

Annual Report Arab Educational Institute

1/9/2019-30/8/2020

Introduction

In unprecedented times, AEI adapted to the emerging needs as the coronavirus crisis reached peaks in the occupied West Bank.

AEI encouraged citizens and especially youths to be pro-active and supportive in responding to the various simultaneous crises. Various solidarity initiatives challenged the “unseen enemy” notwithstanding the impact of the lockdown, the unemployment, and the huge economic challenges due to among other things the collapse of the tourism sector in the Bethlehem area. Meanwhile, the institutions of the PNA and the civil population faced repression by the Israeli occupation forces, and ongoing ‘silent’ annexation by expansion of settlements and settlers taking over certain nature sites in the countryside.

AEI’s work was again inspired by the Palestinian value of *sumud* which is about keeping the community on the land, bringing people together for the common good, caring for the vulnerable, and upholding the value of respect among people as well as for land and nature.

Sumud, literally steadfastness or perseverance, has two general meanings in AEI’s work:

(a) strengthening the moral fabric and internal community relations of a Palestinian society rooted in the land of Palestine, with a special attention to the prevention of violence against women, youths, and vulnerable groups.

(b) strengthening the capacity of Palestinians to raise their voice in support of rights, including women’s and youth rights, out of a vision of peace based on justice.

AEI’s two premises are the Sumud Story House in north-Bethlehem, and the head office quarters in Madbasseh, central Bethlehem. In the Sumud Story House, several women’s groups and a women’s choir come together for a variety of activities and courses, besides a kid group, a youth group, a teacher group and a faith group.

In 2019-20 AEI ran the following projects/activities:

1. Inter-religious citizenship education
2. Sumud and peace advocacy
3. Conflict education
4. Early Warning and Response System in Hebron downtown
5. Providing information and raising awareness about the Wall
6. Sumud Story House

Arab Educational Institute
Bethlehem, February 2021

1. Inter-religious citizenship education

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

Project Duration : 01.09.2019 – 31.08.2022

Donors : Misereor, Kindermissionswerk, Missio, CAFOD, Solidarity Funds (Neth.).

Project short description: The project network of 30 schools helped to foster equal, responsible and participatory citizenship and respect for diversity. It conveyed to Christian and Muslim students, educators and parents the message of working together for the public good during the Covid-19 crisis.

Results:

- 903 Palestinian school students in the regions of Bethlehem and Ramallah aware of commonalities, and respectful of differences between Islam and Christianity
- 2 well-attended public activities in which Moslem-Christian living together was promoted
- 60 teachers trained 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.

903 school students were trained in interreligious education and civic and diversity education during 8 joint interreligious lessons over the year, held in 30 classes at government and private schools. 5 schools gave similar lessons to other classes not part of the project.

About 70% of the 650 student contributions, or about 455 contributions, were of good quality according to the supervisory committees.

530 students were involved in local advocacy actions, all related to the main challenge of the pandemic and its repercussions, and aimed at strengthening Christian-Moslem relations under the stressful conditions. Due to the constraints of the epidemic, the advocacy initiatives were implemented by either individual students or small groups of students with some teachers' and parents' involvement. Local initiatives of giving and solidarity with the infected, elderly and poor were implemented. The messages of students and schools bespoke of the deep sensitivities, fears, moments of loneliness and even acts of violence following the unemployment crisis and an increase of poverty in the wake of the lockdowns. A central slogan was "Together we will overcome the corona virus". Here are main initiatives listed:

1. Students, teachers and parents of the Beit Jala Secondary School for Girls went into a procession of cars to greet, applaud, sing, and give flowers to patients, police and

security teams at the Angel Hotel in Bethlehem/Beit Jala where infections spread during March. Hundreds of watchers noticed the acts of solidarity.

2. Some school students supported by teachers and parents contacted infected persons, sick at home in self-isolation, by way of food delivery, phone calls and social media. This left a feeling of relief, comfort and inner peace among those patients.
2. Students assisted by parents and teachers organized a preventive education campaign to stop the spread of the infections. Some wrote slogans, posters and stories and distributed them during the periods that outside movement was possible. The prevention guidelines were sometimes transmitted through social media.

The various modest initiatives contributed to a greater awareness among some reckless youth and adults, and awakened a sense of responsibility and protection of human life.

The Christmas celebrations for Bethlehem and Ramallah were this time combined in one event on 7 December at the Golden Park Hotel Hall in Beit Sahour. The event was visited by several hundreds of teachers, school leaders, students, parents, inspectors and other officials. They were informed about the advocacy actions conducted by youths in various AEI projects.

