**Annual Report Arab Educational Institute-Pax Christi**

**1/9/2021-30/8/2022**

**Introduction**

The Arabic concept of sumud, literally steadfastness, guides the work at the Sumud Story House of the Arab Educational Institute-Pax Christi, 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 its 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.

During this year, AEI-Pax Christi conducted a strategic planning discussion. Its staff jointly developed the following new mission: *AEI-Pax Christi is dedicated to educate Palestinian women and youth in conducting integrated advocacy on gender equality, human rights, community building and a just peace*.

AEI-Pax Christi’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 should be fully respected, including women and youth rights, the rights of religious communities, cultural rights and environmental rights.

In AEI-Pax Christi’s Sumud Story House in Bethlehem, several women groups and a women’s choir came regularly together for a variety of awareness-raising activities. In addition, a kids group, a teacher group and a faith group gave life to the House.

In the school year 2021-22 AEI ran the following projects:

1. Inter-religious citizenship education
2. An Early Warning and Response System
3. Providing information and raising awareness about the Wall
4. Summer workshops
5. Other activities.
6. **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, and CAFOD.

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

Once again the epidemic required flexible and improvised planning, and good listening to teachers and Ministry officials.

Results:

* Research was done by staff for the development of the new inter-religious content syllabus on the concept of sumud. It contains 20 chapters on the concept’s different meanings and applications. In preparation, staff wrote two articles dealing with the concept.
* 45% of the students made good quality contributions (through story writing, poetry, drama, fieldtrip, or interviewing) on Moslem-Christian living together; according to teacher reports, in total 75% of a total of 1039 participating students contributed satisfactorily.
* New online inter-religious educational materials (4 PPs, 4 films and online games) were introduced as a result of a special supplementary project supported by missio. All teachers and classes were instructed through online training sessions.
* In combination with model lessons, 30 peer visits were implemented in Bethlehem and Ramallah private and government schools. 40 teachers prepared 20 good-quality interreligious lesson plans.
* 30 classes implemented 8 inter-religious lessons in the second semester, on the following topics:
  + Leadership, its forms and attributes, and how to promote the concept in Palestinian society.
  + How to confront and combat hate speech, bullying and non-acceptance of others, with the aim of building a society of citizenship and equality.
  + Mechanisms to enhance the role of Palestinian youth in facing the difficult conditions experienced by the Palestinian people in light of the continuation of the occupation and its practices and the persistence of internal divisions.
  + Introducing advocacy, support and pressure, and planning and implementing community and school campaigns chosen by students.
* 21 schools participated in 4 advocacy events involving public actions; around 75% of the 1039 students were involved.
* In the first semester, two Christian feasts were celebrated, respectively in Bethlehem and Ramallah. On 5/5/2022 we celebrated the Iftar Ramadan in Bethlehem in the presence of 130 invitees of schools, religious leaders, school teachers, school choir, AEI Bethlehem Sumud Choir and heads of the Ministry of Education, and some funders and parents. For Ramallah the event took place on 10/5/2022 in the presence of 45 invitees from the above target groups.
* The training sessions of the three young school choir groups were about interreligious and other songs. The schools arranged more than 12 training sessions for each student choir. They delivered in total 6 performances on the different school occasions as well as during the AEI joint celebrations of the Iftar Ramadan. The Friends of Young Bethlehem contributed to the choirs.
* At least 38 parent meetings were part of the advocacy actions, joint celebrations and other occasions. The school celebrations were related to the Palestinian Document of Independence, and the Christmas and St. Barbara feasts. 20 schools (8 in Ramallah and 12 in Bethlehem) involved parents during their early morning school broadcasts to disseminate project achievements.
* In Ramallah, the new Christian Religious Education inspector, the first of its kind, was a school teacher participating in the program; she was chosen because of her Citizenship and Diversity activities. This is the second Christian Religious Education inspector chosen from the program’s ranks.

1. **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**: The AEI project, “Palestinian Women Operating an Early Warning and Mediation System to Prevent Conflicts in Hebron H2” was concluded at the end of 2021 in its development and operation of an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) on local conflicts in downtown Hebron.

