Spring has sprung, flowers paint the landscape, and the sun sets later and later, giving people more time to enjoy nature’s beauty. Our April theme, “Budding Palestine,” is, in part, inspired by the spirit of spring and the idea of rebirth: renewing, rethinking, and rediscovering. We focus on Palestinian potential and highlight the flourishing talents and successful initiatives that are driving the future of Palestine.

In the opening contribution, “Palestinian Institutions, a Story of Perseverance,” Prime Minister Salam Fayyad reflects on the state-building process and contextualizes it with reference to where we are today. Dr. Safa Nasser Eldin, Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology, addresses “E-Government in Palestine,” which she describes as, “a promising step towards achieving a better life for citizens.” Abeer Odeh, CEO at PCMA, covers the Capital Market Authority in Palestine, and Hasan Omar, a founding executive member of the first ICT Incubator in Palestine, considers the topic of Palestinian entrepreneurship.

Palestine is defined through her people. Many of the articles in this issue show the level of power Palestinians possess through their daily activities and progressive mind-set that enables them not only to survive but to actually thrive under extreme and harmful conditions. In her article, Dr. Tina Sherwell, current director of the International Academy of Art, Palestine, discusses some of Palestine’s budding young artists and students. We are also delighted to have Abeer Ayyoub’s input on what’s blooming in Gaza. Perhaps what makes this issue distinct from others is the number of new contributors whom we are honoured to feature, including Adania Shibl, Sabreen Taha, and Lana Shehadeh.

We could not have an issue with the theme “Budding Palestine” without addressing flowers and are thus grateful to Rouhina Bassous/Ghattach who gives us a vibrant sense of springtime in Palestine. Riyam Kafri-Abulaban offers sensual and practical information on the benefits of a beautiful blooming plant in “Of Black Lily and Green Leaves,” and finally, Rena Zuabi shares a comprehensive analysis of growing Palestinian agribusinesses.

Be sure to check out the eighth edition of the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival between April 15 and 25. The events promise to be spectacular.

We are happy to see the growing support that is strengthening This Week in Palestine and helping us fulfill our mission to document and promote the best of Palestine. The next issue will deal with “Palestinian Behaviour,” and we are already seeking articles for the June edition under the theme, “Jerusalem Calling.” We welcome your stories and thoughts, so please feel free to get in touch.

Manar Harb
Content Editor

Forthcoming Issues:

➢ Palestinian Behaviour – May 2013
➢ Jerusalem Calling – June 2013
➢ Culinary Experience – July 2013
Palestinian Institutions
A Story of Perseverance

By Salam Fayyad

In late August 2009, the Palestinian government introduced a state-building plan that set ambitious goals for Palestinian institutions and sought to arrive at a point of institutional readiness on a par with established states. This plan included the implementation of hundreds of projects, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and other infrastructure. The government also implemented far-reaching reforms in the financial, judicial, governance, and security sectors with efficacy.

In conjunction with the reforms and state-building effort, the government decreased its reliance on outside assistance by 60 percent in five years, in relation to the GDP, by improving tax collection and enacting serious fiscal reform, as well as creating the legal and institutional framework to encourage private-sector-led development. In addition, per capita income returned, in real terms, to its pre-2000 levels. In other words, the Palestinian economy recovered from the output losses sustained as a direct consequence of the tightening of Israeli restrictions during the years of the second Intifada.

But conceptually, the significance of this enterprise lay in the translation of the Palestinian political context and agenda into reality by building efficient, accountable, and responsible institutions of the state that can provide citizens with the best services possible, despite the limited means.

This was not about roads, buildings, or infrastructure, despite their importance. This plan was about statehood, citizen participation, and enfranchisement. It was based on the vision of establishing a functional framework where government is accountable and citizens participate in the widest and most effective way possible in decision-making and governance.

As political and diplomatic efforts were to advance the political agenda to end the occupation and establish a sovereign state on the land Israel occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, the government was to create the needed institutional framework to carry out the responsibilities of a full-fledged sovereign state.

This vision, with all that it entailed by way of self-imposed benchmarks and priorities, was not adopted because its elements were prerequisites to Palestinian statehood. The right to live as free people, with dignity, in a country of our own, is an absolute, natural, and national right of the Palestinian people that enjoys unanimous recognition from the international community. We unilaterally set these goals in order to create institutions capable of performing to the satisfaction of our public and in a manner worthy of their sacrifices in our long struggle for freedom. The concept was to create enough positive momentum to push the world to take practical steps to help end the occupation, which would enable us to fulfil our potential and enjoy our right to live in our sovereign state.

The State of Palestine is now a regional leader in the areas of fiscal transparency, fighting corruption, and social assistance programmes. In the public sector, women have taken their rightful position in leadership and decision-making positions, including the police and judiciary. Women also head significant and world-acclaimed public institutions, such as the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Capital Market Authority, and for the first time, a woman became a Governor and six women assumed key cabinet positions, and in the process, made the Palestinian government, at least in this sense, the most progressive in the region.

In line with these institutional achievements, the level of international awareness and engagement rose. Countries and regional blocs, such as the European Union, adopted progressive positions regarding occupied East Jerusalem and Palestinian statehood.

Of equal significance, the international donor community adopted the Palestinian government’s development priorities, affirming its commitment to investing in areas classified as C, which make up more than 60 percent of the West Bank, and supporting Palestinian development and perseverance in East Jerusalem. This supports our standing position: that such development efforts are essential to contributing to rolling back the occupation and realising Palestinian sovereignty.

These international positions and actions, among others, are steps in the
right direction because they align policy with practice and bring both into harmony with international law and the standing legal and moral obligations that states have towards enabling us to establish our own state.

Two years ago, the international community recognised our efforts and stated unanimously that Palestine boasts the institutions of a functional, established state. In addition to this recognition, the international community and specialised agencies also recognised what we have affirmed all along: in order for us to protect what we have achieved thus far and develop further, as is our right, the Israeli occupation must end.

The punishing, unnatural condition of living under an oppressive occupation denies us our inalienable right to live in a free country of our own, empowered to develop our lives and economy to their full potential. That has been our message all along and for the past two years, it has been the world's standing position.

Ironically, around the time we succeeded in getting world recognition of our institutional readiness for statehood in early 2011, the Palestinian economy was beginning to suffer the ill effects of financial difficulties, which subsequently turned into a deep financial crisis. This was due to a shortfall in foreign aid and it was further vastly complicated by Israel's withholding of our tax revenues.

Sadly and wrongly, some claimed that the ensuing failure on the part of the government to meet its financial obligations on time reflected a lack of readiness for statehood. I say “wrongly” because this claim disregards the fact that sovereign and developed states that have been around for centuries could face, and in fact have faced, serious economic and financial crises. But in no way and at no point did such financial crises form a basis for asserting that any one of these countries no longer qualified for statehood.

In our case, we said all along that a distinction needs to be made between lack of functionality due to financial difficulties, on the one hand, and lack of resilience and determination. Our institutions continued to provide vital services to the public, despite disruptions and unrest, including a devastating storm, the likes of which Palestine had not seen in six decades.

This crisis risked striking at the Palestinian spirit, which insists on building and moving forward towards freedom. It risked implanting despair and frustration as well as paralysing the functional and accountable institutions that Palestinians have built. That must not be allowed to happen. We are determined to protect our right to establish a sovereign state whose institutions are ready and capable to tap into the potential we have been unjustly denied as a people.

Palestinians have a long and prosperous history of entrepreneurship and success that often seems to be achieved against all odds. As far back as the mid-1800s, Palestinian educators, artists, journalists, philanthropists, and entrepreneurs made an indelible imprint on their fields in the region and worldwide. Since the Nakba 65 years ago, our resilience and innate optimism have been key to our people’s survival and perseverance. And while the reality of occupation and the absence of a political horizon inevitably cause frustration and may even produce despair, they cannot in our case lead to a sense of surrender to circumstance or defeat.

The State of Palestine will materialise. This is an historic inevitability whose achievement we, as a people, have helped accelerate by staying steadfast and deeply rooted in our homeland, building where the occupation demolishes and planting where it uproots.

