

Annual Report Arab Educational Institute

1/9/2018-30/8/2019

Introduction

AEI supports Palestinian youth, women and educators in building community in Palestine and voicing their cultural identity and human rights. Our work is rooted in the values of *sumud*, peace, justice, nonviolence, and inter-cultural and inter-religious respect. In the long run AEI wishes that Palestinians actively and publicly participate in a free, democratic, and pluralistic Palestine – a Palestine in which civic rights including women’s rights and the rights of religious communities are respected.

In its educational advocacy, AEI aims to promote the value of *sumud*, in particular in the occupied West Bank. *Sumud* - Arabic for steadfastness or resilience - has two meanings to which AEI’s educational work contributes: a grassroots strengthening of community and a support to Palestinian people’s voices and individual and national rights.

In building community, AEI continuously crosses borders: between city, countryside and refugee camp and between the religions and across the cultural diversity of Palestine.

Through its emphasis on voices and rights, AEI wants to foster a capacity among Palestinian youth and women to do peace-making advocacy. In doing so, AEI applies UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 2250 which call for women and youth to be peaceful change makers in areas of conflict.

AEI’s two premises are the *Sumud Story House* in north-Bethlehem (a women’s house), and the head office quarters in *Madbasseh*, central Bethlehem. In the *Sumud Story House*, several women’s groups, a women’s choir and a parent group come together for a variety of activities and courses, besides a kid group (6-12 years).

In 2019 AEI ran the following projects/activities:

1. Inter-religious citizenship education
2. *Sumud* and peace advocacy
3. Conflict education
4. Wall education
5. *Sumud Story House*
6. Games

Arab Educational Institute
Bethlehem, February 2020

1. Inter-religious citizenship education

Project Name : Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together

Project Annual Budget : 99.783 EUR

Project Duration : 01.09.2016 – 31.08.2019

Donor : Misereor, Kindermissionswerk, Missio Aachen, Cafod, Solidarity Funds (Neth.).

Project short description :

Results:

- 1036 Palestinian students in the West Bank aware of commonalities, and respectful of differences between Islam and Christianity
- 3 well-attended public activities in which Moslem-Christian living together is promoted
- 60 teachers skilled in applying student-centered methodologies of inter-religious/civic education in class
- Achieving broad community support for the project involving teachers and other religious and educational stakeholders (parents, informal leaders, imams and priests) as well as educational authorities (district offices Bethlehem and Ramallah, headquarters Ministry of Education in Ramallah)
- 3 community campaigns to spread the project message.

Comment

As part of its strategy to strengthen sumud, AEI fosters Moslem-Christian living together based on values of citizenship and respect for diversity. This is done through the educational school project, *Citizenship and Diversity: Christian-Moslem Living Together*, in which 30 schools in the central West Bank participate with at least one class, involving 60 religious education teachers, both Moslem and Christian. The project undertakes a strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian Authority. The Ministry connects with the project through the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'diversity', both central to the subject of civics in the Palestinian curriculum. Through the direct participation of Ministry officials the project has become appreciated not only in private but also government schools. The project focuses on students 14-17 years old. The students are old enough to have an understanding of the values involved and are also able to work independently or in teams/groups.

From the 1036 students who participated this year, 570 contributed good quality contributions in the form of an essay, drama, poetry, presentation, community activity or any other educational form. Three choir groups at the government school girls of Beit Jala, Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, endorsed the project message of Moslem-Christian living together and gave 10 school performances attended by many hundreds. Other project methods included: implementing a joint religious studies lesson twice a month (rather than separate Moslem and Christian religious lessons as is usual), fieldtrips to Moslem and Christian holy places, introduction of educational drama and discussion techniques like the posing of a moral dilemma, joint religious celebrations, teacher workshops and training, student essay competition and story writing, an annual community campaign and evaluation workshops with teachers, school principals, students and parents.

An external evaluator (Mr George Akroush) came to the following conclusion about the program in the period 2016-2019: *"AEI initiated a progressive program that became a local change tool for modernity and good citizenship. Amidst social, political and sectarian divisions, exposing students to successful civilizational models and practices is a need not a luxury. It is the only hope for creating productive and*

responsible citizens who are able to contribute to society and play an active role in economic and political transformation. AEI has been challenging complicated conditions at both the local and regional levels. Citizenship and Diversity – Christian Muslim Living Together adopted a pioneering approach of having a diverse, tolerant, democratic and peaceful community. Expanding partnerships and joining other players in the region is essential for creating the desired sustainable change.”

