

**Arab Educational Institute-Pax Christi Bethlem
Annual Report 2025
September 1, 2024 – August 30, 2025**

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Director's Message

Dear friends,

This year, the Arab Educational Institute walked yet another chapter in its long and meaningful journey - one filled with challenges that tested us, and moments of hope that lifted us. Everywhere we turned, we could feel the pulse of our mission alive: in the laughter of children discovering new ideas, in the thoughtful conversations among youth seeking their place in society, and in the steadfast commitment of women who continue to shape the heart of our communities.

As the world around us shifted, AEI remained rooted in its purpose: to strengthen Palestinian identity and heritage, to cultivate true Christian-Muslim living together, and to create spaces where learning becomes a source of empowerment and dignity. Each step we took this year carried the spirit of sumud- that quiet, determined steadfastness symbolized by the cactus that endures and still bears fruit.

In the classrooms we supported, in the training halls we filled, and in the circles of dialogue we facilitated, we saw people realizing that education is more than knowledge -it is belonging, voice, and hope (الرجاء). We watched communities discover that civil peace is not just an ideal but a daily practice of listening, respecting, and building together. And we witnessed how stories - personal, cultural, and collective - can become bridges between generations and faiths.

Throughout the year, AEI continued to weave together its vision of a Palestine where rights are protected, diversity is embraced, and all people – children, women, youth and families - can contribute to a free, peaceful, and democratic society. Every workshop, every encounter, every shared moment was a thread in this larger tapestry of sumud and cooperation.

As we look back, we see not only the projects completed but the relationships strengthened, the perspectives transformed, and the seeds of understanding planted. And as we move forward, we carry with us the certainty that even in the most difficult times, sumud and hope (الرجاء) will guide our path.

Thank you for walking this journey with us - believing in our mission, sharing our vision, and helping us build the foundations of just peace, dignity, and community for generations to come.

Introduction

The reporting period of **September 1, 2024 – August 30, 2025** unfolded during one of the most difficult chapters in recent Palestinian history. War on Gaza, intensified occupation measures, movement restrictions, economic hardship, and deep social uncertainty profoundly shaped daily life across Palestinian communities. Within this challenging context, the Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi Bethlehem (AEI) continued its mission of education, advocacy, and community empowerment, affirming that learning, dialogue, and solidarity remain powerful tools for resilience (sumud) and hope.

Throughout the year, AEI created and sustained spaces where children, youth, women, educators, and community leaders could come together to learn, reflect, and act. Rooted in the values of **sumud (steadfastness)**, civil peace, Christian–Muslim living together, and care for our common home inspired by **Laudato Si'**, AEI's programs responded to urgent social needs while nurturing long-term capacities for leadership, cooperation, and active citizenship. From classrooms and community halls to farms, villages, and international forums, AEI's work bridged education with lived experience, linking personal stories to collective action.

This annual report presents an overview of AEI's vision, values, and achievements during the year. It highlights key projects, partnerships, and initiatives that strengthened community resilience (sumud), promoted dialogue across differences, empowered women and youth as agents of change, and preserved Palestinian cultural identity. Beyond documenting activities, the report reflects AEI's conviction that even under conditions of crisis, meaningful education and civil engagement can plant seeds of justice, dignity, and peaceful living together.

Organizational Overview

Founded in 1986, the **Arab Educational Institute (AEI)** has grown from a small cultural center into a leading educational institution in Palestine. Since 2004, AEI has been officially affiliated with **Pax Christi International**, strengthening its role as a hub for community education, cultural preservation, and peacebuilding.

AEI - Pax Christi has been committed to community education, advocacy, and cultural preservation in the Palestinian occupied West Bank. Through interfaith dialogue, educational initiatives, and empowerment programs, AEI – Pax Christi strengthens Palestinian resilience in the face of social, political, and economic challenges.

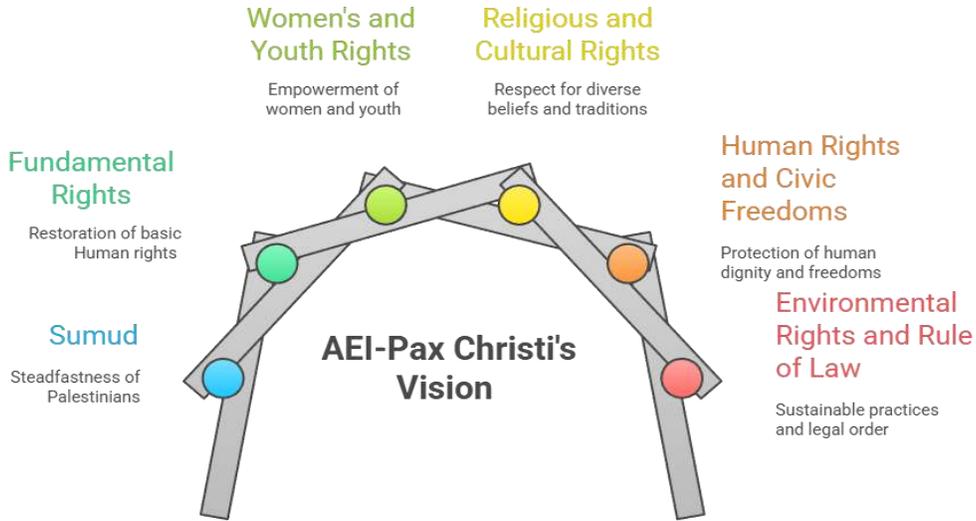
During 2025, AEI - Pax Christi facilitated several projects that engaged women, youth, educators, and communities in interreligious dialogue, civil peace initiatives, environmental advocacy, and cultural heritage preservation.

