**AEI-PAX CHRISTI STRATEGIC PLAN: 2022-2025**

Catholic Peace movement Intl. (Pax Christi Intl.) Association – Bethlehem

with Arab Educational Institute as working organization

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| Full name of the organisation | Catholic Peace movement Intl.(Pax Christi Intl.) Association – Bethlehem (locally known as the Arab Educational Institute) |
| Acronym | AEI |
| Date established | December 1987 |
| Nationality | Palestinian |
| Legal status, official registration number | NGO  QR-0034-F |
| Official address | P.O.Box 681, Bethlehem |
| Visiting address | Hebron Rd near checkpoint, Sumud Story House |
| Director | Rania Murra |
| Co-presidents | Fuad Giacaman, Elias Abu Akleh |
| Telephone n° | +972-2-2746595 |
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| E-mail address | [aei@p-ol.com](mailto:aei@p-ol.com) |
| Website | [www.aeicenter.org](http://www.aeicenter.org) |
| Identity of organisation | Church-affiliated (member of Pax Christi International) |

**Introduction: the context**

The Arabic concept of sumud, literally steadfastness, guides the work at of the Arab Educational Institute, a Palestinian organization for community education in the occupied West Bank affiliated to the international peace movement Pax Christi.

'Sumud'  is sometimes symbolized as *sabr* or cactus: it relates to both the cactus’ capacity to endure and the sweetness of the fruit. AEI’s work aims at the development of community steadfastness/resilience with this double meaning of sumud in mind. 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.

AEI’s work takes place in the occupied West Bank, especially the larger regions of Bethlehem, Hebron and Ramallah. The number of Palestinians living in the West Bank and amounts to around 2,75 million, of which 98% are Moslems and less than 2% Christians. Palestinian Christians live mainly in the Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Ramallah regions. 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 immediate surroundings are governed by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The West Bank is colonized by over 130 settlements primarily located in area C, which is fully controlled by Israel and covers over 60% of the West Bank lands. The division of the West Bank in different political-geographic areas, along with the dispersion of the Palestinian people in general, underlines the need for community-building and strengthening the cohesion of Palestinian society. In the context of what is called by some a “neo-patriarchal” society, there is a shortage of Palestinian youths and women in influential positions. They face many social and cultural obstacles on their way to social participation.

The on-going coronavirus crisis in conjunction with the occupation leaves deep scars in the Bethlehem and Palestinian communities. The economy, especially tourism, has been greatly affected. Public life has increasingly become characterized by a lack of law and order, a decline of values, a surge in domestic violence, and a general atmosphere of hopelessness.

At the same time, we notice that many people, including youths, show mutual solidarity by supporting - materially or symbolically - other Palestinian citizens in need.

The ongoing Israeli occupation and creeping annexation as a result of the expansion of settlements and the taking over of area C in the West Bank has a great impact on many people’s livelihood. Apartheid has become a key term used by international human rights organizations to characterize the situation not just in the West Bank and Gaza but also that of Palestinians in Israel. Developing integrated advocacy capacities among disadvantaged Palestinian groups is more important than ever.

**Mission and vision**

In this context AEI adopts the following *mission* *statement*:

*AEI is dedicated to educate Palestinian women and youth in conducting integrated advocacy on gender equality, human rights, community building and a just peace*.

AEI’s long term *vision* is that Palestinians, through their sumud [steadfastness], will actively and publicly participate in a free, peaceful and democratic Palestine that restores the basic rights of Palestinians including those of refugees. The rule of law and civic rights will be fully respected, including women and youth rights, the rights of religious communities, cultural rights and environmental rights.

AEI has different sources of *inspiration*. They include the papal encyclical Laudato Si’ and its important concepts of ‘common home’ and “ecological conversion” which dates from 2015, the declaration “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” signed in 2019 in Abu Dhabi by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyeb, as well as the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative initiated by Pax Christi in 2019.

**Beneficiaries**

In essence, AEI focuses on strengthening local Palestinian communities and the overall society which has been under so much pressure. Within those communities, we concentrate on women and youths of different ages. The geographical focus is on marginalized areas of the West Bank, such as areas affected by the so-called Separation (apartheid) Wall, the countryside including areas C, and Hebron downtown (H2).

The Sumud Story House in northern Bethlehem along the Wall is a stable point from where new methodologies and actions have been initiated and tried out, such as the Wall Museum and the annual Sumud Festival. Teachers and, broadly defined, educators can also be target groups or stakeholders when they are essential for youth or women empowerment.

AEI stands open to share larger projects in which groups and communities from other areas participate – Gazans, Palestinians in ’48 (Palestinians in Israel), Palestinians in the diaspora and refugees such as those in Lebanon or Jordan - or cultural exchanges with international partners across the Mediterranean. Such exchanges are essential for keeping the windows open.