Institution building in Palestine was and will continue to be about reflecting our people’s unassailable spirit and determination to realise and enjoy freedom and provide them with nothing less than what they rightly deserve: excellence. That is why it is a continuing effort, one that can and will withstand adversity. This is an endeavour motivated by the most powerful and universal of all ideas: freedom and our natural right to enjoy it.
Budding Young Artists

By Tina Sherwell

The International Academy of Art, Palestine (IAAP) was established in 2006, and has been nurturing young Palestinian talent in the visual arts ever since. It has a holistic, student-centred approach to art education that encourages the development of research-based practices in the visual arts. Students on the four-year BA programme – accredited by the Oslo National Academy for the Arts (KHiO) – have the opportunity to study drawing and painting, 3D, photography, video, performance, social intervention, history of art, and critical theory. Students are individually mentored throughout the duration of their studies to support the development of their own artistic practice. The programme culminates in a Degree Show presentation. The IAAP is host not only to a wide range of artists from all over the world who share their specialist knowledge through workshops, seminars, and tutorials, but also to international exchange students from the United Kingdom, Spain, France, and Scandinavia. IAAP graduates have gone on to post-graduate scholarship study at top art schools around the world, including Central Saint Martins, London, and Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, and have participated in local, regional, and international exhibitions, such as The Jerusalem Show, The A.M Qattan Foundation Young Artist Award, The Istanbul Biennale, The Berlin Biennale, The Dubai Film Festival, Documenta 13, the Meeting of Mediterranean Art Schools, and Truth is Concrete – Graz. Below are some examples of the students’ work.

IAAP aims to act as a catalyst for contemporary art in Palestine through student participation in its BA programme and artistic projects, such as Dis-Arming Design, in collaboration with the Sandberg Institute, Jericho 10,000 Years, in partnership with Jericho Municipality, and Picasso in Palestine, to name a few of the major art initiatives of IAAP in recent years. IAAP is currently researching the feasibility of establishing programmes in design and film studies and of fostering collaborations with the drama academy of Al Kasaba Theatre and dance at Sareyyet Ramallah.

Omaya Salman’s work explores questions of dual identity. Her Degree Show focused on masks created from the icons on the covers of our passports, which she used in her self-portraits. Her work was combined with a room of mobiles, whose lullabies were the national anthems of various countries. “My work,” she explains, “is about the inability to identify with a specific social reality or to be totally at home in a single location or culture. My driving impetus is to galvanise viewers, transforming their position from voyeurs to subjects, through challenging them to think about how they automatically formulate racial definitions and have pre-conceived stereotypes of the ‘other.’”

Abdallah Awad’s work explores facets of human subjectivity in relation to vulnerability and the presence and erasure of identity through which he combines animatikon and sculptural casts of his body. “These illusionary lines,” he explains, “imprison our existence and keep us in the world of those who are unremembered or forgotten. With my body, I recreate a new space in order to reveal the connection between the past and present.”

Ayed Arafah’s work focuses on the transformation of the city of Ramallah, as represented through the construction boom, and explores the social relations that surround the traditional cement mixer, which, in its time, determined the pace and speed and form of building. “I observe the vertical expansion of urban construction, as seen in high buildings, crowded refugee camps, abandoned houses, and settlements, all of which are situated within the urban space.”

Khaled Jarrar’s work explores the question of the transformation of young Palestinian recruits. Through his photographic portrait series, he focuses particularly on the bodily transformation of men through their period of training. “This encounter between myself as an officer and the soldiers who are being photographed becomes the stage for questioning the means of production of the image and the reproduction of the self, in which soldier and photographer are interchangeable performed roles.”
Bisan Abu Eisheh’s work focuses on the creation and exploration of archives. In *Playing House*, objects collected from demolished houses in Jerusalem are presented as artefacts in museum cases and accompanied by a video of the demolition of the home. In another work, he revisits family photographs and letters sent from his father while in prison in the 1980s, exploring an era of social solidarity and romance.

**Israa Frehat**’s work focuses on paintings that capture the moment when one shies away from being in front of the camera, or cringes in front of the lens. She is interested in the refusal of representations and reproduces them in realist-style canvases.

**Osama Nazzal**’s preoccupation has been with the new bureaucracies. Using satire and humour, through staged photographs, he explores the invention of bureaucracies in Palestine and multiple roles and distribution of power.

**Reema Tawil** works with the archive of her father – the personal bodyguard of the late President Arafat. She explores the position of her father in the shadows of the political leader, within a rich archive of historical moments.

**Taqi Sabatin** creates a series of portraits of individuals he encountered while working in the construction industry, capturing their character through his keen skills as a draughtsman. “I am interested in tracing strong and weak lines and the impact they have on surfaces of paper, whereby drawing and friction become an experience of clarifying how time and drawing can convey human characteristics.”

**Mahdi Baraghithi** interrogates stereotypes of Arab male identity through projections onto the body. He is particularly interested in challenging images of Palestinians through showing the other side of male vulnerability and self-reflection.

**Jumana Iraq** returns to her mother’s family album and re-works images of her early married life, paying close attention to re-imagining the details of the location as well as poses, gestures, intimate moments, and the enigma of objects that are still found in her home today.

**Razan Akermawy**’s work engages with public space. She creates a stall in which there is no selling or buying but a relationship of exchange. In order to take something from the stall you need to exchange an item of your choice in return, thereby creating a continual cycle of exchange and transformation based on sharing.

Sahar Al Khateeb is engaged with re-articulating used furniture to reveal human relations through deconstructing and reassembling. Her most recent work involves burning the everyday plastic chair, commonly used in wedding receptions, condolence receptions, and coffee shops.
Noor Abed uses video, performance, and photography to explore the relationship of the female body to urban and desert landscape. In this particular silent video work, she dances on the high-rise floor of the skeleton structure of one of the tallest buildings in Ramallah. “I explore concepts of repetition, unproductive energy, and time, as well as the paradox of the intimate within public space,” she explains. “My work focuses on activities with no beginning and no end: activities that take place in time but do not lead to the creation of any definite product or result, in which the notion of repetition becomes central.”

Asma Ghanem’s photography and video work explore the layered world of fantasy, in which she juxtaposes her contemplative prose with her images. She engages with questions of longing, melancholy, and desire, and the intimate space of female dreams.

Tina Sherwell, lives in Jerusalem. She is currently director of academic programmes at the International Academy of Art, Palestine in Ramallah.
The Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival
2013

At Sareyyet Ramallah we take pride in being the first to publicise contemporary dance in Palestine in order to promote dialogue and cultural exchange between the Palestinian people and other nations of the world, to introduce the Palestinian public to various forms of contemporary dance, and to develop the capacities of those involved in the art of dancing in Palestine. During the last eight years, the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival (RCDF) has become an annual event that the public attends enthusiastically and awaits impatiently. International groups also attach great significance to it and are keen on being participants.

The events of the RCDF are not limited to annual performances during a specific time period but are held throughout the year and include hosting workshops and co-productions as well as participating in conferences and festivals that specialise in contemporary dance. This has greatly helped Sareyyet Ramallah to become synonymous with Palestinian contemporary dance.

Each year sees an increase in the number of our achievements. We now have seventy-five dancers in three performance groups: Sareyyet Ramallah Folklore Dance Company, Sareyyet Ramallah Contemporary Dance Company, and Danadeesh Dance Troupe, in addition to one hundred and twenty students who are studying folklore, contemporary dance, and ballet, based on an academic curriculum prepared specifically for the Sareyyet Ramallah Dance School by trainer Samar Haddad King.

This year, the festival will host a group of many outstanding Arab and international dance companies. People with disabilities will be especially featured through two participating companies in this category. Meanwhile, the RCDF will be preceded by a training workshop for Palestinian dancers and youth with disabilities, whom we will be able to watch on stage. Afterwards we hope to proceed with a teaching programme for people with disabilities that will allow them to be integrated later with other local groups.

The RCDF also has plans to expand performance venues and present shows in community and cultural centres in the old city of Ramallah.

The eighth edition of the RCDF will be held between April 15 and 25, 2013, in partnership with the Ramallah Municipality, and with the support of the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, Diakonia/NAD, the Representative Office of Norway, The A.M. Qattan Foundation, Pro Helvetia – The Swiss Arts Council, and in cooperation with the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem, the French Institute, the Consulate General of Greece in Jerusalem, the Goethe Institute, the British Council, and the Representative Office of Brazil.
E-Government in Palestine
A Promising Step towards Achieving a Better Life for Citizens

By Safa Nasser Eldin

E-government is not only the use of information and communication technologies as a tool to achieve better government but also a driving force to refocus the public administration on the key issues that need to be reformed in order to implement a modernisation process and better governance that leads to a better life for Palestinian citizens. Nowadays, it takes you and me an hour or two to be issued a new passport or driving license in our beloved state of Palestine. “Better Citizen Services” (simplification and accessibility) and “Better Governance” (efficiency, accountability, transparency) are clearly the starting requirements and the final objectives of the e-government initiative, covering both the citizens’ demand side and the technical-organisational facets at stake.

E-government can be defined also as a framework that is composed of different layers that enable various types of electronic services: Government to Government (G2G), Government to Business (G2B), and Government to Citizen (G2C). In order to address these service objectives of the overall e-government vision, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT), in coordination with all relevant Palestinian institutions, tries to ensure that ICT become the enabling instrument of an integrated reform process that will make the Palestinian government easy to reach, easy to understand, easy to trust, more responsive to change, accountable for its actions, transparent in its processes, financially responsible and efficient, and, through monitoring and evaluation, more effective. To do so, we developed the e-government policies that fully reflect the current needs of the Palestinian people, while contributing to the creation of a modern public administration that is capable of delivering innovative quality services. E-government policies and practices are instrumental in achieving good governance, which is among the most important priorities of the Palestinian public-sector reform.