Our Vision

*AEI-Pax Christi envisions a future where Palestinians, through their sumud -steadfastness, can actively and publicly contribute to a **free, peaceful, and democratic Palestine**.*

This includes the restoration of fundamental rights for all Palestinians, including refugees, and the full respect of:

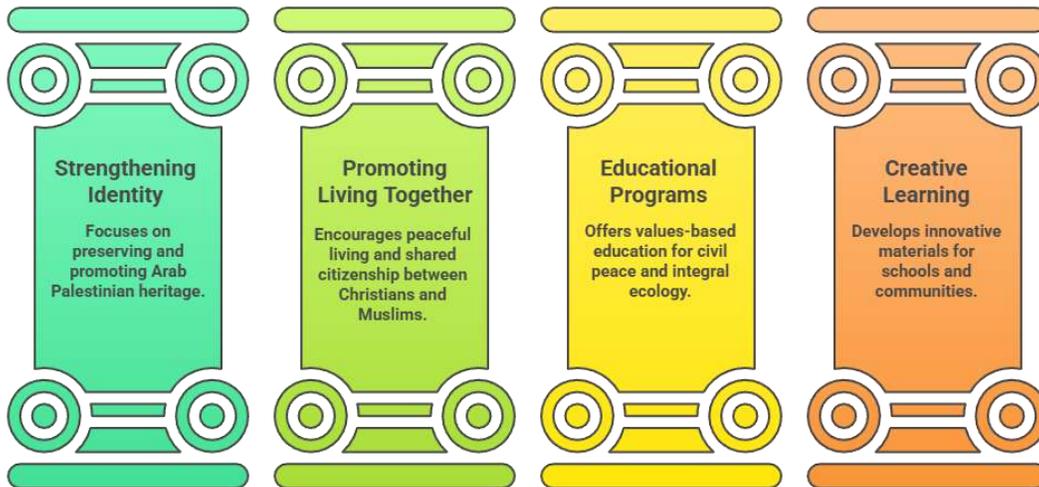
- Women's and youth rights
- Religious and cultural rights
- Human rights and civic freedoms
- Environmental rights and the rule of law



Our Mission

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

AEI's Guiding Principles



Made with Napkin

Sumud as Our Guiding Concept

The Arabic concept of *sumud*, literally “steadfastness,” is central to AEI’s vision and practice. Often symbolized by the **cactus** - strong enough to endure harsh conditions yet producing sweet fruit - *sumud* reflects both resilience and hope.

At the **Sumud Story House** in Bethlehem, AEI-Pax Christi brings this concept to life through community education, cultural celebration, storytelling, and advocacy. The institute works to strengthen personal and collective resilience while building bridges between local and international communities.

Civil Peace Values in Our Work

Civil peace - social harmony, justice, and cooperation within society - is a cornerstone of AEI’s mission. In Palestine, as in many parts of the world, civil peace faces challenges stemming from political tensions, social inequalities, and external pressures. The consequences of weakened civil peace can be seen in rising violence, polarization, mistrust, discrimination, and migration.

AEI responds to these challenges by integrating civil peace values across all its programs through:

- **Education and awareness:** Teaching living together, shared citizenship, and conflict resolution in schools and communities
- **Dialogue and interfaith engagement:** Bringing together groups of different backgrounds to build understanding
- **Community projects:** Encouraging joint initiatives in culture, environment, and social development.
- **Justice and equity:** Promoting fairness and equal opportunity in public life
- **Modeling peaceful practices:** Demonstrating nonviolent communication and respect for diversity in all AEI activities

By embedding the principles of civil peace in its work, AEI affirms that living together is not only possible but essential for safety, dignity, and collective

well-being. These efforts strengthen Palestinian society's capacity for resilience, understanding, and solidarity.

Laudato Si' Values in Our Work

Care for our common home, as articulated in *Laudato Si'*, is a new core guiding principle of AEI's mission. In Palestine, environmental degradation, climate vulnerability, and social injustice are deeply interconnected with the realities of occupation, economic hardship, and marginalization. These challenges disproportionately affect vulnerable communities and future generations, threatening both human dignity and the sustainability of life itself.