Important are the needs of the participating communities. In the future AEI will conduct regular feasibility and needs studies through our contacts in the region. Doing so we will better able to determine which specific target groups and beneficiaries are chosen for particular projects.

**Fields**

AEI is often characterized by project participants as a ‘value organization’, always emphasizing the need to keep values central in education and advocacy. Our values are especially related to AEI’s main four fields of work:

* *Gender equality and women’s rights*. Building on women groups’ experiences in the Sumud Story House, AEI has increasingly moved during the last years into the fields of gender equality and women’s rights. Examples are projects set up in cooperation with local women CSOs in the Bethlehem and Hebron areas, including H2. This emphasis is also reflected in the gender equality statement which is included in AEI’s new bylaws. While we find it important to support (young) women taking leadership roles, we will involve males as participants and stakeholders in future projects promoting gender equality.
* *Youth participation and education*. AEI’s flagship project, ‘Citizenship and Diversity’, aims at annually involving almost 1000 Palestinian youths in the age range of 15-18 years in student-centered activities. AEI has a wide network of schools and teachers in all areas where it is active: the regions of Hebron, Bethlehem and Ramallah. In addition, the Sumud Story House hosts an older youth group and a children’s group. Youth participation in educational and advocacy projects will remain a priority.
* *Community building and civic peace*. All AEI’s activities have a community-building component aimed at civic peace, that is, they aim at constructively dealing with conflicts, tensions and violence in both the domestic sphere and in the neighborhoods and broader communities.
* *Just peace*. Any organization in Palestine has to take the context of occupation into account. Empowerment can only be limited under occupation. Also as a member of the Pax Christi movement, AEI is interested to contribute to justice and peace by nonviolently struggling against actions of the occupation, the Wall and the checkpoint system. Many activities have been launched from the Sumud Story House which raise the voices of women to demand freedom of movement and an end to occupation.

AEI will also keep promoting sumud or steadfastness as a central ‘Palestinian’ value, for several reasons. First, sumud is close to the general educational value of hope, so important in a situation where many feel hopelessness. Second, sumud is a political ‘red thread’ through Palestinian history and is a characteristic of Palestinian culture. Studying it opens doors to Palestinian stories both past and present, both heroic and every day. Third, sumud is a citizenship concept, emphasizing respect for others, the self, the community, and the environment. Fourth, it can be fruitfully connected to other values, such as perseverance and steadfastness in the Christian and Moslem religions.

**Methodology**

In its group and community work, AEI applies participant-centered methodologies which have been compiled in a syllabus and published in manuals. They include Read, Reflect, Communicate and Act (RRCA), and Moral Dilemmas. In general our approach can be called ‘voice-oriented’. We find it important that youth and women are able to raise their voice, bring out their ideas and emotions, make arguments, tell stories. In projects we are used to directly work with participants rather than delegating training to local consultants and trainers. For this we are appreciated by local partners.

In a series of recent projects, AEI applied advocacy education and practice among youth and women. Our experiences in several multi-year projects convinced us to put advocacy center-stage in our existing and new project activities for the coming years. Especially (young) women’s groups and school groups backed by the Ministry of Education, have been quite effective in raising demands and getting a hearing - even more so when they were able to choose the advocacy topics themselves.

Advocacy will always be applied not individually but in youth and women groups which will be trained in the different advocacy steps. It will include youth- and women-led research, networking actions, storytelling, legal arguments and media use, involvement of stakeholders and decision-makers, and requesting clear policies and concrete promises to which decision-makers can be held accountable.

Also based on positive experiences, AEI will promote in its advocacy trainings the use of (on-line) games, story work, and exchange visits between participating communities learning from each other.

The advocacy topics will include access to services and rights (previously chosen as a general ‘umbrella’ topic by groups of youths and women), gender equality, inclusive education, civic peace, and political and social rights. The Citizenship and Diversity project will be adjusted in order to have the student population, as well as the teachers, becoming more trained and practiced in bottom-up advocacy for peaceful and productive ‘living together’.

**Learning, monitoring and evaluation**

Learning happens throughout any project. In recent years we learned much from our trainers and facilitators, who often have been a living example of how to develop effective advocacy.

Given the colonization, fragmentation and continuing deterioration of local situations, we decided to implement more short-term needs and feasibility studies before starting any project. Such studies will be done with the help of AEI’s expanding contact network of persons and organizations.

AEI will train its staff through thematic and capacity building workshops, including education and training in monitoring and evaluation dynamics and protocols. Besides outcome monitoring and analysis, we will do more impact mapping. A tool developed in the last three years, the sumud battery, will be further refined to match the participants’ background.

The ‘voice and accountability’ tool practiced together with CAFOD in order to evaluate AEI’s advocacy capacity will be annually practiced in a staff workshop.