The project, led by AEI as lead applicant and Women’s Activity Association (WAA) in Hebron as co-applicant, had as outcome the participation of women in conflict prevention in H2 Hebron. Dealing with violence against women and domestic violence was an important aspect of the conflicts the project attempted to prevent or deal with. Hebron downtown is much affected by the presence of Israeli settlements which directly impact on women’s lives and their chances to participate in society.

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, all volunteers.

Looking back at the project as a whole, in total 40 early warners (8 per CSO) were trained over 8 sessions, and 100 mediators (20 per CSO) were trained over 6 sessions in conflict sensitivity, mediation, communication, and other relevant topics. The teams of volunteers were supported in each of the neighborhoods by 5 local women CSOs.

1. **Information and awareness-raising about the Wall at the Sumud Story House**

**Project Name** **:** Wall Information Center at Sumud Story House

**Project Duration** : 01.04.2019 – 31.03.2022

**Donor** : Haella Foundation, Action Funds and Friends of Young Bethlehem

**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 harmed by the so-called separation wall. It provides information about the impact of the wall to 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.

Results:

The Center supported mixed **Moslem-Christian women groups** to engage with the Wall Info Center. It arranged 15 training sessions in subjects related to the impact of the Wall and advocacy:

* Wall activities as nonviolent peaceful resistance
* Narrating and writing narratives about the wall and freedom of movement.
* The Wall and advocacy
* Writing prayers and quotes for advocacy for peace
* Interreligious education and advocacy
* Nonviolent communication skills.

In addition, 6 sessions were conducted for a training about trauma and advocacy, supported by another funding agency, in which the impact of the Wall was discussed.

The Center collected and edited (abbreviated**) 20 women’s stories** from the Hebron area related to the impact of the Wall and the checkpoint system in Hebron. It was not practical to have posters fixed on walls in Hebron - they would be removed quickly, while the Israeli army in Hebron does not allow posters on military objects. Instead AEI staff made a series of photos of 20 story placards which were held in the air in front of suggestive objects like closed roads or (from a roof) an overview of the center of the city. The photos were placed on AEI’s website and FB page, and individual pages. The placards are now at an partner NGO in Hebron which are using them indoors, to show visitors. Photos of the Hebron action and the new posters of the Wall Museum were uploaded on the **AEI website and its FB pages,** for instance:

<https://aeicenter.org/wallposters-2/>

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=the%20%E2%80%9Cwall%20museum%E2%80%9D%20in%20bethlehem%2C%20palestine>

Two articles on **the Dutch BVN/VARA site** mentioned the posters in Hebron and the Wall Museum:

<https://www.bnnvara.nl/joop/artikelen/het-doorvertellen-van-nakba-verhalen?fbclid=IwAR3FKx5eRSH3tbwsGr_0HizlRT4SOlLiZ8K5esmt44Vpx5A8zOA6_z5Pb20>

<https://www.bnnvara.nl/joop/artikelen/hoe-de-hel-losbarstte-tijdens-een-pelgrimage-naar-hebron>

The **Wall Museum in Bethlehem**: The Human Rights Path along the 8-9 meter high wall near the Sumud Story House was given a first shape in August 2022. The posters along the path contain stories by and about children in Bethlehem and Palestine. After checking the Wall Museum posters, 36 existing posters which had become unreadable due to the sun were “repaired” by attaching large stickers upon them displaying the original story texts.

The Center collected material for an investigative article by Toine van Teeffelen written for the **Jerusalem Quarterly** magazine: “Rachel’s Tomb: Narrative counterspaces in a Military Geography of Oppression”:

<https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/Rachel%E2%80%99s%20Tomb%20-%20Narrative%20Counterspaces%20in%20a%20Military%20Geography%20of%20Oppression.pdf>

In collaboration with Sabeel and Kairos-Palestine in Palestine and its partners in the Netherlands, including PAX,

AEI helped to produce in Beit Jala a book with **the Arabic translation of “Je moet er geweest zijn” {‘You once had to be there”]**, a book with cartoons and poems by the Dutch cartoonist Len Munnik and educator Arie de Bruin. AEI supported the translator Elise Aghazarian and took responsibility for the printing process. The cartoons show how the Wall imprisons Palestinians. The book was inspired by earlier visits of the authors. The book, handed out to dozens of Palestinian teachers, will be used by Palestinian educators to encourage visual arts activities.