2. Sumud and peace advocacy

Project Name : Engaging, empowering and equipping diverse and marginalised youth and amplifying their voices for peace

Project Annual Budget : 102,283.00 EURO

Project Duration : 15/1/2018 - 15/1/2021

Donor : EU, CAFOD

Project short description : Coordinated by AEI, 20 Palestinian schools and youth/women clubs in the occupied West Bank have been involved in an advocacy project for Palestinian youth in the West Bank (2018-2021). The project promotes civil society engagement in non-violent action for peace. In the project 600 young participants from the Bethlehem and Hebron areas, including from marginalized communities, worked on community topics directly relevant to youth. They organized nonviolent advocacy actions informed by respect for human values, civil rights, and international law. In communicating their sumud [steadfastness], participants learned skills to represent local communities and become ambassadors of Palestinian youth towards decision-makers and the world.

This last year the focus was on training and local advocacy actions among young women in the Bethlehem area (neighborhoods and villages - Khan al-Ahmar, Sumud Story House, Al Walajeh, Artas, 'Azzariyyeh), teenager students at Bethlehem schools (Lutheran school Beit Sahour, Greek Catholic school Beit Sahour, Greek-Orthodox Shepherds School in Beit Sahour, Swedish school in Bethlehem, Dar al Kalimeh in Bethlehem), young women in downtown Hebron (Jabal Johar, Al-Qasara, Tel Rumeideh, Shuhadeh Street, Haret al Sheikh), three schools in the Dura region (Sikka, Deir al Asal, Bourj) and two youth clubs also in the Dura region (Abou Asajeh, Beit al Roush al Fouka).

The advocacy actions included local demands ranging from improved garbage collections services, regular and safe school transportation, improved access to health clinics, to broader issues such as more accurate representation of women in media, no drop outs from schools, no cut of UNRWA services, or freedom of movement (no to the Wall).

During March 2019, several AEI members visited CAFOD in London and spoke with development workers, school groups and politicians to tell about the project.

For a presentation of the project, see

<https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-article-presentation-EU-project-in-West-Bank.pdf>

For an article about the project in the magazine *This Week in Palestine*, see <https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-article-EU.pdf>

For 20 narratives written by youths as part of the project, see <https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-resource-narratives.pdf>

3. Conflict education

Project Name : Palestinian Youth Protecting Civic Values in Conflict

Project Annual Budget : 93.489 EUR

Project Duration : 01.09.2018 – 31.12.2020 (each year new application to be approved, present subsidy is 15.02.2019 – 31.12.2019)

Donor : ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (zivik Funding Programme, Federal German government)

Project short description : For 9 months during 2019, this project took place in 8 communities in the southern West Bank, specifically in locations where Palestinian youths are frequently engaged in violent clashes with Israeli army or settlers. It targeted 400 Palestinian youth in the age range of 15-18 years. The desired changes included a reduction in the use of violence by those youth and a behavioral change to protecting civic values in conflicts and challenging extremist ideologies which promote violence. The project supported 8 local educational leadership teams – 5 members in each community team – to give a positive example to youth and provide moral orientation to local communities under pressure. In each community the project engaged with politically active youth leaders. Guided by educational teams and youth leaders, the 400 youth became aware of advocacy skills. The activities included:

- Youth researches in each of the communities, in which youth collected stories, facts and opinions around the selected civic advocacy topics and formulated demands and built argumentative support. The research conclusions were summarized in a magazine-type publication (see below).
- Networking meetings with stakeholders to deepen knowledge, build alliances, and refine demands.
- Implementation of a 3-day summer workshop program for 50 youth in each of 8 communities in which previous experiences were reflected upon and advocacy campaigns prepared.
- In each of the communities, a local advocacy campaign to advocate for civic respect on the advocacy issue and involving networking meetings with decision-makers, public events, class visits at schools, fieldtrips, and collaboration on the production of local TV documentaries (on local Mawaal station).

The project was conducted in government schools in areas near Bethlehem: Battir, ‘Abdiyyeh, Artas, Beit Jala, Aida Camp, Doha (both a girls and a boys school) and Dar Salah. The advocacy topics included dealing with conflicts by improved town planning, safer tourism routes (due to conflicts with settlers), strengthening cohesion of agricultural community, dealing with water shortages, and safety on the roads due to various tensions including political conflicts.

The magazine gives insight into the project’s youth research – a relatively new extracurricular track at Palestinian schools which clearly helps independent and critical thinking:

<https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-resource-youth-research-English.pdf>

4. Wall education

Project Name : Wall Information Center

Project Annual Budget : 9.000 EUR

Project Duration : 01.01.2019 – 31.12.2021

Donor : Haella Foundation, Friends of Young Bethlehem, and small contributions

Project short description : The Wall Information Center at AEI's Sumud Story House in North-Bethlehem aims to give voice to Palestinians who are directly hurt by the so-called separation wall. It provides information about the impact of the wall toward domestic and international audiences and gives attention to people's narratives of loss as well as *sumud* [steadfastness, resilience]. Doing so it amplifies the voices of Palestinian women living in the shadow of the wall. The Center advocates the right to protection, security and development in accordance with human rights and international humanitarian law in accordance with the principles of UNSCR 1325 (on women's security).