The government network was initiated in April 2010 in order to be used as the infrastructure for e-government. This network links ministries and government institutions by fibre optic lines to ensure high speed and enough capacity. A security framework was developed in order to ensure the security, integrity, authenticity, and availability of data being transported over the government network between the connected ministries or the data stored in data centres.

Security framework
In December 2011, a National Team for Systems and Information Security was created by the cabinet to suggest information-security best practices which could be adopted to build a national information security strategy in Palestine and provide the terms of reference for the establishment of the Palestine Cybersecurity Emergency Response Team (PaCERT) as well as practical steps to maintain information and reduce piracy and attacks on Palestinian networks. The PaCERT will be providing reactive services triggered by an event.
or request, proactive services to help prepare, protect, and secure systems, and security-quality-management services to help improve the overall security of the organisation and identify risks, threats, and system weaknesses.

To exchange data needed by the e-government services, various governmental agencies need to agree on and understand specific elements in the exchanged data message. In other words, to provide or consume data via e-government services, all parties must understand and agree on the vocabulary, meaning, structure, codes, and business rules pertaining to the exchanged data. Also, in order to develop and maintain e-government services, important metadata about government registries and databases, in addition to metadata about services, must be maintained and used.

A Palestinian Interoperability Framework, “Zinnar,” was recently established and accredited by the cabinet (March 2013) to address these issues. Zinnar consists of five servers: Ontology Server, Entity Server, Address Server, Service Repository, and Database of Databases. More information can be found at http://zinnar.pna.ps on these five components and the achievements of the interoperability committee in each of them.

Any exchange of data needs to be governed by a legal framework, a unique set of rules and regulations. Here also MTIT has worked in cooperation with other related ministries and the private sector on developing drafts for laws to address the current needs of e-government. An e-transaction law was drafted but still needs endorsement by the cabinet and the president. Other legal drafts are also needed: information systems law, personal data protection law, cybercrime law, etc.

What do we mean by national policies?

An e-government policy document in Palestine was a reflection on the priorities and approaches of the MTIT in coordination with all relevant Palestinian institutions. It directly fed into the development of an ad hoc E-Government Implementation Roadmap that transformed this policy advice into the specific e-government projects to be implemented and services to be delivered. It was developed under the framework of the MENA-OECD Initiative to Support Palestine. The detailed Implementation Roadmap was based on an analysis of the current context, the policy constructs that guide the choice of priorities and key tasks, and the result of an analysis of 17 public administrations.

Services


Taking into account the Estonian experience was essential in order to enhance the e-government in Palestine in partnership with the Estonian government through its E-Government Academy, which assisted us in the implementation of e-government services in the seven ministries mentioned above.

The general aim is to access the administrative services of the overall government (central and local) through the post office and physical desks of local public administrations or through an Internet-based one-stop shop.

One-stop shop (G2C) model

In order to enrich the public and private sectors in Palestine with the needed skills and knowledge to build the Palestinian e-government with skilled Palestinian hands, Sina Institute at Birzeit University has developed professional training sessions in cooperation with MTIT and as part of the Palestinian E-Government Academy (http://www.egovacademy.ps). This project is funded by Tempus and led by Dr. Mustafa Jarrar. The training sessions are directed towards building e-government services. The programme includes 6 courses (approximately 300 highly advanced and specialised training hours). The tutorials were developed in 2011 by Palestinian specialists in collaboration with highly reputed European scientists, and were tailored to fit the needs of the Palestinian society.

Having previously worked more than three years in e-government as a general coordinator, I believe that achieving the objectives of e-government is not a luxury in Palestine. It should be one of our priorities within our current living situation, with all the complicated conditions of living under occupation in Palestine or of living outside Palestine. In fact, we are in need of all the technology possible in order to facilitate routine official work without having to run from one place to another, getting entangled in governmental bureaucracy, and getting trapped by the obstacles put in our way by the Israeli occupation.

Dr. Safa Nasser Eldin is Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technology.
Blossoming Spring in Palestine

By Roubina Bassous/Ghattas

Spring this year in Palestine is unique; manifesting a colourful appearance and a great wealth of flowering plants spread over the hills and countryside. In Palestine, the highly valued wild flowers are used for medication, cooking, decoration, and spiritual and traditional purposes. Flowers are recognised as an integral part of the national Palestinian heritage, filled with history and symbolism.

This year boasts high amounts of rainfall, which has exceeded the normal average for the same period. Rainfall has enhanced the growth of a wide and dense cover of flowers across the country. Soon after the first winter rains in October/November, a green carpet grows, covering the country until the next dry season. Pink and white cyclamen, and red, white, and purple anemones bloom from December to March, followed by the blue lupine and yellow corn marigold. Many native plants, such as the crocus and squill, are geophytes, storing nourishment in their bulbs and blooming at the end of the summer.

Palestine’s landscape of flowers and plants changes abruptly within various geographical regions. But at this time of year, the hills, fields, and roadsides are ablaze with many colourful herbaceous plants. The red fields are dominated by anemones (شقائق النعمان) and overlap with poppies (شجاع الورد), buttercups (برقوق النمور), red everlasting (دم الغزال), and tulips (قرن الغزال الجبلي) – one of the rarest yet most beautiful flowers that grow in the wild. Light- to dark-pink colours are also seen – the most beautiful being cyclamen (شيا الراعي), linum (الكتان), bull mallow (شيبة قديس), Jerusalem sage (سبيع جنوب), henbit deadnettle (خوذة - رأس الهر), and thyme (الزعتر الفار), which has aromatic and medicinal uses. Yellow and white fields are also widespread and include yellow daisies (الاقحوان), euphorbia (آب لب وخيلوب الشمس), wild mustard (جردل), field marigold (مخلب القبل), the beautifully scented joss flower (الترجح الشناج), toothpickweed (اللابيوة), chamomile (البابيونج), watercress (العكوب), and gundelia (جرجير). Many of these plants are used in traditional Palestinian cuisine. Blue and purple fields, mainly in the Jenin area, are full of beautiful flowers, including bright blue lupines (المرمية), sage (البري الطرمس), cistus (الجدت), and germander (البتيلة), all of which have historical medicinal value.

Other types of vegetation flourish too at this time of year. Natural woodlands of oaks, pistachios, pines, and carobs cover the hilly regions as well as their plant associations such as asparagus, honeysuckle, and others. In spring, rockrose and thorny broom turn the hillsides pink, white, and yellow. There are hyacinth, crocus, and narcissus in the mountains as early as December, followed by anemones, tulips, cyclamen, iris, and daisies. Honeysuckle creeps over the bushes, and large plane trees such as tamarisks and willows provide shade along the streams of Jordan Valley.

Today, forests of planted trees and bush plants such as pine, cypress, acacia, and eucalyptus are distributed throughout the country where wildflowers and medicinal plants grow in profusion. Fruit trees such as wild plums, peaches, pears, figs, medlars, mulberries, dates, and almonds bloom in spring. Blackberries, loquats, and pomegranates flourish during the summer months. In the south, acacia trees and the prickly cactus suck moisture from the desert. Atlantic pistachios strike a dramatic note among the dry riverbeds, and date palms grow wherever there is sufficient underground water.

Another marked feature of the region is the great variety of bulbous and tuberous-rooted plants such as crocuses, cyclamen, fritillaries, orchids, and tulips. Bulbous plants flower either in the late winter and spring or in the autumn,
one geographical area to another since
the ecosystems are different. This is why
Palestine is such a pleasant place to
wander through and has been called the
Land of Wild Flowers; anyone who has
seen it in spring would award it this title.

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ARIJ is a Palestinian research
organisation that works in the fields of
socio-economics, natural resources,
water management, sustainable
agriculture, and political dynamics of
development in the oPt. More information
can be found at www.arij.org.
Article photos courtesy of ARIJ, 2013.

when the weather is cooler and there
is plenty of moisture around to promote
growth. There are many special plants
in Palestine that grow in the sand-dune
habitats of the coast, such as acacia,
tamarisk, and marram grass.

All this makes Palestine home to a
stunning variety of plants. As part of the
Mediterranean basin to the west and the
vast desert to the east, Palestine is a
world centre of wild plant biodiversity and
is known for its rich biological resources
and variety of plant formations. Palestine
(West Bank and Gaza Strip) alone is
host to 2,076 plant species – 1,959 plant
species in 115 families in the West Bank,
and 1,290 plant species in 105 families
in the Gaza Strip.* The plant families’
composition and distribution differ from

Survey: Review for flowering plants inhabiting the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Bethlehem, West Bank.
Jerusalem District Electricity Company
Getting Smarter

By Mashhour Abudaka

Established in 1914, the Jerusalem District Electricity Company (JDECO) is among the first Palestinian Public-Private Partnership (PPP) institutions and one of the most important Palestinian national economic institutions. Despite exceptional circumstances and decades of regional political unrest, the name JDECO has remained linked to Al-Quds Al-Sharif since its inception during the days of the Ottoman Empire.