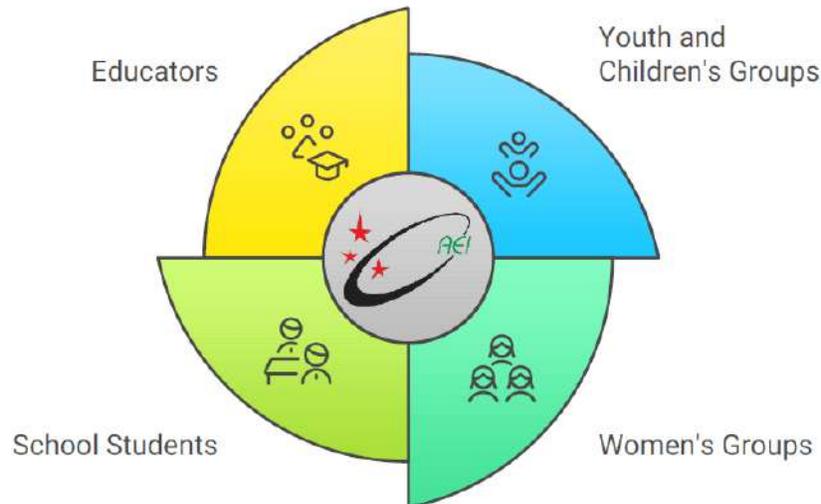
AEI responds to these challenges by integrating *Laudato Si'*-inspired values across its work through:

- **The implementation of seven Laudato Si'-inspired projects** that promote integral ecology, linking environmental care with social justice and human dignity.
- **Programs that raise climate awareness and ecological responsibility**, emphasizing ethical stewardship of land and natural resources.
- **Youth-focused initiatives** that strengthen environmental leadership, resilience (*sumud*), and active citizenship.
- **Support for marginalized and vulnerable communities**, recognizing that social justice and environmental protection are inseparable.
- **Educational and community-based activities** that foster a culture of responsibility toward creation and solidarity among people.

Through this integrated approach, AEI affirms that caring for the environment is not only an ecological duty, but also a moral and social commitment to justice, peace, and the well-being of present and future generations.

Who We Serve

Arab Educational Institute's Target Groups



By participating in AEI projects, programs, and meetings, target groups experience a dynamic environment that nurtures awareness, creativity, a “dialogue of life,” and meaningful community engagement.

Key Projects and Achievements

During this year, AEI implemented a diverse set of projects and initiatives, including:

1. Citizenship and Diversity: Christian/Muslim Living Together in Palestine Project
2. Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) Project
3. Summer Workshops – “Roots and Wings”
4. Young Palestinian Women Conducting Advocacy for Civil Peace
5. Sumud Story House Women’s Group
6. Global Engagement and Cultural Exchange

1. Citizenship and Diversity: Christian/Muslim Living Together in Palestine Project

During the last year, the *Citizenship and Diversity: Christian–Muslim Living Together in Palestine* project continued to serve as a vital space for dialogue, learning, and sumud within Palestinian schools, despite an exceptionally challenging political, economic, and social context. Implemented by the Arab Educational Institute (AEI) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education, school administrations, teachers, students, and local communities, the project reaffirmed education as a powerful tool for nurturing dignity, living together, and active citizenship.

Throughout the semester, teachers have demonstrated remarkable commitment by adapting lesson plans and classroom activities to promote shared values, interreligious understanding, and responsible citizenship, even in the absence of a dedicated budget and amid salary delays, strikes, and reduced school days. Valuable educational materials -lesson plans, reflections, and student work - were collected and are being prepared for further development and integration into the program’s curriculum, reflecting sustained ownership by participating schools.

Capacity building for educators was strengthened through six teacher workshops held in Bethlehem and Ramallah. These sessions focused on inclusive classroom practices, conflict resolution, effective documentation, and innovative teaching approaches, including the introduction of artificial intelligence tools in interreligious education. The workshops provided both practical skills and moral support, reinforcing teachers’ role as key agents of social cohesion and peaceful living together.

Peer learning remained central to the project’s methodology. Fifteen peer visits enabled religious education teachers to observe and conduct model lessons addressing religious and cultural tolerance, shared responsibility toward the environment, and youth advocacy. Feedback from these visits highlighted increased student engagement, growing awareness of shared

values between Christianity and Islam, and a strong desire among students to translate learning into practical action.

At the classroom level, thirty government and private schools implemented joint interreligious lessons each semester, co-taught by Christian and Muslim teachers. These sessions addressed themes of respect, citizenship, dialogue, and religious tolerance in the digital age, using participatory and student-centered methodologies. In parallel, all participating classes hosted guest lecturers who engaged students in discussions on youth leadership, digital security and countering hate speech, and social intelligence in interfaith communication. Teachers and students alike reported increased confidence, empathy, and critical thinking as a result.

The project's impact extended beyond classrooms through fifteen local advocacy initiatives led by students, teachers, and parents. Despite mobility restrictions and ongoing instability, these actions addressed pressing community needs, including food aid, environmental care, social solidarity, and awareness-raising against discrimination. These initiatives demonstrated students' growing sense of responsibility and their ability to translate values of living together into concrete action.

Interreligious and spiritual dimensions of the project were further strengthened through Ramadan Iftar gatherings held in Bethlehem and Ramallah. Bringing together educators, supervisors, religious leaders, parents and AEI staff, these gatherings offered moments of reflection, solidarity, and shared prayer, reinforcing common ethical values such as patience, giving, resilience, and unity during a time of widespread suffering.

Across all activities, students' stories and teachers' observations reflected meaningful transformation. Students showed improved conflict-resolution skills, greater openness toward peers from different religious backgrounds, and increased willingness to collaborate in mixed groups. Classrooms became more inclusive spaces, where dialogue replaced fear and differences were increasingly viewed as strengths rather than barriers.

