleh, School Principal, Evangelical Lutheran School, Ramallah
- Mrs. Naela Kharoub, School principal Dar Al Kalima
- Ms. Aida Abu Mohor, School principal the Good Shepherd school

***PS. Meanwhile the board has been changed in 2020:***

Maysoun Qawasmeh, chairperson

Zuheir Timezi, secretary

Widad Rabi', financial adviser

Sana' al-Azah, adviser women's activities

Suleiman al-Lusi, academic and educational adviser

Manar Atick, youth and children adviser

Anton Nassar, religious affairs adviser

## **APPENDIX 3: MORE ABOUT AEI**

### **10 things to know about AEI**

1. AEI's main focus is supporting Palestinian education, both youths and adults. AEI develops and tests student-centered, value-based methodologies that challenge both student and teacher or trainer.
2. In its educational advocacy, AEI aims to promote sumud in Palestine. Sumud is Arabic for steadfastness or resilience. For AEI, it has two meanings to which its educational work contributes: a grassroots strengthening of community and supporting people's voices and rights.
3. As part of its strategy to strengthen sumud, AEI fosters Moslem-Christian living together based on values of citizenship and respect for diversity in Palestine, in both informal and formal education.
4. AEI aims to build community, as part of sumud. In its educational work, AEI continuously crosses borders within the Palestinian community: between city, countryside and refugee camp and between the religions.
5. As member of Pax Christi, AEI is part of the international peace movement. In the Palestinian context AEI works on education about nonviolent sumud strategies and solutions based on international law.
6. AEI has a special interest in stories. It has particular experience with the use of 'stories of sumud' as educational tool that brings out Palestinian voices.
7. AEI also pays special attention to culture as an educational source of inspiration for developing voice, story and sumud.
8. AEI works on supporting and organizing Palestinian women's voices and rights, either in-house or in relation to women groups in Palestine and abroad.
9. In its in-house activities, AEI works with youth, encouraging them to develop their own creative educational activities.
10. AEI is a networking organization. It is part of the platform of Christian Palestinian organizations in Palestine, and actively links up with women and youth NGOs and clubs in the countryside and the city so as to broaden work and partnerships.

### **FAQ**

*How did AEI start?*

AEI started in 1986 as a group of teachers giving additional lessons to secondary school students in the Bethlehem area. In 2004 AEI became a Palestinian NGO, part of the Pax Christi movement.

*What are AEI's target groups?*

AEI has in-house Palestinian youth and women groups as well as a family group. The women come together at the Sumud Story House, the youth (from 12 years on) in the Youth House, both in Bethlehem. AEI's main project, *Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together*, is conducted at 30 schools in the Bethlehem and Ramallah regions. It involves some 90 teachers and headmasters, and annually some 750-1000 students (14-17 years).

*What are AEI's local and international affiliations?*

AEI is member of the international peace movement Pax Christi, the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine, Tawasol (women's empowerment centres in Palestine), and UNOY (United Network of Young Peacebuilders).

*Who are AEI's funders?*

AEI's main funders are development aid NGOs in Germany, the Netherlands and UK. However, AEI also benefits from the presence of support organizations in Europe and from crowdfunding actions.

*What is AEI's long term vision?*

The active and public participation of Palestinians in a free, democratic, and pluralistic Palestine in which civic rights including women's rights and the rights of religious communities are respected.

*What is AEI's day-to-day mission?*

it is AEI's educational mission to support the sumud of Palestinians.

*What does sumud mean?*

Literally, sumud means steadfastness. AEI works with the concept of sumud because of the educational value of staying in touch with the Palestinian land and community and the value of sumud as a 'third choice': refusing to resign to occupation or to become part of a vicious cycle of violence.

*How does AEI support Palestinian youth and women?*

AEI organizes group work and meetings at the Youth House and Sumud Story House and is also engaged in various projects. Examples are choir-singing, advocacy activities near and against the Separation Wall, work on women's rights, inter-religious (Moslem-Christian) classes at schools, journeys to discover Palestine, teacher training, and training women in how to build up a home-based business in tourism.