As set by the Jordanian Companies Law of 1964, JDECO is governed by an 18-member board of directors that represents the stakeholders: two from the Jerusalem Municipality, one each from the municipalities of Ramallah, Al-Bireh, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Jericho, and nine members who represent various private investors. Board members who represent private investors are elected every four years, and members who represent the local authorities are appointed by their respective institutions. The role and duties of the board of directors are defined by JDECO’s detailed by-laws, and the board has several specialised sub-committees.

The JDECO concession area covers 25 percent of the West Bank (366 km2 – an area equal to that of the Gaza Strip) and includes the Jerusalem Area (East Jerusalem), which encompasses 47 towns and villages in an area of 82 km2; the Ramallah Area, which includes 72 towns and villages in an area of 174 km2; the Bethlehem Area, which includes 43 towns and villages in an area of 80 km2; and the Jericho Area, which has 7 population centres and covers 30 km2. The Palestine National Authority recently extended the JDECO concession in Jericho to cover large parts of the northern Jordan Valley.

Since 1967, JDECO gets its electricity supply from the Israel Electric Co., and has one main distribution station in Jerusalem and several substations that cover the area of concession.

JDECO’s main headquarters is in Jerusalem and recognised as such by the Israeli government as it was recognised previously by the Jordanian, British, and the Ottoman authorities. JDECO has several branch offices, storehouses, workshops, and training centres in the major West Bank cities and towns.

JDECO’s getting smarter and building the Palestinian information highway
In its pursuit to acquire the latest technology to run and manage its electricity network, JDECO established JDECO Fiber in May 2011, to develop and manage smart-grid and smart-metering systems based on the latest fibre optics technology. More than 200 kilometres of fibre cables have already been laid along the electricity cables. The total length of the JDECO grid stretches over 3,000 kilometres, and work is in progress to finish laying the fibre cables during the next two years. Accordingly, in 2011, JDECO was granted a permit from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MTIT) to develop a fibre network that utilises its electricity infrastructure on condition that the fibre be open for other licensed Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to use.

The optical fibre cables are lighter and cheaper than cables made of copper. Laser light is used to transmit signals along the fibre, which is not influenced by the adjacent electric field, unlike transmission along the copper cables, which are sensitive to electric magnetic fields. A single fibre can carry a beam of laser light that can potentially carry an unlimited amount of information (using today’s technology, 20 terabytes) for more than 25 kilometres without a significant loss of intensity; while corresponding copper strands can only carry 100 megabytes for a distance of around 1.5 kilometres (1 terabyte = 1,000 gigabytes = 1,000,000 megabytes). JDECO is laying cables that have 96 strands of fibre as a standard. Utilising the electricity infrastructure for telecommunication will serve to meet the demand for higher telecommunication bandwidth and purposes a significant reduction of the cost of supplying the end-users with super-high-speed Internet. Connected cities, smart cities, or connected communities are becoming a reality for Palestinian cities, towns, and villages that are served by the JDECO grid.

New electric wires and cables now come embedded with fibre strands and are sold as one unit. The embedded cables are installed in all newly developed parts of the grid in villages, towns, and cities across the JDECO concession area. Newly installed metres and smart metres are also connected with these embedded cables. Consumers will soon discover the benefits of super-high-speed Internet. This will pave the way for new technological developments such as building smart buildings and the
acquisition of intelligent house appliances. The new businesses that are expected to flourish include those focusing on educational tools for schools and self-learners, security systems, IPTV, and video-on-demand.

Municipalities will hugely benefit from the electronic superhighway; they are expected to start new services built around the concept of e-municipality or smart city. Citizens will have a score of new electronic services and become more actively engaged in the local government. Local government can improve services, cut costs, raise efficiency of delivery of services to its citizens, and become responsive to local demands from constituents.

The ultra-high-speed telecommunication fibre network will bring numerous benefits to JDECO. It will be able to increase the efficiency of its grid by monitoring station and substation electricity losses, controlling and directing the electricity supply from different and alternative sources such as wind- and sun-powered substations, reading meters remotely and detecting electricity theft. The smart-grid technologies will surely encourage community participation in finding alternative supplies of energy. JDECO is now installing two-way electricity meters. JDECO subscribers can generate their own power and supply the grid with electric power at a favourable cost differential. The fibre telecommunication cable is the main attraction of this development.

Building on a legacy of a successful PPP model, JDECO will refrain from providing last-mile services; thus JDECO is partnering with local authorities, the ICT industry, ISPs, media outlets, and the Palestinian Internet Exchange (PIX), which is a non-profit local NGO, to bring many benefits to Palestine and to the Palestinian public, such as reduction of access costs to the telecommunication infrastructure and the introduction of new technologies. This is bound to bring economic growth and innovation through new investment in building smart cities and connected communities. The local ICT industry will be free to use the high-capacity network to bring new services to end-users and connect them to the outside world.

Mashhour Abudaka completed his PhD and DIC in engineering from Imperial College, University of London in 1989. After relocating to Palestine in 1994, Dr. Abudaka held several senior positions, including executive director of PITA, minister of transport, and minister of telecom and IT. Currently, Dr. Abudaka is an adviser to the Jerusalem District Electricity Co.
The Palestine Capital Market Authority’s (PCMA) mission is to be a proficient regulator and the safeguard of a strong and transparent capital market in Palestine. This is done through implementing a modern, robust, transparent, and fair regulatory framework for the securities, insurance, mortgage, and leasing markets in Palestine. The mission also includes maintaining an orderly capital market with the institutional capability to conduct effective and responsible market oversight and supervision that supports capital investment and economic growth in Palestine. This is done through strengthening the legal and regulatory structure in accordance with international standards and best business practices; ensuring that investors and beneficiaries have access to complete, accurate, and transparent financial information on Palestinian enterprises; protecting the interests of investors by developing the internal capacity for risk-based regulation and market-monitoring practices; and implementing regional initiatives in coordination with relevant stakeholders to attract foreign investment in Palestine.

The PCMA has placed a high priority on completing the legal framework for the leasing sector by finalising the leasing law and completing the first draft of the mortgage law as well. It worked hand in hand with the Palestine stock exchange to ensure the listing of new companies and was able to enlist more than seven new companies during last two years; new financial instruments as well were introduced, including bonds and depository receipts.

To mitigate the risk in the insurance sector, the PCMA, with the aid of experts, finished the first phase of the actuarial study for the insurance sector and started working with relevant companies on future business plans.

The PCMA has drafted an action plan with stakeholders to launch a programme that aims to improve corporate governance and transparency in Palestine. Initial responses show positive signs from targeted corporates reflected in their quarterly disclosure and yearly reports.

The PCMA was established as an autonomous agency by law No. (13) in 2004. It is governed by a board of directors composed of seven members. Its jurisdiction encompasses the securities market, the insurance sector, the financial mortgage and leasing sectors, and any other non-banking financial institutions. In the past years, the PCMA has chaired the National Committee for Corporate Governance in Palestine.

The PCMA was set to achieve several targets in 2012, ranging from expanding the number of listed companies to strengthening the legal framework and improving the professional standards of those working in the financial sector. To that effect, more than seven new companies were added to the stock exchange, bringing the total number of listed companies to 48. Moreover, the PCMA finalised the leasing law which received the approval of the council of ministers and is set for endorsement by the president. As to improving the professional standards in the financial sector, the PCMA concluded an agreement with the Chartered Institutions for Securities and Investment in the United Kingdom to conduct courses and exams to qualify persons working in the financial sector (including PCMA staff), in addition to undertaking multiple training programmes in Palestine and other Arab and European countries.

In regard to corporate governance, the PCMA embarked on a comprehensive awareness plan, with the aid of professional consultants and related stakeholders, starting with a screening process of existing practices within the corporates, their bylaws, and the level of adherence to basic corporate governance practices. Furthermore, the PCMA engaged itself with other stakeholders in setting a manual for corporates and shareholders that identifies rights and responsibilities; and work is under way in cooperation with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to set a scorecard to measure corporate compliance with the Palestinian code of governance.

Sectors under the PCMA mandate include:

1. Financial Securities
Components of the securities market:
   • Palestine exchange
   • Clearing and settlement
   • Securities companies
   • Investment funds and custodians
   • Other financial professionals

Our market was characterised by a low turnover in securities trading; a multiplicity of internal and external factors contributed to this situation, yet the index in 2012 was stable, compared to other markets in the region. Meanwhile, the securities directorate went ahead with its designated plan to improve the regulatory framework in the market; as such it issued regulations for the operation of custodians and their licensing, as well as instructions for bonds and for International Depository Receipts.