Overall, during this reporting period, the project reached **1,009 students** across government and private schools in Bethlehem and Ramallah. Despite extraordinary challenges, it succeeded in strengthening interreligious understanding, empowering educators, and fostering a school culture rooted in respect, dialogue, and active citizenship. The semester reaffirmed that sustained educational engagement - even under conditions of uncertainty - can contribute to lasting social change and nurture a generation committed to peaceful living together in Palestine.



Joint Christmas Celebration 2025

After a two-year interruption caused by Israeli war on Gaza and the escalating violence in the West Bank, AEI / Pax Christi – Bethlehem renewed its annual joint Christmas celebration, powerfully reflecting the values of citizenship, diversity, *şumud*, hope (*raja'*), and shared humanity. The event embodied AEI's lived and practical approach to interfaith education, bringing together Muslim and Christian participants, including Ministry of Education officials, teachers, students, members of AEI's women and youth groups, the Advisory Board, and friends. This spirit of shared citizenship was symbolically and visibly expressed through the joint facilitation of the celebration by two women presenters - one Christian and one Muslim - an intentional and courageous act that affirmed mutual respect, inclusion, and the spirit of living together. Despite calls to cancel all festivities due to the ongoing suffering, Muslim partners, teachers, women, and youth participated with joy, affirming that collective celebration can be an act of resilience (*şumud*) rather than denial. Poetry, music, traditional trills, and shared meals created spaces for healing, dialogue, and renewed social bonds, while teachers and participants

exchanged experiences rooted in human rights, Arab Christianity, and a shared national identity. Reflections from women, youth, teachers, and elders highlighted Christmas not only as a religious occasion but also as a national and human celebration - one that counters extremism, honors cultural heritage, strengthens relationships, and reaffirms Palestinian unity across religious lines. This celebration stood as a living model of AEI's commitment to life, courage, and hope, signaling a collective return to joy, connection, and shared belonging after a period of profound loss and silence.

Related news updates and video materials are available through this link: [AEI Christmas Celebration 2025](#).



2. Summer Workshops – “Roots and Wings”

The Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi Bethlehem implemented its annual summer program, **“Roots and Wings: Connecting Heritage with Hope and Future-Building,”** during 2025. Hosted at **Happy Farm** in the Bethlehem countryside, the program offered a structured, values-based learning environment focused on identity, emotional resilience (sumud), integral ecology, peaceful living together, and shared citizenship. A total of 75 participants took part, including 30 women from the Sumud Story House and 45 children and youth representing different Bethlehem communities.

a. Women’s Workshops

The women’s component consisted of three intensive sessions designed to strengthen emotional well-being, cultural identity, and community connection. Key elements included:

- **Nature-based healing and mindfulness**, using the farm environment as a supportive space for grounding and emotional release.
- **Storytelling and group dialogue**, where participants shared personal experiences of loss, sumud, and heritage.
- **Trauma-awareness and coping tools**, facilitated by psychologist Mrs. Sandrine Helal, emphasizing spiritual hope (رجاء), self-care, and collective support.
- **Cultural and artistic engagement**, including singing, traditional meals, and expressive activities.
- **Recreational closure**, through a final pool-day outing to reinforce joy, solidarity, and relaxation.

These sessions enabled women to experience meaningful emotional relief, renewed confidence, and strengthened bonds between Christian and Muslim participants.



b. Children and Youth's Workshops

The program for children and youth comprised eight structured sessions integrating experiential learning, ecological engagement, and cultural education. Key components included:

- **Environmental responsibility**, through planting, taking care of feeding and playing with the animal care, and other farm activities.
- **Creative and cultural expression**, including arts workshops, a collaborative flag mural, and a dedicated Palestinian Heritage Day featuring traditional dress, songs, and cuisine.

- **Values-based storytelling and film discussions**, focusing on sumud, cooperation, empathy, and environmental protection.
- **Field visits**, including excursions to Cremisan Monastery and Golden Park Resort, offering exposure to nature, heritage, recreation, and community bonding.
- **Team-building activities**, morning songs, group games, and gratitude practices that reinforced cooperation, leadership, and mutual respect.

The children demonstrated noticeable improvements in self-confidence, ecological awareness, cultural pride, social skills, and emotional regulation. Parents consistently expressed appreciation for the program’s positive impact on their children’s behavior, mood, and sense of belonging.

c. Overall Outcomes

The “Roots and Wings” workshops successfully advanced AEI’s mission by:

- Strengthening Palestinian cultural identity
- Promoting Christian-Muslim living together
- Enhancing emotional resilience/ sumud
- Encouraging environmental stewardship in line with integral ecology
- Supporting community cohesion and shared citizenship

Participants concluded the program with a deeper connection to their heritage, increased trust and solidarity, and strengthened personal and collective resilience. The summer workshops provided an essential platform for healing, learning, and community building, leaving a lasting positive impact on all who took part.



3. Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) Project

During the Period: 1 September 2024 – 31 August 2025, the Arab Educational Institute implemented the first cycle of the project “*An Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) to Protect Vulnerable Palestinian Civilians in the Bethlehem Area.*” This cycle targeted five marginalized communities - Beit Zakarya, Al-Ma’sara, Marah Rabah, Um Salamona, and Beit Fajjar - aiming to enhance community preparedness, protection, and coordinated response to local risks.

a. Project Implementation

AEI conducted a comprehensive research phase, including a 15-day assessment of community vulnerabilities, interviews with leaders, and a needs-assessment survey. Five community organizations joined the project and facilitated the recruitment of 50 youth participants (5 men and 5 women per village) based on leadership potential and commitment to community engagement.