Finally, AEI will continue recruiting international volunteers, who often have special skills and knowledge which can be shared with AEI staff and members.

**Networking**

Networking serves many purposes, not only learning. Often networking is essential in order to raise funding and find suitable projects. As a peace movement, AEI is particularly fortunate to be part of Pax Christi International’s network, the UNOY youth network, and support groups such as the Friends of Young Bethlehem in the Netherlands and Pax Christi Stuttgart and Augsburg in Germany. We will continue with networking to establish joint projects with local or international partners, including Pax Christi International in Brussels. Important will be finding complementariness between partners so that the project sum will be more than its parts.

Networking is also important in order to preserve AEI’s positive name in the society. For instance, networking with religious personalities, Moslem and Christian, has been essential in AEI’s Citizenship and Diversity project. Networking is actually part and parcel of all AEI’s projects. The need for networking increases the more we focus on advocacy.

**Programs**

1. *Youth*

*Citizenship and Diversity*: Besides the ongoing activities in AEI’s longstanding project, a new three-year proposal will be developed in which more emphasis is put on the follow-up by training school classes over two years rather than one year. The second year will involve the students in doing advocacy in and outside school to promote values of citizenship and diversity, especially Moslem-Christian living together.

Research will be done to find new funders, possibly with the help of German volunteers annually coming to AEI.

In order to check opportunities for the development of more online educational materials, a needs and feasibility study will be conducted about the students’ and teachers’ use of online educational games. Also, a study will be made about applying sumud batteries, a new type of evaluation which needs to be adapted to fit the characteristics of the target groups.

*Earth and environmental education***:** In line with AEI’s understanding ofsumud as caring for the land and for non-consumerist and non-polluting habits, a brief needs/feasibility study will be done how AEI can complement environmental learning at schools through sumud education that helps to protect the earth.

*GNRC/Arigatou*: Besides implementing the annual activities in the Sumud Story House, AEI will follow-up GNRC’s request to establish a national Palestinian GNRC committee for doing advocacy on protecting children’s lives, making use of AEI’s network in the Bethlehem, Hebron and Ramallah regions. A formal launch of the new committee will be organized, either physical or online.

1. *Women*

*Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) and peace/conflict resolution in local communities*: AEI joins a proposed project of CAFOD and GNDR submitted at the Canadian government, on young women’s advocacy in local communities. AEI will make use of the EWRS experiences in downtown Hebron. In addition, AEI will submit a three-year project for young women’s advocacy in the southern West Bank at Misereor, again based on a needs/feasibility assessment study in cooperation with local community partners.

*Bethlehem Bible College/churches initiative*: AEI will give its support to a new local initiative to do advocacy for the position of Christian women in Palestinian church life.

*Pax Christi International*: AEI will approach Pax Christi International in Brussels to develop a joint project on advocacy for peace-building and non-violence in local communities, possibly with more PC partners in the Middle East, and possibly with an own contribution raised through fundraising/crowdfunding among Pax Christi sections in Europe and US.

1. *Sumud Story House (SSH)*

*SSH group work*: AEI will continue its group work at AEI (weekly meetings of children group, experienced women group, youth group, teacher group, Bethlehem Sumud Choir), supported by GNRC/Arigatou and solidarity donations from Germany and the Netherlands. SSH will establish a new Youth Choir with the help of a donation from the Netherlands.

*Wall Information Project*: AEI will continue with the Wall Information Center, developed during the last five years. The Wall Museum will be expanded with new posters in north Bethlehem. A Human Rights Path will be developed to make recent posters more accessible to visitors. Photos will be made in downtown Hebron of women’s stories shown on posters.

*Non-violent creative activities and events in and out of SSH***:** AEI will continue with annual events including the Sumud Festival, the summer workshops, the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel (WWPPI), and nonviolent events near the Wall or in SSH in line with projects or the ongoing situation in Palestine.

1. *Capacity building and internal systems*

*Partnerships***:** Collaboration will be continued with Pax Christi, UNOY, GNRC/Arigatou, SR and the Platform for Palestinian-Christian Organizations in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. If possible, cooperation will be directed at the development of new joint projects.

*Courses and training***:** AEI will continue with the M&E course for staff. Younger employees will be trained or coached by experienced staff in financial procedures and fundraising, and in safeguarding rules and application of bylaws.

*Communications*: AEI will develop a communication plan which prioritizes project links to local radio and TV, and a more effective use of technology to build up a social media following both locally and internationally.

*Volunteers*: Local and international volunteers will receive a brief training to become familiar with ethical and safeguarding codes, and various practical guidelines and bylaws.

*Documentation*: An internal documentation of photos, films, interviews, PPs, and various office-related texts will be made available and accessible at SSH. Palestine–Family.Net will document stories of Palestine developed and collected by AEI staff.