Although there was a high level of adherence to the law and regulations by listed companies and financial intermediaries, some companies were
2. Insurance Sector
Components of the insurance sector:
- Insurance companies
- Palestinian road accident victims compensation fund
- Palestinian insurance federation
- Other insurance professionals

The insurance sector has recorded growth throughout the years. The first and second phases of the actuarial study for the sector were completed and findings were disseminated to the companies; the PCMA will work with the individual insurance companies during 2012 to ensure that the findings be reflected in their financial data and in their future policies. Concurrently, the electronic programme for car insurance and connectivity to the licensing department is virtually completed. Loss adjusters and insurance investigators have had to comply with new instructions, including training and educational programmes.

3. Mortgage Financing and Leasing Sectors

3.1 Finance leasing:
A finance lease is an asset-based financing tool that allows the lessor, as owner, to retain ownership of an asset while transferring substantially all the risks and rewards of ownership to the lessee.

3.2 Mortgage Financing:
- Mortgage finance is an emerging sector in Palestine with good prospects.
- Mortgage finance is defined as extending loans for the purpose of buying real estate against real-estate collateral.

The draft law for mortgage financing was finished and given to stakeholders for comments, and the final draft handed to the cabinet for approval in 2012. Work will be under way during 2013 to draft the relevant regulations to the law.

As mentioned previously, the leasing law is pending the final endorsement of the president. It is noteworthy that these laws were drafted in close coordination with the Palestinian Monetary Authority, the Ministry of Transportation, the Land Authority, and companies and agencies working in the field.

The PCMA has 70 well-educated and trained qualified employees; 31 out of 70 are women, as we encourage increasing women’s access to positions of top responsibility. Some women are department heads, and 19 hold high degrees. The PCMA has almost completed the process of application for full membership in the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO), which focuses on developing, implementing, and promoting adherence to internationally recognised and consistent standards of regulation, oversight, and enforcement in order to protect investors and maintain fair, efficient, and transparent markets. It also seeks to address systemic risks, enhance investor protection, and promote investor confidence in the integrity of the securities markets through strengthened information exchange and cooperation in enforcement against misconduct and in supervision of markets and market intermediaries; and to exchange information at both global and regional levels on their respective experiences in order to assist the development of markets, strengthen market infrastructure, and implement appropriate regulations.

Abeer Odeh was appointed CEO for PCMA in June 2009. She has held a number of senior management positions, including chief financial analyst, chief controller, project director, and chief auditor. She has more than 20 years of experience in management and finance and specialised experience in auditing, assessment of internal control, project management, and financial valuation and analysis. Ms. Odeh holds an MBA from Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, Chicago, and is a certified public accountant, American Institute of CPAs.
Cut the leaves right at the stem, slice in half and remove the main vein. Place in a strainer and wash repeatedly with water, squeezing the leaves between washes....

Arum Palaestinum, Black Lily, Loof Falasteeny, is a beautiful plant with bright-green leaves and a black calla lily flower that blooms in early spring in Palestine. This unassuming beauty is a busy manufacturing centre of antioxidant, anti-cancer, and anti-many-other-diseases compounds. It is known even to Israeli scientists as Palestinian Loof, and belongs to the plant family Aracea (a-RAY-see-eh), the genus Arum, and the species so appropriately known as Palaestinum. Reports of this particular plant flowering in California are found in the literature; usually it is reported to flower alongside its white calla lily cousin. But in Palestine, Loof blooms in shady warm areas, on its own. It is a culinary delicacy served in a variety of forms – sautéed in olive oil with onions, cooked in a tomato-based sauce with wheat flour or whole wheat bread – a delicacy enjoyed for years in the kitchens of those who appreciate it and know how to prepare it.

You must wash and squeeze the leaves to get rid of their bitter taste, which causes numbness in the mouth. A sign of a master chef is a Loof dish that does not numb one’s tongue. Some might prefer to boil the leaves and decant them several times to get rid of the toxins.

It is this exact toxicity that makes Loof an interesting plant to study for biological activity. It is odd that Palestine has not been flooded with scientists from all over the world clambering to study its wide variety of medicinal herbs. After all Palestine as a region holds 3 percent of the world’s biodiversity, including medicinal plants. Moreover, herbal medicine in Palestine forms an integral part of medical care and has been largely unchanged for many generations. All Palestinians are subject (throughout their lifespan) to all types of decoctions, macerations, and oil-based remedies. Mothers get their knowledge from their own mothers who have inherited this information from their own mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, etc. For an upset stomach, drink sage tea; for a cold, make chamomile tea, quickly and hurriedly, and infuse with fresh honey from this year’s harvest. For beautiful hair, massage your head with olive oil before washing it. For beautiful skin, use sugar, lemon, and olive oil to scrub your face, the resulting glow competes with the best and, of course, most expensive spa treatments. And for anti-aging or anti-cancer effects, a Loof-based cream, or pill? Maybe?

Although Palestinian herbal medicine is deeply ingrained in the culture, a serious and central effort to document the ethnopharmacological knowledge and support it with a comprehensive natural-product-screening programme is still lacking. Many brave efforts of young scientists in various Palestinian universities exist, but a more central project is needed. Much like everything else, traditional medicinal plant knowledge is being hijacked by Israeli culture and scientists.

Pour a good amount of olive oil into a saucepan on medium heat. Chop an onion or two into fine squares; add to the warm oil, and sauté. Add your chopped Loof leaves and stir. Keep stirring until the onions are clear and barely visible, and your bright green leaves are dark and wilted.

Studies show that Loof has antioxidant activity. Chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and ageing are all associated with the presence of high levels of reactive oxygen species, in other words radicals. In general, radicals (as chemists like to call them, not to be confused with other types of radicals such as political ones) are reactive species that can pretty much eat through anything. They can attack proteins, lipids, and carbohydrates, and cause both structural and functional changes. Radicals are serious troublemakers for those in search of eternal youth. They can break down skin tissue and cause wrinkles,
age spots, and fine lines. So imagine if in Palestine we find the one plant that can seriously stop such damage, or, to be less vain and more humble, at least significantly slow it down. Radicals are also associated with cancer. Cancer, till this day, remains a shape-shifting disease. It has many causes that range from lifestyle, nutrition, age, weight, and genetics on the macro level, to the more precise causes, such as the uncontrolled cell proliferation – the inability of our cells to stop dividing. The presence of radicals that can cause genetic damage to our cells and render them unable to stop dividing is hypothesised to be a cause of cancer. Medicinal plants with antioxidant compounds that can neutralise these highly reactive species may be another mode of attack. It may be just another weapon that can help secure at least one victory in a battle in the war against one of the worst diseases in the history of modern medicine.

To serve this in a tomato sauce, peel your tomatoes, chop them into fine pieces, and gradually add them to the saucepan and stir. Then add water, a dash of salt and some pepper, and let the mixture simmer over low heat.

According to the literature, Loof has significant amounts of phenolic compounds. Phenolic compounds are a special family of alcohols that exhibit interesting biological activity. For example, they are responsible for the red colour in berries, which also exhibits antioxidant and anti-aging activity. Phenolic functionality has also been associated with other biological activities and has made excellent medicinal compound targets. The key feature of phenols is their acidic alcohol group, which is significantly more acidic than a regular alcohol (for example, ethanol). The presence of a benzene ring (a special unsaturated six-membered ring) causes this high acidity as well as the ability to react with radicals to form more stable compounds. We call benzene rings a conjugated pi system that is capable of resonance stabilisation. In other words, the presence of the benzene ring stabilises the compound and accounts for its ability to react in various ways.

Once the Loof stew is ready you can serve it with whole wheat bread for dipping, or with whole wheat maftool (couscous), or with bread crumbs covered with the stew.

As Loof flowers around this time of the year, we natural-product explorers feel a bit of hope, a tinge of potential, and a skip of the heartbeat as we macerate leaves in alcoholic and aqueous media. We hope that perhaps this time next year, we might hold in a test tube an extract that promises eternal youth, or eternal life, or a treatment for cancer. We hope that Palestinian research will blossom into efforts to document a long history of herbal medicine and further support what is recognised to be folk knowledge with scientific results that can not only preserve this tradition and protect it from theft but will also provide a basis for serious research efforts, achievements, and publications. The importance of research-active academics cannot be highlighted enough. Not only will it provide working opportunities for many highly educated Palestinians but it will ultimately make us better teachers.

You may choose to garnish the stew with lemon… Bon Appetite!