AEI then delivered 50 EWRS training sessions and 50 conflict-prevention sessions, supported by 10 meetings with community leaders. These trainings combined theoretical knowledge with practical application and introduced participants and local CSOs to the EWRS Manual, methodologies, and operational structure.

b. Establishment of Community EWRS Teams

By mid-2025, each community had established fully functioning Early Warning and Response Teams, divided into “warners” and “responders.” These teams assumed responsibility for monitoring threats, issuing alerts, coordinating responses, and engaging with local authorities. Participants also contributed to refining the EWRS Manual to ensure contextual relevance.

c. Community Initiatives

Each village identified a priority issue and jointly planned interventions, meeting with stakeholders and authorities to address challenges. These

initiatives strengthened youth engagement, encouraged community-driven problem solving, and increased cooperation between citizens and local leadership.

d. Key Outcomes

The EWRS project successfully highlighted the following achievements:

- **Enhanced Skills and Leadership:** Participants demonstrated significant growth in public speaking, negotiation, community engagement, planning, and problem-solving.
- **Strengthened Community Awareness:** The project increased understanding of cooperation among citizens, stakeholders, and decision-makers, shifting attitudes toward collaborative conflict prevention.
- **Improved Communication and Advocacy:** Youth became more confident interacting with officials, documenting issues, and presenting community needs effectively.
- **Youth - Leader Collaboration:** Engagement with community leaders fostered trust, support, and shared ownership of local initiatives.
- **Identification of Key Challenges:** The research phase generated valuable insights into local vulnerabilities and informed tailored community action plans.
- **Personal Empowerment:** Participants reported increased confidence, agency, and a sense of belonging and responsibility toward their communities.
- **Sumud as a Living Value:** The project deepened understanding of *sumud* as a cultural and social practice expressed through collective action, resilience, and protection.
- **Renewed Hope among Youth:** Despite hardships, youth reported that the project restored motivation and belief in their ability to effect positive change.
- **Strengthened AEI - Community Partnership:** Communities expressed strong appreciation for AEI's role and called for continued collaboration in civil peace and community protection initiatives.

The EWRS project achieved significant impact at the personal, community, and institutional levels. It empowered youth and local leaders with the skills, structures, and confidence needed to proactively address community risks, strengthened local preparedness and coordination, and reinforced values of sumud, civic responsibility, and peaceful community engagement across the Bethlehem area.



4. Young Palestinian Women Advocating for Civil Peace

The Arab Educational Institute in partnership with six women-led civil society organizations in Bethlehem and Hebron, finished implementing the project *“Young Palestinian Women Advocating for Civil Peace”* under extremely challenging political, social, and economic conditions. The war on Gaza, intensified Israeli military restrictions, settler violence, and severe movement limitations - particularly in Areas C and H2 - deeply affected daily life in the target communities. Despite these constraints, the project not only continued but became increasingly relevant, responding directly to urgent community needs related to safety, trauma, access to services, and social cohesion.

The project focused on strengthening women’s leadership, improving community-based advocacy services, and enhancing civil society collaboration. Across six marginalized communities, women emerged as key actors in addressing issues such as early warning and emergency response, cybercrime and drug awareness, environmental protection, psychological first aid, and child safety. Concrete achievements included the establishment of a women’s developmental association in Artas, the creation of a safe playground in Beit Skaria, and the delivery of advocacy, protection, and

awareness services to more than 520 women in Hebron's H2 areas. These interventions contributed to measurable improvements, such as reduced bullying in schools, increased access to psychological support, and stronger links between communities and local institutions.

A defining feature of the project was the depth of civil society collaboration. Women-led organizations worked jointly with municipalities, police units, health and relief organizations, environmental bodies, educational institutions, and international actors such as the Red Cross. Community meetings regularly brought together 100–160 participants - far exceeding initial targets - and created rare spaces for dialogue in highly restricted environments. In total, more than 565 stakeholders and community members were actively engaged, reflecting strong ownership and trust in the process.

Women's leadership was significantly strengthened throughout the project. Thirty-three women were identified as active community leaders, exceeding the original target, and successfully led advocacy initiatives that resulted in tangible community changes. Many women transitioned from being beneficiaries to facilitators, negotiators, and organizers, confidently engaging with authorities and institutions on sensitive issues that were previously considered taboo.

While the project achieved all its objectives and demonstrated strong social and structural sustainability - particularly through strengthened leadership, partnerships, and community-based organizations - financial sustainability remains a challenge in the absence of secured follow-up funding. Nevertheless, the project leaves behind empowered women leaders, functioning local structures, and resilient networks capable of continued advocacy and collective action. Overall, the project stands as a strong example of women-centered peacebuilding and civic engagement under conditions of prolonged crisis, contributing meaningfully to civil peace, community resilience, and democratic participation in Palestine.



5. Sumud Story House Women’s Group

This year, the Sumud Story House (SSH) women’s group has continued to thrive as a dynamic and empowering space for Palestinian women, welcoming many new participants who have joined the group’s diverse activities. The group meets weekly on Mondays, offering a rich program that combines health and psychological support sessions, creative expression, and storytelling, alongside social and cultural activities that foster connection and joy. Women share meals, celebrate birthdays and both Christian and Muslim feasts, and engage in entertainment and recreational activities, creating an environment of mutual respect, support, laughter, and solidarity.