Encouraged by the Ministry's publicity and school presentations about the project during the annual teacher days organized by the Ministry, it happened that several government schools in the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas started to organize school celebrations with an inter-religious dimension. They did so in the first semester on days such as Christmas, the Prophet Mohammed's Birth, St Barbara's Day and All Saints' Day. In total 16 government schools (with large majorities of Moslem students) held Christian religious events in their school communities, as did the private schools. On average, the number of attendants at such celebrations was, according to teachers, some 200.

The main conclusions of this year's project are:

- The high level of commitment of the teachers, principals and inspectors was Important for the project's continuation during the ongoing accumulation of crises.
- The relevance of the project remained high due to the fact that all people including the youths faced existential dilemmas and constraints which clearly had an ethical and spiritual dimension, also because mutual cooperation and civility were essential to survive the crises.
- The largest part of activities could be completed despite the uncertainty and changes in types of education (from physical to online and back, or combinations/hybrid).
- Teachers needed support for online learning in terms of materials and training.

A new syllabus came out in digital form and summarized the many methods which teachers applied in and out of school over the many years of the project. In compiling the methods and approaches, AEI made use of all kinds of documents including model lessons in the project, previous project manuals issued by AEI, narrative reports, and minutes and notes kept from teacher workshops and meetings. The main purpose of the manual is to give a handy 'skeleton'

to teachers and educators which helps them to quickly go through the many different available methods and approaches when making lesson plans.

At AEI a faith group was established which was partially inspired by the project. During the members' prayers, reflections and discussions about the meanings of Christianity topics were discussed like: What is God's presence during trials, or: Where is God during the corona virus crisis? AEI staff and the faith group held individual and group prayers for the victims and the speedy recovery of the ill and the wounded in the Arab world, especially in Palestine and Lebanon.

3. Sumud and peace advocacy

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

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

Donors : EU and CAFOD.

Project short description : Coordinated by AEI, 20 Palestinian schools and youth/women clubs stayed involved in this advocacy project for Palestinian youth. Supported by the EU Peace Initiative and the British charity CAFOD, youth and women groups in both the Bethlehem and Hebron areas continued to raise their voices in front of decision makers. The project promotes civil society engagement in non-violent action for a just peace.

This last year the focus was on fieldtrips and decentralized advocacy actions among young women in the Bethlehem area (neighborhoods and villages - Khan al-Ahmar, Sumud Story House, Al Walajeh, Artas, Aida camp), 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 neighborhoods), three schools in the Dura region in southern Hebron district (Sikka, Deir al Asal, Bourj) and two youth clubs also in the Dura region (Abou Asajeh, Beit al Roush al Fouka).

During the 10 fieldtrips in the Hebron area - the main activity implemented in this period - staff gave advice about social distancing, and mouth covers and disinfection soap were made available. The large buses allowed for adequate social distancing between the 25-30 participants per trip. The fieldtrips with school teenagers were organized in dialogue with local municipal authorities and parents.

The fieldtrips were used to involve the participants in the preparation of a coordinated campaign in Hebron about access to rights and health services.

Due to the corona virus crisis, planned offline activities like a conference in Hebron and coordinated advocacy campaign events in both Hebron and Bethlehem could not be organized.

The planning required much improvisation, while considerable contact and organizational work was in vain.

To deal with the safety problems of face to face meetings, AEI went along with suggestions of local contact persons to work on the advocacy campaigns in a more decentralized manner and making use of online exchanges.

Several women participating in the Hebron downtown communities came to be involved in another AEI project supported by UN Women for developing an early warning and response system about the prevention and solving of conflicts in the Hebron area (see below).

Many of the participants in the Hebron and Bethlehem areas were active in civil actions to confront the immediate challenges people faced because of the corona virus crisis. In Artas, north-Bethlehem/Sumud Story House, Walajeh, the groups in Hebron downtown and the schools in Dura area young people were active in a range of activities: providing economic relief, medical supplies, protection wear, and first aid packages; informing the public about social distancing and other protective measures, and giving moral and sometimes material support and consolation to those who were alone; as well as sometimes supporting corona patients themselves. In the Bethlehem region, some 50 students from AEI's inter-religious school project cooperated with schools involved in the EU project to support locals, especially in Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, Walajeh and Artas. The activities in Artas were documented in an article published in the Catholic Universe newspaper (UK).