Dr. Riyam Kafri-AbuLaban is an assistant professor of organic chemistry at Al Quds Bard College based at Al Quds University-Abu Dis. She teaches organic chemistry, writing, and First Year Seminar (a great books class). She co-writes and co-manages The Big Olive: The Tales of Two Professors in Palestine (http://thebigolive.tumblr.com). She is married to Ahmed AbuLaban, and both are on the fearless frontlines of parenthood with the lovely toddler twins Basil and Taima. Riyam can be reached at rkafri@gmail.com.
Budding Gaza

By Abeer Ayyoub

As it was his neighbourhood’s turn for an eight-hour shift of blackout, the ten-year-old Mahmoud Kuhail turned on a weakly lit electric torch, picked up his kanoun (oriental zither), and the oriental musical evening started. Along with his father accompanying him on the lute, Mahmoud started singing and playing Um Kulthum’s Lessa Faker.

Mahmoud was only five years old when he began to hum to the rhythm as his father played an Umm Kulthum song. Even back then his father had decided to put Mahmoud on the family track; the track of art and music. In addition to being a psychiatrist, the father, Dr. Emad Kuhail, has been an amateur lute player for more than 30 years. Emad believed in his son’s talent and started to work on the artist-to-be project.

“When I discovered that Mahmoud was interested in music, I immediately gave him an electronic keyboard and got him registered in the only music school in Gaza,” recalled Emad.

Mahmoud started to attend music classes, learning to play various instruments. His focus was on the electronic keyboard before his teacher called Emad to tell him that his son’s talent could be directed toward a more difficult instrument – the kanoun.

In 2010, Mahmoud entered the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music competition and was awarded the first prize for five-to-ten-year-olds, the youngest age group. Last year, Mahmoud was the only child to be allowed to participate in the same competition for ten-to-eighteen-year-olds, even though he was still only nine. Mahmoud won second prize this time.

“I want to be like Anas,” Mahmoud said with a shy smile on his face. Anas is priority for its people or its government. Gaza schools don’t have music classes at all. The Gaza branch of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music is the only music school in Gaza, and it’s suffering from a financial crisis that might close it.

Emad is aware of these hardships, but he still insists on encouraging his son’s talent. He is committed to finding a way to enable his son to continue even if the music school closes.

Mahmoud’s teacher at school. Mahmoud admits that playing the kanoun is what he loves most in life. His dream is to be famous and travel all over the world to show everyone his talent.

“I have created a fan page for myself on Facebook and I got 100 fans in less than a week; I’m becoming famous!” Mahmoud announced with clear confidence.

Unfortunately Mahmoud’s passion and ambition have not been met with much support and appreciation. Gaza is a developing city where art is not a high priority for its people or its government. Gaza schools don’t have music classes at all. The Gaza branch of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music is the only music school in Gaza, and it’s suffering from a financial crisis that might close it.

Emad is aware of these hardships, but he still insists on encouraging his son’s talent. He is committed to finding a way to enable his son to continue even if the music school closes.

Far-removed from Arabic classical music but not from music in general, Mohannad Barakat, 33, decided to use Western music beats to send his own national message. After learning that “Gangnam Style” was the second most frequently searched term on Google during 2012, Mohannad decided to do something similar in order to help promote the Palestinian cause.

As Mohannad watched many parodies of Gangnam Style he felt that he could do better and at the same time direct the world’s attention to the difficult circumstances under which Gaza’s Palestinians live.

Although Mohannad had hoped for success, he never expected the fame he has received.

“We created something out of nothing,” Mohannad commented. The band, known as Gaza Style now, borrowed a friend’s cell phone for filming and a laptop for montage just because they believed in what they wanted to do.
The video clip presented a number of the difficult situations that Palestinians under the siege in Gaza are forced to endure, such as high unemployment, fuel shortages, closed borders, risky tunnels, Palestinians being imprisoned in Israeli jails, and the widespread destruction throughout the Gaza Strip as a result of constant Israeli military operations.

Waleed Abu Shaaban, 25, one of the band members, admits that even though he was taken by the idea when Muhannad first suggested it, he faced many hardships in implementing it. Social obstacles were the hardest to overcome since Gazans don't accept anything that they are not used to, especially when it's Western.

“Our neighbours told my father to stop me; they told him that his son is becoming a perverted dancer.”

The seven-member band says that it managed to achieve its goal: the video made the headlines for more than one week. The band intends to continue to use international rhythms to promote the Palestinian cause.

Mahmoud and Muhannad are not the only people in Gaza to use their talents to support their country; Hamdi and Deema Shusha’a are siblings who have chosen the art of drawing on glass as a step toward supporting tourism in Gaza.

Hamdi studied interior design, and Deema graduated with a BA in accounting. Hamdi is the one who taught Deema how to draw so she could be his assistant. With time, Deema and Hamdi have become a team that specialises in drawing on glass.

The team draws on cups and plates and makes personal portraits. Much of their work bears the images of Palestinian cities, in particular the Old City of Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock.

During the last couple of years, Deema and Hamdi have received the support of the pro-Palestinian convoys that regularly visit Gaza. Hamdi said that the activists appreciate his work the most and are always impressed by it.

“I write the word ‘Gaza’ on most of my work because I know that many people around the world don’t know it. This is how I see myself supporting my homeland,” Hamdi commented.

Hamdi and Deema are not appreciated by people in their area, but this is not the only obstacle they face. They also have problems finding galleries to exhibit their work. They dream of holding an auction outside Gaza, especially for their paintings that have the signatures of activists from countries all over the world.

No matter how hard their lives are, Gazans still find something to live for every morning when they wake up. They still have beauty and art deep inside. The young generation in Gaza can still find their own ways to support and raise awareness of their Palestinian cause. The young generation of Gaza can still teach life.

Abeer Ayyoub, 25, is a freelance journalist from Gaza who graduated from the Islamic University of Gaza with a BA in English literature. She was a human rights researcher before turning to writing and reporting. Her work has appeared in Haaretz, Al-Jazeera Net, and The Monitor. Abeer can be reached at abeer.ayyoub87@gmail.com.
Entrepreneurial Spirit and Small Businesses in Palestine What Is Missing?

By Hasan Omar

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) indicates that Palestine exhibits a low early-stage entrepreneurship rate. The proportion of the adult population involved in early-stage entrepreneurial activity is around 9 percent. It is 14.7 percent among factor-driven countries and the MENA-seven GEM countries.

Many initiatives and programmes that support entrepreneurship and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have taken place during the past few years. The Intel Business Plan Contest, the Microsoft Imagine Cup Competition, the Celebration of Innovation, ESCWA Commercialization Tour, the Business Entrepreneurship Forum, and the Call to Innovation are just some examples. There are also initiatives by the Palestine Investment Fund (PIF), three venture capital firms, a business-and-innovation centre, microfinance institutions, and incubation programmes that include those at university centres of excellence in the West Bank and Gaza. As a result, there is a clear increase in the number and quality of business ideas presented by entrepreneurs. What is not clear, however, is the impact on the total number of successful start-up jobs created and on the GDP.

It seems that most incubation programmes target the technology sector. Why only the ICT? Yes, it is an enabler and borderless sector that offers thousands of jobs, but there are other promising sectors that require more attention and support. An agro-business incubator, for example, would help a lot.

Palestinian entrepreneurs most likely have the knowledge required but lack business skills. This is due to many reasons, including the education system. However, and as a result of the dozens of training programmes conducted, the situation is different now. Due to the number of institutions that work in the entrepreneurship field, many regard entrepreneurship as an option and alternative to the job. It is fine, and sometimes it works, but we are always looking for the real entrepreneurs.

We are proud of the Arab Bank, Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC), and other examples of solid entrepreneurship. However, we know that doing business within the current context and global competition is a different story. Palestinians are entrepreneurs by nature, yes, but it is not enough; and innovation is the secret.

Research conducted by MAS (Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute) and published in the Palestine Country Report 2010 states, “In 2010, the OPT was in the top 10 countries, among the 60 participating GEM countries, in which fear of failure would prevent people from starting a new business.”

Fear of failure should not be a barrier. Barriers are everywhere; it’s the nature of entrepreneurship. Neil DiBernardo (Dun & Bradstreet) noted, “During the first half of 1997, over 43,000 US businesses failed.” Half of the businesses die during the first two to five years of trading, with a peak between 18 and 24 months (Cressy, 2006). The failure rate sometimes exceeds 70 percent, as stated in a study from Bradley University. Then it is a game of numbers, and we need a large pool of entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas to make sure that we’ll end up with a satisfied number of successful businesses.

Entrepreneurial spirit is affected by...
external and personal factors that include the local context, general framework conditions, and business climate, as well as social, cultural, political, and economic factors. Despite such obstacles, which we all admit exist, Palestinian entrepreneurs share many other characteristics and chances for success with other entrepreneurs around the world. For any framework to succeed, however, these factors should be taken into account (Elmuti et al, 2011).