Beyond social gatherings, the SSH provides opportunities for learning, awareness, and civic engagement, including social and political awareness sessions, religious and interfaith discussions, and participation in significant commemorations such as Nakba Day, Naksa Day, World Week for Peace in Palestine, Palestinian Land Day and Mother’s Day. Cultural heritage is celebrated through olive picking, sharing traditional stories, and cooking and tasting Palestinian foods, reinforcing women’s connection to their land, history, and collective memory.

The SSH is more than a meeting space; it is a safe and inclusive platform where women express themselves freely, share experiences, celebrate diversity, and strengthen bonds of unity and resilience. By nurturing dialogue, creativity, and cultural pride, the group enhances women’s sense of sumud - steadfastness and rootedness - while empowering them to participate actively in their communities. Through the SSH, AEI continues to cultivate a space

that reflects its mission of empowerment, living together, cultural identity, interfaith understanding, building national unity and social cohesion, making a lasting impact on the lives of participants and the wider community.



Related news updates and video materials are available through these links:

[*Art Activity with the Women's Group*](#)

[*Word Week for Peace*](#)

[*Commemorating Nakba*](#)

Global Engagement and Cultural Exchange

❖ Building Bridges of Solidarity: AEI's Cultural Outreach in Germany

In the framework of strengthening AEI's international relations and global outreach, the Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi International in Bethlehem conducted an official visit to Germany in May 2025. The visit was undertaken by AEI Co-President Mr. Elias Abu Akleh, accompanied by Mr. Roger Salameh, General Head of Projects, following an invitation from the Pax Christi branch in Augsburg. From 20 to 28 May 2025, AEI was honored through a series of music festival events hosted across four churches in four German cities. These cultural gatherings provided a platform to introduce AEI's mission, values, and key programs to diverse international audiences. During the events, AEI representatives presented the Institute's educational, cultural, and peacebuilding initiatives, generating strong interest and appreciation among participants. The visit

also served as an important opportunity to deepen dialogue on future cooperation and to strengthen partnerships among Pax- Christi branches worldwide, reinforcing AEI's role in promoting cultural exchange, solidarity, and international engagement.



❖ International Partnerships and Representation

During 2025, the Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi / Bethlehem (AEI) further strengthened its engagement within the Pax Christi International movement through both leadership representation and active participation in international advocacy spaces. AEI proudly marked the election of Mr. Roger Salameh as a **Board Member of Pax Christi International** for a period of three years, a step that enhances Palestinian representation within global peace and justice platforms. In parallel, AEI actively participated throughout the year in the **Pax Christi working group**, contributing to several meetings that focused on the Palestinian context amid rapidly unfolding political developments. These meetings addressed the ongoing war on Gaza, the severe humanitarian consequences, and the escalating violence across the West Bank, including the expansion of Israeli settlements, land confiscation, forced displacement, and systemic restrictions on Palestinian life. Through these engagements, AEI consistently brought forward local perspectives from Bethlehem and wider Palestine, emphasizing the lived realities of occupation, the urgent need for accountability, and the centrality of justice, human dignity, and nonviolent action in any path toward peace.

❖ From Steadfastness to Hope: AEI at the Pax Christi World Gathering

The Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi Bethlehem participated in the Pax Christi International World Gathering held in Florence, Italy, commemorating the movement’s 80th anniversary. AEI was represented by its Co-President, Mr. Elias Abu Akleh, and General Head of Projects, Mr. Roger Salameh. The gathering brought together Pax Christi members, partners, and peace advocates from around the world to reflect on eight decades of commitment to nonviolence, justice, and reconciliation, while engaging in dialogue on current global challenges.

A key contribution to the program was an online panel by Mr. Foud Giacaman entitled “*Nonviolent Resistance in the Face of Occupation and Division: From Steadfastness to Hope.*” The panel offered valuable insights into AEI’s experience in promoting nonviolent approaches rooted in community engagement, cultural preservation, and education. Mr. Giacaman highlighted how these practices contribute to strengthening social cohesion and sustaining hope under conditions of prolonged hardship.

AEI’s participation in the World Gathering also provided an important space for exchange with international partners, reinforcing shared values and exploring avenues for future collaboration. The event affirmed the Institute’s role within the global Pax Christi network and its ongoing contribution to advancing peacebuilding efforts grounded in nonviolence and solidarity.



❖ Advocacy and International Dialogue in Belgium

The Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi / Bethlehem (AEI), together with Wi'am – the Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, carried out a joint advocacy mission to Belgium focused on deepening international awareness of justice and peace issues in Palestine. Through a series of engagements with European, church-based, and civil society stakeholders, the delegation shared lived experiences and perspectives from Bethlehem and the broader Palestinian reality.

The program included visits to Brussels and Antwerp, where discussions centered on strengthening channels for advocacy, dialogue, and cooperation, with the aim of elevating the voices of Palestinian communities within international forums.