For more information:

The project's stories and photos in an instagram series – "sumudstories" – see *here*.

Or follow AEI's Facebook page: Arab Educational Institute (AEI-Open Windows), *here*.

For the sumud stories written in the project by Palestinian teenagers and young women in the Bethlehem and Hebron area, "Never Give Up and Never Stop Caring," see *here*.

For an article about the project by British partner CAFOD: see *here*.

4. Conflict education

Project Name : Palestinian Youth Protecting Civic Values in Conflict

Project Duration : 01.09.2018 – 31.12.2020

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

Project short description : The project "Palestinian Youth Protecting Civil Values during Conflicts," supported by the German Federal Government (ifa) involved 8 government schools in the Bethlehem district: Battir, 'Abdiyyeh, Artas, Beit Jala, Aida Camp, Doha (both a girls and a boys school) and Dar Salah. They worked on upholding civic values in the context of various types of conflict. 400 youth studied tensions and conflicts within or imposed upon their communities. They carried out advocacy initiatives and raised their voices and demands in front

of public figures. Guided by educational leaders and various local figures, the youths of 15-17 year conducted a story research that resulted in an Arabic-language book of 40 stories accompanied by a card game.

The advocacy topics and activities per school:

1. Beit Jala/Walajeh (with Beit Jala Government School for Girls): Stories, drawings and meditations on spirituality and values of caring in time of corona, as well as in some cases about understanding the impact of the separation wall on agricultural land and olive tree production, as in Beit Jala.
2. Aida refugee camp (with Bethlehem Government School for Boys): Stories and research essays about conflicts related to water distribution in Bethlehem.
3. Doha/Dheisheh refugee camp (Mosqat Government School for Girls): Personal stories, meditations and essays about the impact of the corona crisis and the initiatives of caring for the community.
4. Doha/Dheisheh refugee camp (Al Kholafah Al-Rashadeen Government School for Boys): Stories and researches on the lack of Palestinian control over water sources, and the dependency on Israel.
5. Al 'Abdiyyeh (Al-'Abdiyyeh Government School for Girls): stories on mutual connections and rootedness in the land such as in contested archeological sites.
6. Dar Salah (Dar Salah Government School for Boys): Stories of living under corona and some stories about land/water conflicts, along with stories of voluntary support to clean up and keep maintenance of school facilities under lockdown and the disinfection of class rooms.
7. Artas village (Fardoos Government School for Girls): stories about staying at home and other isolation and distancing measures, taking care of each other's families, and special attention to the increase in the number of virus carriers because of Palestinian laborers working in Israel and returning home.
8. Battir village (Battir Government School for Boys) stories about improving local conditions for tourism despite settlers visiting local sites.

The youth did small-scale research about the major conflicts and tensions that impinge upon their communities. Due to the constraints imposed by the corona virus crisis in spring 2020, the students did their story research in the surrounding neighborhoods, and talked with neighbors, friends and (extended) families. They were encouraged to speak about conflict issues of land and water but also to ask about the ways how the corona crisis impacted on community life. The stories tackled issues of citizenship through a spirituality of sumud: fostering mutual support between neighbors, staying connected to the values of preserving land, implementing the slogan "prevention comes first," and strengthening family and community bonds. See *here* for a story written by one of the youths along with further background information about the project.

A new card game involved examples of conflict scenarios and examples of 'rules of respect' distilled from the stories collected in the book and other value stories about well-known conflicts. The purpose of the game is that Palestinian youth think about the moral and practical principles they might wish to apply when dealing with conflicts in their communities.

In general it was felt that the value of respect is a strong ,umbrella' concept and can involve respect for other communities, for the land, for the law, and for different religions. During a Day of Respect later in the year the school students heard about AEI's inter-religious project in the Bethlehem area, and were told about experiences of respect during corona times. Various schools engaged in voluntary work such as cleaning up an archeological place (Battir), painting cross-overs on the street (Abediyyeh), and helping farmers. Online drama was a helpful activity because it encouraged empathy and comparing different points of view.

5. Early Warning and Response System in Hebron

Project Name : Palestinian Women operating early warning and mediation systems to prevent conflicts in Hebron H2

Project Duration : 15/05/2020 - 14/11/2021

Donor : Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund/UN Women

Project short description: A new AEI project, "Palestinian Women Operating an Early Warning and Mediation System to Prevent Conflicts in Hebron H2" aims at developing and operating an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) on local conflicts in downtown Hebron. The project, supported locally by the Women's Activity Association (WAA), focused on the development of an early warning and response system by AEI in coordination with the Palestinian NGO REFORM. On the ground the project was implemented by 5 early warning teams of 8 women in 5 different Hebron H2 neighborhoods. The early warners were supported by 5 responder/mediator teams of 20 local women per neighborhood.