A survey conducted by the Business Women Forum - Palestine showed that female entrepreneurs are facing many challenges, such as networking, marketing, permits, and finance, and these challenges are structural in nature rather than gender-related. Other research has discussed some of the barriers, such as the evaluation by the OECD in 2008. An analysis of ten dimensions indicates that barriers include access to finance and to international markets. The report shows a low level of innovation in many countries in the region. This is true, and still there is a gap between the north and the south. The results of the huge efforts during the last four years will be reflected in the 2013 report.

Access to finance is an obstacle. It is trivial that we cannot do any business without the proper financing. The available resources of funding, including the seed money and venture capitalists alone, are not enough. A business angel network in Palestine and in the diaspora is needed to complete the cycle of the financing stages.

In its 2011 study, MAS recommended the strengthening of three areas in order to support and improve the context of MSMEs: the legal environment, access to finance, and access to related support services. A 2007 study recommended that entrepreneurship and innovation in Palestine should be encouraged through changing the Palestinian educational culture to emphasise learning by doing and original and critical-thinking approaches. It was also recommended in 2011 by the PIF, which focused on basic and higher education as well as seed-stage funding. Actually, education is the secret. Yet all are waiting for and expecting a real change. Without the proper cooperation, coordination, and integration between and among the existing institutions working in the field of business development and entrepreneurship, our achievements and successes will be limited.

Even with the special case of Palestine, the situation is better than that of many countries in the region despite the available resources. Palestine won second place in the “Intel Challenge Levant” in Amman. In addition, two projects were ranked among the top 20 out of 750 projects from 64 countries in infoDev’s Global Forum on Innovation & Technology Entrepreneurship in Helsinki. These are just examples and indicators on the level of entrepreneurship in Palestine. Is it about the donor-driven projects, Dutch-disease, the design of these programmes, the adoption vs. adaptation of business models, the quality of the services delivered, or the level of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit?

To conclude, more work must be done to respond to the current needs; for example: the creation of incubation programmes that target various sectors as agents of economic, cultural and social change; more involvement and contribution from the private sector and integration with the education system and the government; a business angel network; more cooperation and coordination between stakeholders and players; and models localised for the Palestine context.

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In the first phase of the project children were introduced to the fundamentals of drawing, colour, raw material, and puppetry. They were also trained in the various basic moves for the dabka and folklore dance.

In the second phase of the project, a summer camp was organised during which children learned how to create murals either by drawing or through the use of a variety of raw material. The aim of the summer camp project was to employ the energies of children and to help them use their time in a constructive manner through doing voluntary work, strengthening their relation with their environment, and making them responsible citizens.

The third phase was characterised by intensive work on joint activities between trainers and children, the outcome of which would be displayed in an exhibit at the end of the project. In addition, the children formed a Palestinian folklore dance group. School administrators, headmasters and mistresses, and teachers played a significant role in facilitating the project. They demonstrated much interest in the project and expressed their desire to have similar projects in all schools, believing that such projects leave an indelible impact on children and provide them with the opportunity to exercise their talents, guide their interests, strengthen their character, and incentivise them to creative work. Consequently, children do better in their academic work.

As a result of participating in the project, some schools managed to take part in drama and dance contests, even winning first prize in the puppet theatre. Other schools, however, emphasised the fact that they suffer from an acute shortage in the human and material resources necessary for carrying out extra-curricular activities that would increase the cultural and art appreciation of children.

The project provided a means to discover children’s talents. Most of the children had never had the chance to experience various art activities, which were as exotic to them as space creatures. Working individually and in groups, the school children were able to build self-confidence and engage in painting, clay sculpture, and dancing. Mahmoud, a student from Emleson School explains, "My friends did not believe that I had the talent to create shapes from clay. But when they saw what I did, they said I was gifted.”

The project’s closing ceremony included a dance show staged by students from the eight schools, and a dabka, fine arts, and puppet show contest.
Growing Palestinian Agribusinesses
Paths to Self-Sufficiency and the Struggle for Self-Determination

By Rena Zuabi

Small farms are a defining feature of the Palestinian landscape, from the tree-covered mountains of Marj Ibn Amr and the fertile valleys that sit at their base, to the expansive greenhouse that is the Jordan Valley, and the rocky, rolling hills of the Bethlehem district, the land is scattered with farms; farming villages with their winding roads, brightly coloured shutters, and homes with paint worn off so perfectly and endearingly it is as though they bore upon themselves the fatigue and physical strain of the farmers who live within them. Farming is a pillar of the Palestinian economy, perhaps more so, however, it is a cornerstone of Palestinian culture, history, and a transcendent symbol of Palestinian resistance.

Despite its importance, the agriculture sector suffers the brunt of occupation policies. Unimpeded access to water resources could increase West Bank agro-GDP by an estimated 10 percent and create over 110,000 new jobs. Israel’s buffer zone constitutes 17 percent of the Gaza Strip and some of the most fertile agricultural land in the region yet remains out of reach to farmers.

Consequently, the agriculture sector is one “condemned by neglect.” The Palestinian Authority allocates only around 1 percent of its annual budget to the agriculture sector, and from 2001 to 2005, 85 percent of this allocated budget went towards the agriculture ministry’s staff salaries. The sector also accounted for a little over 1 percent of international aid between 1994 and 2000, and this amount in fact decreased up until 2006.

While more donor aid has focused on agricultural development in recent years, many projects are implemented within the context of a post-Oslo and post-Paris Protocol neoliberal economic development framework, which emphasises export-oriented cash crops that are reliant on Israeli permits and bureaucracy.

Currently, one of the largest agricultural projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) focuses on the export of cash crops such as flowers and strawberries in the Gaza Strip. This is not only labour intensive but relies on donors’ ability to coordinate for permits and approvals with the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) that allow produce to reach international shores. This ultimately leaves farmers and their hard-earned harvests vulnerable to the whims of the ICA’s political will. Further, such programmes do very little for the 40 percent of Palestinian households that were reported as food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity.

Other agricultural projects in the OPT combine more holistic methods of value chain development, especially in the olive and olive oil sectors. This includes trainings in marketing, sustainable agricultural techniques, methods of hygienic packaging, and capacity building for agricultural cooperatives, as well as land rehabilitation, cistern construction, and other infrastructure development. This is an important improvement on the Gaza cash-crop model. Ultimately, however, the focus of these projects is to produce for export and puts Palestinian farmers, yet again, in the hands of Israeli occupation authorities.

There is also a deeply paralysing divide between farmers and the local market as well as access to local agricultural inputs. For example, a small-scale farmer may create a large enough, high quality harvest of cucumbers and zucchini to actually sell after household consumption needs; however, she or he does not have the business and marketing plan to effectively reach local stores or packaging houses to attract consumers and gain a profit. Moreover, many agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seeds, and certain tools are purchased from Israeli producers. The limited supply of local agricultural goods and services increases farmers’ reliance on Israel to continue working their land.

Of course, there are some development projects that are striving to garner the potential of small-scale farmers and local cooperatives to become viable enterprises, while increasing local food security and natural resource ownership. These unfortunately remain few and far between.

The deep-seated challenges facing the agriculture sector in Palestine are multi-layered and delicate. Farmers are faced with the impossible task of yielding larger, higher quality harvests with increasingly less land, water, and other resources due to Israeli policies of expropriation and forced transfer. The PA, despite its national strategy to prioritise the agriculture sector, has done very little to improve the lot of small-scale farmers.

In the international aid community, infrastructure development, such as the drilling of groundwater wells and the reclamation of land is being gradually recognised as increasingly important to legitimate agricultural and community development. However, coordination with the Israeli permit and planning regime remains an obstacle to widespread infrastructure development. Finally, the majority of small-scale Palestinian farmers do not function as businesses and are therefore unable to market and sell their products locally.

While the problems of the agriculture sector are overwhelming, so are the opportunities. A large collection of research has been devoted to understanding the post-Oslo challenges to the sector. Palestinian-ownership and food and resource sovereignty have been acknowledged as more effective frameworks through which to approach agricultural development, using local markets and the power of farmers as a tool of resistance. Although there is no replacement for assertive diplomatic action in support of Palestinian rights, there are steps that can be taken on the ground to forge greater economic self-sufficiency and Palestinian ownership over the agriculture sector.

The onus to revive the agriculture sector is not on civil society or the public sector alone. There is an important chance to garner the nascent spirit of entrepreneurship making headway in the OPT. Therefore, tapping into the resources and strengths of both civil society and the private sector through partnerships and coordination can allow for more effective responses to the socioeconomic development needs of Palestinian communities.

Local and international development stakeholders – from venture capitalists and angel investors, to international
civil society organisations – can and should invest in Palestinian business ideas that strengthen local agricultural value chains from the farm to the market. This includes farmers’ businesses, packaging houses, input suppliers, and marketing services.

Establishing an incubator for sustainable agribusinesses in the OPT is one tool through which to create a local laboratory where agribusiness ideas can take root and develop, and where entrepreneurs may receive the type of local and international expertise, mentoring, and guidance needed to achieve success, especially given the unique context of occupation that Palestinian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) must deal with.