A significant moment of the visit was an encounter with His Grace Bishop Johan Bonny, Bishop of Antwerp, joined by Fr. Paul and Mrs. Annemarie. Conversations addressed the realities facing Palestinian society, the role of interreligious engagement, and practical ways to support initiatives promoting peace and living together. In addition, meetings were held with COMECE, the Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, members of the media, and representatives of various faith-based and civic organizations. These exchanges highlighted shared commitments to education, social cohesion, and nonviolent approaches to advocacy.

AEI express their appreciation to all partners and hosts whose collaboration contributed to the success of this impactful and constructive visit.



❖ **Global Recognition of the AEI Wall Museum**

In 2025, the Wall Museum in Bethlehem achieved an important milestone in strengthening its international visibility by being officially listed in *Museums1*, a worldwide online directory for museums and cultural institutions. This inclusion recognizes the Wall Museum as a significant history and cultural site and places it within a global network that connects museums with researchers, educators, tourists, and cultural practitioners. The free listing enhances accessibility and outreach, supporting the Museum's mission to share the Palestinian narrative, lived experiences, and historical context with a broader international audience.

Culture & Palestine Series

As part of its commitment to preserving Palestinian cultural memory and strengthening collective identity, AEI continued the dissemination of the *Culture & Palestine Series*. This initiative enriches knowledge and understanding of Palestinian history, heritage, and identity, with particular attention to the Arab Christian presence in Palestine.

The series consists of a collection of educational and cultural publications that document historical narratives, cultural heritage, and contributions to Palestinian society. These books are used in different AEI projects and schools, serving as resources that enhance cultural awareness, reinforce identity, and promote interfaith understanding and shared citizenship.

Methods and Approaches

AEI employs a range of participatory and innovative approaches that align with its mission to promote education, cultural preservation, social cohesion, and civic engagement. These methods emphasize active learning, storytelling, advocacy, community involvement, and capacity building, ensuring programs have both immediate and lasting impact.

- **Experiential Learning**

Hands-on activities and interactive workshops actively engage children, youth, and adults, allowing participants to learn by doing. This approach fosters critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper connection to civic, social, and cultural topics.



- **Storytelling and Cultural Engagement**

Through the use of narratives, oral histories, and creative presentations, AEI brings Palestinian heritage and lived experiences to life. Storytelling not only preserves collective memory but also strengthens identity, resilience, and empathy across generations.



- **Training and Capacity Building**

AEI invests in the development of teachers, staff, community leaders, and partner organizations through comprehensive training programs. These sessions build skills in facilitation, advocacy, storytelling, digital

marketing, using AI and program implementation, enabling local actors to sustain and expand AEI's mission within their communities.



- **Advocacy Initiatives**

Advocacy is integrated as a core method, empowering participants and partners to raise awareness on issues such as social justice, civic rights, and environmental stewardship. AEI supports communities in amplifying their voices and influencing positive change at local and broader levels.



- **Community Engagement**

AEI's programs actively involve families, schools, and local organizations, ensuring that learning and cultural initiatives extend beyond individual participants. By fostering inclusive participation and collaboration, AEI strengthens social cohesion, shared responsibility, and a culture of civic and environmental awareness.



Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration

Throughout the year, the Arab Educational Institute – Pax Christi (AEI) continued to strengthen and nurture partnerships with local and international organizations that share common values of justice, peacebuilding, human dignity, and the protection of children’s rights. AEI maintained regular communication and coordination with key partners, including the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC–Arigatou), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Jerusalem Liaison Office (JLO). These relationships were sustained through ongoing meetings, exchanges, and consultations aimed at sharing institutional updates, discussing the evolving political and humanitarian situation in Palestine, and reflecting jointly on regional developments. The partnerships also provided spaces for strategic dialogue, future planning, and exploring opportunities for joint initiatives and coordinated advocacy, reinforcing AEI’s commitment to collaborative action and international solidarity.

Future Plans and Strategic Goals

Looking ahead, AEI - Pax Christi is committed to expanding its impact by:

- Enhancing interfaith education by introducing new concepts and broadening the reach of the *Citizenship and Diversity* program to additional schools.
- Scaling up the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) to more communities to enhance local resilience and crisis preparedness.
- Strengthening women’s advocacy initiatives, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, to foster leadership and civic engagement.

- Fostering Palestinian civil peace to strengthen cohesion, unity, and internal harmony within communities across Palestine.
- Promoting and disseminating the integral ecology approach into new communities as well as schools.
- Enhancing digital resources by developing online materials and bilingual resources to ensure wider access and greater outreach.
- Diversifying funding sources and forging new partnerships to ensure the sustainability of AEI's programs.

AEI - Pax Christi remains dedicated to fostering peace, justice, and resilience through sumud, education, advocacy, and cultural preservation.

Financial Overview

- Funding sources include donations, project grants, and international partnerships.
- Expenses primarily cover educational materials, training workshops, staff, and community activities.

Acknowledgments

AEI – Pax Christi expresses its deep appreciation to the partners, donors, and friends whose continued trust and collaboration sustain the Institute's mission. Particular recognition is extended to *Misereor, Kindermission, Missio, Action Hope, CAFOD, Pax Christi International, Pax Christi Augsburg, Pax Christi Flinders*, as well as many other dedicated contributors whose support has been vital to the implementation of AEI's programs.