These various volunteering teams – in total 140 women - involved locally well-connected women from different age and background. As a result of the project, the participating women are expected to increase their capacity to warn about conflicts at an early stage and participate in conflict prevention efforts. The teams of volunteers are supported and enabled by 5 local women CSOs working in H2 Hebron while guided by the project applicants. They jointly developed a platform for meetings together with rural and urban Hebron CSOs and local institutions such as municipality and governorate.

After holding researches, interviews and discussion sessions, staff and researchers came up with a manual which detailed how to develop an Early Warning and Response System. It was based on findings from real life and used in the next stage of project implementation: the training in doing advocacy toward civilians, stakeholders and decision makers to constructively deal with local conflicts. A simulation board game was developed to support the training to be taken place after September 2020.

6. Information and awareness-raising about the Wall

Project Name : Wall Information Center

Project Duration : 01.01.2019 – 31.12.2021

Donor : Haella Foundation, Friends of Young Bethlehem, and other 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 their *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 (a resolution dealing with women's security).

Partially in the context of the Wall Information Center, AEI organized its Ninth Annual Sumud Festival in September 2019 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.

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>

7. Sumud Story House

Project Name : Sumud Story House

Project Duration : 01.09.2019 – 31.08.2020

Donors: Quakers NL, EU/CAFOD

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 2 women groups and 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.

in the month of July AEI organized several online summer workshops for its staff and members, under the slogan "crossing walls."

Over three sessions, the Dutch trainers Sytse and Marlies Tjallingii took a neuro-linguistic approach in discussing with Palestinian women questions such as: "How to cross inner walls between weakening and empowering emotions in the present-day crisis situation? How to cross from despair to trust, from fear to courage, and from behavior to identity?"

In a workshop led out of London, Elvan Yilmazata spoke about "access to services during crisis." Elvan talked about how vulnerable groups in the London area were supported during emergencies and crises. She was re-deployed to help support the response to Covid-19 in a West London borough where she currently works.

Dutch Yara van Teeffelen led two workshops with Palestinian youth and children. She asked the participants in her first workshop to make drawings on their mobile screens through the use of a new app she developed. The participants made imaginative drawings about crossing the Wall through the use of a random object – like a sandwich or a household tool. In another online workshop she led out from the Netherlands, Yara introduced AEI's kids group to a paper-and-scissor activity in which the children were asked to cut into pieces, then make colorful drawings out of a paper template of the Wall.

Other activities as part of the summer workshops were done by the kids group (15 members), the women's group (30-35 members), the youth/teenager group (15/20 members), a faith group (12/15 members), all on weekly base. Fortunately, most activities could be done face-to-face. Activities included: workshops in arts, drawing, writing wishes and prayers in Arabic and English (for the kids), interviews about the impact of corona, singing songs, writing poems and planting flower or tree seeds in gardens (women). Some women and youth were involved in distributing food boxes to needy or infected people in the Bethlehem community. The different groups at the Sumud Story House did also 'walk and talks' around the neighboring wall museum, reading quotes and stories there. The women's group organized two fieldtrips to Jericho. During the physical meetings short films were shown and discussed. The kids groups did rehearsals of small pieces of heritage drama, and they also exchanged anecdotes and songs related to C19. In total, the different groups registered about 50 stories, created 7 poems and 2 new 'corona songs', and dozens of Moslem/Christian prayers/wishes – all in Arabic. They also shared songs available on YouTube.

Finally, AEI staff received a series of training sessions about monitoring and evaluation given by the Jerusalem-based trainer George Akroush as part of CAFOD's support for AEI's capacity building.

8. Other

Networking

AEI is a networking organization, and in 2019-20 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 which devoted an episode on the Wall Museum
- Christian organizations in Palestine, coordinating political positions and statements, of which AEI is presently secretary.
- 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

The 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>
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 of teacher manuals and books and articles on Palestinian daily life, culture and identity. Ph.D. in discourse analysis, MA in social anthropology.

AEI's staff and management met weekly. Workshops as part of staff meetings created in-depth communication on issues of implementation and learning processes. In such workshops issues of management, M&E, and conflict environments were discussed, as well as procedures for youth and children's rights protection and complaints, among other things.