Partially in the context of the Wall Information Center, AEI organized its Ninth Annual Sumud Festival in September in the context of the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel and the International Day of Prayer for Peace. This year's festival's title was "The Wall is a Denial of God's Creation," in accordance with the theme chosen for the World Week by members of the World Council of Churches. The aim was to raise voices of Palestinian youth, children and women saying "no" to the Wall as a denial of God's image in His creation and a violation of values of freedom and equality.

AEI opened a 'reflection corner' at the Wall around Rachel's Tomb for visitors and locals alike to contemplate the impact of the Wall in an imprisoned area. The corner is where the Anastas family house is surrounded by the Wall. The corner is part of the 'Wall Museum' and contains quotes of Bethlehemites about imprisoned life and of the poet Mahmoud Darwish articulating the trauma of a broken home/homeland. The 'opening' took place on 13 September in preparation of the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel convened by the World Council of Churches. Together with Palestinian kids, Dutch visual artist Ada Krowinkel, of the Friends of Young Bethlehem, helped prepare the paintings.

About the Wall Museum, with a link to photos of posters:

https://aeicenter.org/?page_id=94

For a reading of all story wall posters:

<https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-resource-wall-posters-all.pdf>

5. Sumud Story House

Project Name : Sumud Story House

Project Annual Budget : about 20.000 EUR

Project Duration : 01.09.2018 – 31.08.2019

Donor : Radical Hope/Tides Foundation (US), contributions from individual donators Pax Christi Germany

Project short description : The Sumud Story House is located near the Bethlehem-Jerusalem checkpoint and the Wall around Rachel's Tomb. Rachel's Tomb is a holy place in north Bethlehem annexed to Israel and walled-off, made inaccessible to Palestinians. At the Sumud Story House 3 women groups including a choir came regularly together for their weekly meetings dealing with a wide range of social, cultural, psychological and religious topics. The women groups have a mixed Moslem-Christian composition, and focus on community building and developing voices and stories. The particular strength of the SSH is the opening up of platforms in which common women, Moslem and Christian, meet, dialogue with, and

sometimes challenge authority representatives. Religious stakeholders like sheikhs and priests have become conveyors of the House's message in support of gender equality.

6. Games

As part of the various projects, AEI developed in 2018-19 a series of educational or awareness-raising games, with different purposes in mind. Some show the absurdities of occupation including an (old) checkpoint game (still available in French) and a new permit card game, in English. Others support critical thinking among Palestinian youths, such as the 'Rules of Respect Game' (Arabic). Still other games support the documentation of heritage stories, like the 'Wisdom of Sumud Game' (English).

For a brief overview of the games, see:

<https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-Article-Game.pdf>

For the cards of the Permit Card game, see:

<https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-resource-Permit-cardgame.pdf>

For the cards in the Wisdom of Sumud game, see:

<https://aeicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AEI-2019-Resource-Wisdom-Of-Sumud.pdf>

Other

Safeguarding for Children and Vulnerable Adults

In cooperation with British development organization CAFOD, AEI developed a protection code for the children with whom it works. The code recognizes the personal dignity and rights of children and vulnerable young adults, towards whom it has a special responsibility and a duty of care and respect. AEI and all its staff, volunteers and consultants undertake to do all in our power to create a safe environment for children, young people and vulnerable adults and to prevent their physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Memorandum of Understanding Between BZU Palestine Digital Archive (PDA) and Arab Educational Institute (AEI)

In order to make use of the many visuals and stories of www.palestine-family.net (PFN), Palestine Digital Archive (PDA) at Birzeit University (BZU) made an agreement at the end of 2018 that BZU can use its archive to preserve various audio-visual materials of Palestinians' life, history, culture and heritage to prolong their lives and to protect them from being lost or damaged. PDA strategy is to build a network with archives to enable researchers and Palestinians inside-outside Palestine to use its archive friendly and easily. The cooperation with PFN is expected to add value to the archive and will provide original copies of photos and documents.

Youth exchanges

The United Network of Young Peace Builders (UNOY) organized in June 2019 in Amman a regional meeting aimed at developing a joint regional strategy for organizations working in the field of

peacebuilding and empowerment of youth in the Middle East and North Africa region. The meeting was attended by AEI and representatives of youth organizations from Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and Jordan.

A delegation of AEI youth participated in a youth exchange in Kildu – Estonia for 10 days in April 2019 on “Conspiracy and Media Literacy”. The event was organized by the informal youth group “interEST” and funded by the European Union program Erasmus+. The project involved 30 participants from 6 countries.