The Institute also warmly recognizes the essential role played by educators, volunteers, youth facilitators, and grassroots actors, whose commitment and engagement have significantly contributed to advancing social transformation. Their efforts continue to strengthen values of justice, peace, and living together across Palestinian communities.

Together, we remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering communities and preserving Palestinian cultural heritage for future generations.

Advisory Board

AEI – Pax Christi is guided by a diverse and dedicated Advisory Board, bringing together leaders in education, community advocacy, and cultural initiatives. Their expertise and guidance ensure that AEI’s programs are relevant, inclusive, and impactful, shaping a forward-looking organization that empowers communities and preserves Palestinian heritage.

Meet our Advisory Board members:

- **Zuheir Tmezi** – Journalist and Civic Engagement Advisor
- **Maysoun al-Qawasmeh** – Social Activist, Women’s Advocate, and Journalist
- **Widaad Rabi’eh** – Financial and Interfaith Dialogue Advisor
- **Anton Nassar** – Religious Leader and School Principal
- **Sana’a al-‘Azza** – Facilitator of the SSH Women’s Group
- **Manar Ateek** – Women’s Advocate and Entrepreneur (Beauty Salon)
- **Dr. Sliman Al-Lucy** – Academic Leader and Research Advisor
- **Ms. Athari Zboun** – Youth Leader and General Health Doctor
- **Mrs. Oriana Hihi** – Fundraising and Program Sustainability Advisor
- **Mr. Jimmy Lama** – Youth Activist and Project Coordinator

Together, the board reflects AEI’s commitment to inclusive leadership, community representation, and excellence, ensuring that every initiative strengthens civil peace, sumud, cultural identity, and social responsibility in Palestine.

Staff

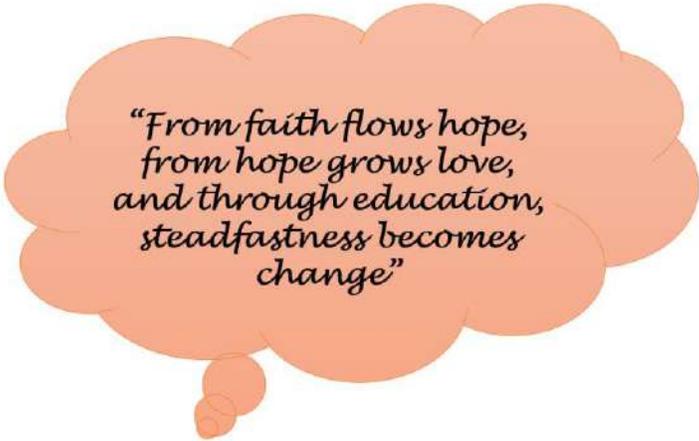
<i>Staff Name</i>	<i>Type of involvement in AEI</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
<p>Fuad Giacaman</p> 	<p>Co –Founder, Co-president and political and educational adviser, program coordinator, member financial committee, monitoring and evaluation, member management team.</p>	<p>Former headmaster and teacher at Bethlehem schools, former AEI - Pax Christi general director. BA in English language and literature.</p>
<p>Elias Abu Akleh</p> 	<p>Co –Founder, Co-president and financial adviser, program coordinator, financial management and accounting, member financial committee, member management team, monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>Experience in financial administration of dozens of AEI - Pax Christi projects as well as private schools in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, involved in AEI - Pax Christi since 1986.</p>
<p>Rania Murra</p> 	<p>Former AEI Director Legal representatives</p>	<p>MA in Gender and Development from Birzeit University</p>
<p>Jenny Baboun</p> 	<p>Legal representatives</p>	<p>Communications Officer at Bethlehem University</p>
<p>Akram Abu Zuluf</p> 	<p>Auditor</p>	<p>Licensed Certified Public Accountant PACPA (Palestinian Association of Certified Public Accountants) in the year 2000. Licensed for Audit Profession Practice (Board of Auditing Profession in Palestine).</p>

		Licensed Certified Public Accountant ACPA (Arab Society of Certified Accountants).
Roger Salameh 	General Head of Projects Member of financial and management team	Experience for over 8 years in youth projects, coordinating and secretarial work, coordinating AEI - Pax Christi youth groups, international exchanges.
Claudette Mubarak 	AEI Acting Director Project coordinator – Sumud Story House coordinator Member of management team	MA in Cultural Institution Management from Dar Al-Kalima University
Sahar Fakhouri 	Project coordinator	MA in Cultural Institution Management from Dar Al-Kalima University
Taghreed Qumsieh 	AEI's House Keeper

Conclusion

As this reporting year comes to a close, the Arab Educational Institute reflects on a period marked by hardship, perseverance, and meaningful impact. Despite severe political and social constraints, AEI's work reaffirmed that community-based education, dialogue, and advocacy remain vital pillars of resilience. Across schools, villages, and community spaces, women, youth, educators, and local partners transformed challenges into opportunities for learning, cooperation, and leadership.

The year demonstrated that **sumud** is not passive endurance, but active engagement - strengthening civil peace, interfaith dialogue, environmental responsibility, and cultural heritage, even in the most restricted settings. While financial and political uncertainties persist, the foundations built through empowered leaders, strong partnerships, and shared commitment to dignity and justice provide a solid base for continued work toward a free, peaceful, and democratic society.



*"From faith flows hope,
from hope grows love,
and through education,
steadfastness becomes
change"*