*Recruitment staff*: Staff will be recruited through an open and transparent procedure, organized by a committee including management and members of the advisory board. First-degree relatives of existing staff will be excluded.

*Financial and procurement protocols*: The existing financial protocols will be adapted, translated into English, and added as an appendix to the bylaws published on the AEI website in English and Arabic. There will be a 2000 (?) shekel threshold after which purchases require at least three bids.

*Safeguarding*: The new guidelines, which specify rules for both children and vulnerable adults, will be available on the website in English and Arabic. They will be further studied by staff during a training, and circulated among any volunteers and trainers/facilitators/consultants.

**Table planning 2022**

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| **Program** | **Projects (current and planned)** | **Development tasks (year 1)** |
| **Youth** | *Citizenship and Diversity* | \*Implementation ongoing activities  \*Consultation teachers and Ministry needs study  \*Evaluation/needs/impact study online games  \*New three-year proposal  \*5 new possible funders approached, besides missio, KW and CAFOD. |
|  | *Sumud and earth education* | \*New one-year concept note and proposal  \*Needs-feasibility study  \*If possible, matching proposal with a call |
|  | *GNRC/Arigatou* | \*Composition national GNRC committee (incl. partners)  \*Launch event, physical or online  \*One-year partner proposal submitted to 3 possible funders |
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| **Women** | *EWRS/Canadian government* | \*Feedback proposal draft CAFOD/GNDR for Canadian government |
|  | *Young women advocacy/Misereor* | \*Needs/feasibility/impact assessment study among women partners  \*Three-year proposal |
|  | *Bethlehem Bible College/churches initiative* | \*Choice and planning activities  \*Implementation project |
|  |  |  |
| **Sumud Story House** | *In-house group work* | \*Ongoing group work  \*Establishment youth choir |
|  | *Wall Info Project* |  |
|  | Wall Museum | \*Preparing HR path along wall posters (garbage)  \*Planning 10 wall posters  \*Shirts, caps |
|  | Hebron photos | \*Planning |
|  | *Summer workshops* | \*With German volunteer, if possible |
|  | *Non-violent creative events* |  |
|  | Sumud Festival | \*Planning |
|  | Peace/prayer week | \*Planning |
|  |  |  |
| **Capacity** | *Partnerships* |  |
|  | Pax Christi | \*If possible: together developing women’s peace advocacy project  \*Supportive fundraising by PC sections (own contribution)  \*3 applications US funding partners  \*Arrangement EU registration |
|  | UNOY | \*Membership tasks |
|  | GNRC/Arigatou | \*Membership tasks |
|  | Christian-Palestinian platform | \*Membership tasks |
|  | *Internal training* | \*5 M&E sessions, including impact analysis  \*Coaching staff in financial procedures  \*Coaching staff in fundraising  \*Training in safeguarding guidelines |
|  | *Communications* | \*Communication plan finalized  \*Implementation recommendations |
|  | *Volunteers* | \*Guidance:  German volunteer  Bethlehem University students  Artas |
|  | *Documentation* | \*Finalizing internal documentation system  \*Story documentation on PFN |
|  | *Safeguarding guidelines* | \*Finalization and circulation guidelines |
|  | *Publications* | \*Sumud advocacy manual (Canadian)  \*Sumud value syllabus (Citizenship and Diversity) |

**AEI Staff**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Type of involvement** | **Qualification** |
| Mrs Rania Murra | Director AEI, member management team, member financial committee, coordinator women group meetings at AEI, advise community campaigns | Many years of experience in setting up and coordinating women groups, monitoring and evaluation |
| Mr Roger Salameh | Member management team, head of youth program and AEI youth group coordinator | Experience for over 10 years in youth project coordinating and secretarial work. |
| Mrs Claude Mubarak | Member management team, head of SSH program and coordinator Wall Information Project. | Experience in project coordination and reporting |
| Dr Toine van Teeffelen | Member management team, educational adviser, development affairs, research, 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. |
| Mrs Jenny Baboun | Webmaster | Experience in communications strategies and web design |
| Mr Akram Abou Zuluf | Accountant | Certified public accountant |
| Mrs Taghreed Sa’ed | Housekeeper | Long-time experience |
| Mr Elias Abu Akleh | Co-president, member financial committee, legal representation, financial management, accounting, part-time, pay role staff, monitoring and evaluation | Experience in financial administration and accountancy of dozens of AEI projects. |
| Mr. Fuad Giacaman | Co-president, member financial committee, legal representation, research and advice. | Former headmaster and teacher at several Bethlehem schools, former AEI general director, many years of experience in project coordination, monitoring and evaluation |

**Members of AEI advisory board**

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

Orianna Johny Iskandar Hihi, member

Athari Zboun, member

Abeer Khair, member

Jimmy Lama, member

Arab Educational Institute

Bethlehem

[www.aeicenter.org](http://www.aeicenter.org)

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