*Is it possible to volunteer at AEI?*

AEI has both local and international volunteers and student-interns. Bethlehem University students regularly conduct their internship at AEI. Pax Christi Stuttgart

annually screens and sends a young volunteer. Whether AEI is the right place for a volunteer or intern is decided in a meeting, correspondence or skype exchange based on a CV and introductory letter. AEI cannot contribute financially to an international volunteer's stay in Bethlehem.

*What are AEI's achievements?*

We feel that we have especially achieved in awareness-raising and skills training among Palestinian youth and women so that they are better able to raise their voice and tell their human stories across walls. An important success of our work is the strengthening of Moslem-Christian relations within Palestinian society in the central West Bank, especially at schools. AEI's *Citizenship and Diversity* project has run for almost 20 years and involves 30 West Bank schools. Annually 800-1000 students actively participate in the project.

AEI has been a bridgebuilder between women and authority bearers in Palestinian society. It has effectively worked making relations between Palestinian women and youth across different sections of the society in the West Bank, such as city, countryside and camps. Many of the stories documented by AEI are on display on 270 large weather-resistant posters attached to the Wall, and seen by many visitors of Bethlehem, the so-called *Wall Museum*. Since years, AEI hosts a women's choir, the *Bethlehem Sumud Choir*, and recently also a youth music group, *Sawa (Together)*. The Sumud Story House has conducted many creative advocacy actions vis-a-vis the Wall in north Bethlehem and Palestine in general, including an annual *Sumud Festival*. AEI issues a publication series, *Culture and Palestine*, with some 25 publications, mainly in English.

*Who are members of AEI?*

AEI's youth, women and family groups have a membership structure. Any Palestinian, from whatever background, above 12 years can become a member of AEI. Members are asked to come regularly together and contribute voluntarily to the objectives and activities of the organization.

*Is AEI a political organization?*

No, AEI is an educational organization. However, especially due to the context of occupation, all activities of AEI are affected by politics. Especially through our membership of the local coalition of Palestinian Christian organizations and Pax Christi, we bring out or support political or human rights-related statements and participate in nonviolent advocacy actions.

*Is AEI a Christian organization?*

AEI calls itself a church-affiliated organization. We however count among our members and board both Moslem and Christian Palestinians.

*To whom is AEI accountable?*

AEI is accountable to the Palestinian educational community, represented in its advisory board.

*Does AEI host visitors and visiting groups?*



Yes, AEI can organize cultural tourism programs in the West Bank including an itinerary of one or more day(s) and home stays at Palestinian families. We recently trained 20 women to work in the field of cultural tourism.

*Is AEI interested in international exchanges?*

Due to AEI's focus on developing voices and communicating stories, we are interested in international exchanges with youth, women, schools and educators.

*How can we support AEI?*

There are different ways to support us. Financial help is much appreciated. For international donators, please make use of the bank account of the Friends of Young Bethlehem, based in the Netherlands: <http://www.fofyb.org/engfofyb/index.html>  
It is also possible to support by coming as a volunteer, for weeks or months.  
At the end of the year and during the Christmas season, we always welcome wishes and prayers as an expression of moral support.

*How can we be kept updated about AEI's activities?*

Please follow AEI's website, [www.aeicenter.org](http://www.aeicenter.org), and AEI's Facebook page: Arab Educational Institute (Open Windows). Contact [aei@p-ol.com](mailto:aei@p-ol.com) for receiving a newsletter issued 3-4 times a year.

*How can I become a member of AEI?*

Palestinians in the West Bank and the Bethlehem area may join AEI's youth and women groups in their weekly activities. When you are a member of a group, you will be automatically a member of AEI. Please contact [aei@p-ol.com](mailto:aei@p-ol.com) or call 02-2744030 / 02-2746595 for information about the schedules of the groups.

*What advantages will I have as a member?*

You will have a say in the nature of the group work and will also be invited to participate in other activities of AEI.