Educators visit to the Netherlands

The Dutch Verus association for Catholic and Christian education invited 12 staff members and teachers related to the Arab Educational Institute to come to the Netherlands, 16-23 June 2019. The program included various visits to schools, exchanges with Dutch school leaders and teachers, an introduction to the education system, and excursions around the Netherlands.

Volunteering

Also this year AEI hosted volunteering guest trainers. Two Dutch Quakers, Sytze and Marlies Tjallingii, gave in Spring workshops on Neuro-Linguistic Programming to AEI youth and women groups.

Networking

AEI is a networking organization, and in 2018-19 was linked up to various organizations:

- Pax Christi, of which AEI is a member organization
- UNOY Peacebuilders, with its network of 80 youth organizations in 50 countries
- World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, convened by the World Council of Churches
- Kairos Palestine and Sabeel and its new initiative Kumi Now
- Christian organizations in Palestine, coordinating political positions and statements
- Arigatou, an international organization for inter-religious dialogue and living together.

Locally, AEI maintained and developed networks in the central West Bank and the Hebron area among schools, women organizations and cultural or youth clubs.

AEI also took part in a committee with inspectors of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in overseeing inter-religious education at 30 schools, both governmental and private, in the context of the Citizenship and Diversity program.

Advisory board

A new AEI advisory board convened in summer 2019, consisting of 7 members involved in community and school education and women’s development work. The new board members represent the broader community and educational leadership: Zuheir Tinezi, Maysoun al-Qawasmeh, Widaad Rabi’eh, Anton Nassar, Sana’a al-’Azza, Manar Ateek, Dr Sliman al-Lucy.

Permanent staff

<i>Name permanent staff</i>	<i>Type of involvement in AEI</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
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Fuad Giacaman	Co-president and political and educational adviser, program coordinator, member financial committee, monitoring and evaluation, member management team.	Former headmaster and teacher at Bethlehem schools, former AEI general director. BA in English language and literature.
Elias Abu Akleh	Co-president and financial adviser, program coordinator, financial management and accounting, member financial committee, member management team, monitoring and evaluation.	Experience in financial administration of dozens of AEI projects as well as private schools in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, involved in AEI since mid-1990s.
Rania Murra	General director, program coordinator, adviser on political and women's affairs, spokesperson, member financial committee, monitoring and evaluation, member management team.	10 years' experience in setting up and coordinating women groups. MA in women and development studies. Presently member of international board Pax Christi.
Roger Salameh	Project coordinator, member management team.	Experience for over 8 years in youth projects, coordinating and secretarial work, coordinating AEI youth groups, international exchanges.
Claudette Mubarak	Project coordinator Wall Information Center	New BA graduate from Bethlehem University.
Toine van Teeffelen	Educational adviser and researcher, project manager.	Experience in developing, monitoring and evaluating of projects at AEI and elsewhere, author teacher manuals and books on Palestinian daily life, culture and identity. Ph.D. in discourse analysis, MA in social anthropology.

AEI's staff and management met weekly. Workshops connected to staff meetings for in-depth communication on issues of implementation and learning processes were regularly organized. In such workshops issues of management, M&E, analysis conflict environment, and procedures for youth and children's rights protection were discussed, among other things.

Ten 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 all the time crosses borders within the Palestinian community: between city, countryside and refugee camp and between the religions.
5. In its advocacy activities, AEI works with youth, encouraging them to develop their own voices and demands, and learn how to influence stakeholders and decision-makers.
6. 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.
7. As member of Pax Christi, AEI is part of the international peace movement. In the Palestinian context AEI works on education about nonviolent strategies and solutions based on international law.
8. 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.
9. AEI pays also special attention to culture as an educational source of inspiration for developing voice, story and sumud.
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.

Quotes of youth participating in AEI's projects

The wall in front my school hasn't made me thoughtful. Now I come to think how to challenge it peacefully.

When I, my classmates, teachers and trainers planted together our school gardens, I understood better what sumud should be.

Love of God, love of our people and love of our lands are great ways. I have learnt and began to practice now.

Saturday 21 September was a very special day to me and to my dad and mum. It was the day when I and my friends and others participated in the AEI World Week to Pray for Just Peace and the 9th Annual Sumud Festival. We came to Bethlehem from Deir Kahil, a village on the way to south of Hebron, in the West Bank. I and my sister presented a drama and a poem as well as a dance on "Jerusalem" as a holy place for all believers of God. We enjoyed and became proud of ourselves. We were not afraid to stand in front of many people. This is a great and interesting event which helped me also to narrate my story, experience and joy to the classmates of my village while meeting Christians from Bethlehem.