Fuad Giacaman and Rania Murra wrote an **article about the World Week for Peace** in Palestine and Israel *for* [*the World Council of Churches website*](https://www.oikoumene.org/news/in-bethlehem-sense-of-sumud-keeps-peace-workers-pursuing-their-vision?fbclid=IwAR2RUYsd6yC3BC2jaZEC7zghfskSxv3w6UB9SUroJEMmYbQeM0YW5KK3f0c)*.*

**Local meetings with NGOs**: an online meeting as part of a series of online weekly presentations (“Kumi Now”), organized by Christian theology liberation center Sabeel was in part devoted to the Wall Info Center and the Wall Museum. Also, during meetings at schools in the context of AEI’s inter-religious education project the Wall Museum was discussed; as during the UN Women project in Hebron where AEI developed young women’s advocacy actions to improve access to services in cooperation with local NGOs; and also during a series of workshops at AEI on trauma, developed with a local Palestinian NGO specialized in counseling.

**Visitors**: During this period, seven international groups visited the Sumud Story House and the Wall Museum, from Sweden, Belgium and France. The visits of two local school student groups and teachers were co–organized by AEI. The groups watched 2 presentations about the wall. The presentations were filmed and sent online to two more schools, where teachers presented them to their classes.

1. **AEI-Pax Christi Summer Workshops 2022**

**Project name:** *Reviving the Palestinian Sumud Through Arts*.

**Project duration**: Two weeks during July 2022.

**Donors**: Augsburg Diozese, Quakers NL

**Venue**:Sumud Story House and the Bethlehem environment.

The 2022 AEI’s annual Summer Workshops encouraged 100 Palestinian youth and women, Christians and Moslems, to learn about and practice *Reviving the Palestinian Sumud Through Arts*.

All groups included Palestinian Christians and Moslems from the larger Bethlehem area.

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| **Theme** | **Participation** | **Hours** |
| Folk Arts and oral history | Women (45) | 12 hours |
| Arts and folk arts | Children (30) | 12 hours |
| Conversation about sumud and Arts in English | Teenager youths (35) | 12 hours |
| Sports: swimming and leisure | Women, youths, children (110) | 30 hours |
| Interfaith reflections and prayers | Children (30) | 2 hours |
| Fieldtrips about Palestinian heritage, walks and talks | Women, children (75) | 8 hours |
| Doing advocacy: cleanliness campaign | Children, women (75) | 8 hours |

1. **Other**

**Capacity building**

AEI-Pax Christi held extensive consultations with stakeholders about its Pax Christi status. It proposed to the Pax Christi International secretariat to become an Associate Member.

The management team also planned for AEI’s senior staff (Fuad Giacaman, Elias Abu Akleh and Toine van Teeffelen) to withdraw as paid staff in 2024, while staying available as part-time volunteers for at least two more years to train successors.

AEI also reflected upon its international support base given that the Women’s Ecumenical Support Group in Holland announced the termination of its activities.

AEI further detailed its safeguarding and financial regulations. It developed a social media plan, and an extensive documentation of stories and audio-visual materials.

In dialogue with UNOY it developed a reflection on peace and development discourse.

Some aspects of a previously held Monitoring and Evaluation training were continued.

**Networking**

AEI is a networking organization, and during 2021-22 it 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 Kumi Now
* A platform of 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-Pax Christi again took part in a committee with inspectors of the Ministry of Education in overseeing inter-religious education at about 30 schools, both governmental and private, in the context of its Citizenship and Diversity program.

After three long-term projects were terminated in 2021, AEI conducted extensive consultations about several new projects, including a new three-year Citizenship and Diversity program stage, a new three-year Misereor project among women in Hebron, a series of projects with the German DVHL, and a new capacity building project on integral ecology with CAFOD.

**Advisory board**

AEI-Pax Christi’s board members represent the broader community and its educational leadership: Zuheir Tinezi, Maysoun al-Qawasmeh, Widaad Rabi’eh, Anton Nassar, Sana’a al-‘Azza, Manar Ateek, Dr Sliman al-Lucy.

**Permanent staff**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| *Name permanent staff* | *Type of involvement in AEI* | *Qualifications* |
| 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 complaint-making, among other things.