Prioritising human and environmental sustainability can be mainstreamed into any MSME development in the territories. “Sustainability” is a term that is thrown around quite a lot in the occupied territories. In the agriculture sector, however, sustainability can take on tangible and actionable meaning. A sustainable agribusiness would be independent, or independent to the extent possible, of any Israeli imports; a sustainable agribusiness would not rely on export-oriented business plans that require Israeli permits, but could focus on local market needs; a sustainable agribusiness would use international partnerships and expertise to develop business ideas, resources, and investment.

Sustainable agribusinesses would also take into consideration environmental protection, using resources and inputs that support farmers’ use of goods such as non-harmful pesticides and plastics, as well as indigenous seedlings and plant types. The possibilities for these businesses are truly exciting opportunities to build local markets and international investment, financial and otherwise, to redefine the contribution of the agriculture sector to the Palestinian economy and the struggle for self-determination.

There are already organisations, incubators, pre-incubation and accelerator programmes devoted to the important work of supporting private Palestinian enterprises. The task, however, is to specifically push the momentum of agribusinesses due to the importance of agriculture-sector development to the struggle for Palestinian self-determination. Teaching entrepreneurial skills and creating support-resource networks and mentoring systems in universities has already taken hold in the OPT, yet these lack a specialised focus in the agriculture sector.

There is also potential to work off of the years of business development in the information technology and information communications technology sectors in the OPT to promote the use of innovative technology in agricultural and rural development. A 2011 World Bank report explains how mobile applications can work to increase the efficiency and income of isolated farmers in Tanzania. Mobile applications are already taking hold among farmers in Sri Lanka and a number of countries in West Africa, namely, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Niger, where small-scale farmers are using mapping applications and text messages to more efficiently use agricultural inputs and quickly request extension services and receive updates on market trends and other needed information that would otherwise be more difficult to access due to their geographic isolation.

Advancing civil society and private partnerships that support potential agribusinesses and integrate sustainable approaches to their growth are crucial to the viability of agriculture within the Palestinian economy moving forward. This is just one path through which to contribute to broader studies and work currently being employed to redefine the existing development framework that binds Palestinian agribusiness to Israel’s occupation.

Without taking bold and innovative steps that create workable synergies among civil society and private-sector actors to support Palestinian MSMEs and local, self-sufficient value chains, the agriculture sector, and the beloved villages and farmers that have historically created it, will remain in the shadows of an obscure state-building project and the occupation it empowers.

Rena Zuabi is a Palestinian-American who lives and works in Ramallah in the NGO sector. Her previous research focused on the legal geography of Israel’s land tenure system and its socioeconomic impact on Palestinian citizens of Israel. She holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of California, San Diego.

Article photos by George Azar.

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1985

Ministry of Planning
Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
Edward Said National Conservatory of Music
PMRS – Palestine Medical Relief Society
Aggad Group
Hebron Municipality
Refugee Protection Unit
Bethlehem Municipality
1986
Jericho
1990
Welfare Association
JDC
1992
Ramallah Municipality
PAJ
1996
CDAR
2000
UNPA
Paltel Group
JMCC
UPRWA
UNRWA
MD1997
Al Ramandjati
Lutheran World Federation
Siriyyet Ramallah
St. George’s landmark Hotel
SUNBULA
Palestinian Counseling Center
Tours 2002 Net Tours
IRWAQ
Birzeit University
2007
JUIN
Oasis
Corto
Al Hoash Arab Bank
2010
Tulip Inn Arab Hotel Association
Arab University
Orijuwan Cenzo Suites
Jerusalem Hotel
Jerusalem Festival
2009
MSSPTAL
Palestine International Festival
2012
Grand Park Hotel
Kozana Association

2013

Twenty eight years of leaving an imprint

Publishers of Turbo Design

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My parents' house is surrounded by a large garden, which they have attended to over the years with great devotion and diligence, cultivating various types of plants and fruit trees that grew slowly but insistently until finally the day came when we were showered with their crop – figs, grapes, pomegranates, apricots, pears, loquats, dates, berries, almonds, and all types of citrus. There were also vegetables – lettuce, tomatoes, parsley, okra, potatoes, aubergine, peppers, onions, and garlic. In short, our house is surrounded by a garden that made the idea of buying fruits and vegetables from the market very strange indeed.

However, at the edge of this garden, at its north-western end, where the soil was less fertile and more rocky, there grew a small caper bush. Aside from its thorns, it had flowers that blossomed at the end of spring, their delicate white petals adorning the whole plant right through to the start of autumn. It also had round leaves that were, in their turn, unruffled by the changing seasons; whether it was autumn or spring – even an Arab spring – they always stayed light green. The plant also produced, year round, strange little fruits that looked like earrings. During our childish games we would pick them, mindful of the thorns, and drape them around our ears so they would swing like the earrings dangling from our mothers’ ears. Apart from this, we did not know what else to do with that plant, and hardly noticed it, not even the beauty of its white flowers. It was always there, the last bit of the garden we passed by on our way to school early in the morning, and the first thing to welcome us when we returned. Sometimes the sight of it, despite its spiky thorns and drab green leaves, brought on a feeling of warmth and serenity. But in general, this caper plant was a reminder of the truth of that piece of land, the nature of its soil and the plants that used to grow on it before my parents eliminated them all as part of their plan for a paradise. That plant annoyed them a lot: every time they plucked it, it grew back again. After a while, they simply left it alone and let it grow as it pleased. And it did so with no impediments, especially as its thorns saved it from the devilish hands of us children, which showed the other plants and trees less mercy. Every few minutes my parents had to warn us not to step on the parsley bed or the aubergine shoots, and not to climb the apricot or loquat trees and break their fragile young branches.

Then finally the ultimate blow was dealt – or so it seemed to us all, and certainly to my parents. They decided to build a small storage room on the spot where the plant grew. We did not really need a storage room, but they said at least that way they could put the space to good use, instead of it being occupied by the caper plant, which they couldn’t find any use for. So they woke up one morning and started digging. They dug a hole about a meter deep and four meters wide, and pulled out the plant and its roots. Then they filled the hole with rocks, and covered it with cement. After they had finished building the storage room, they tiled the floor. Unlike the caper plant, this building, made of bare black volcanic stones, did not stir up any particular feelings of warmth and serenity. Rather, it evoked might – especially my parents’ might.

It looked as if they had finally succeeded in banishing the last traces of real nature, as manifested in the thorny plants, from around their house.

It was two and a half decades ago when my parents erected that storage room. Last summer, while visiting them, a feeling of nostalgia propelled me to check on that back part of the garden and its secret gate, which I used to pass through on my way to school and back, something I hadn’t done since I left home. As I was walking around, suddenly, at the very top of the storage room’s wall, between its bare black volcanic stones, I caught sight of something pale green. I drew nearer to the storage room. It was nothing else but the caper plant, blossoming anew, this time from between the cracks in the wall.
Freezing a Memory
“Shoot as You Walk in Jerusalem”

By Sabreen Taha

What would a camera say about a place? How can the photo protect a whole city? These were the first questions that came to our minds when we decided to look for a new form of resistance in Jerusalem. Considering all the changes that a place could undergo over time, a number of us Jerusalemites decided to take photos of our city in an attempt to capture the memory of the real Jerusalem in our minds by freezing it. Believing that this city belongs to its original people, not to the Zionists who deny Palestinian and Arab identity through their policies and huge campaigns, we recognised the need for a cultural activity that could be used as a tool to spread awareness of the changing demographic reality of this land.

“Shoot As You Walk in Jerusalem” is a project that started a year ago, taking its name as part of a bigger Arab photography exhibition called “Shoot As You Walk (in the Arab World),” which aims to document life in the area. The project’s first trip to the Old City of Jerusalem was announced through social networks, where pictures containing every little detail of the Old City streets and walls that would be later posted on the sites would preserve the memory of the places in the minds of “the rightful owners of this land,” no matter how far they are from it.

Believing that a single photo can make a difference, the group shared its first achievement after almost a year of photo trips through the Old City. Two photos of the west wall of Al-Aqsa Mosque were published; the first one was taken last year during one of the group’s first trips in the Old City, and the second was taken a month ago. In the first picture you see an Islamic building that no longer appears in the other picture since it was demolished by Israeli bulldozers to be replaced by another building that aims to block the view to Al-Aqsa Mosque from the west side.

After 38 trips, the group has covered almost 40 percent of the Old City streets inside and around the walls. Each trip had a specific track with different stops, and sometimes an accompanying tour guide would explain the history and significance of particular places. The group’s aim was to provide photo-documentation of every important detail that could potentially be changed in the future. After each trip, members of the group published their pictures online, especially on the group’s Facebook page, with a brief but accurate description of each location. A gallery with the best pictures is the next step for the group and will serve to enable even those who are not allowed to enter Jerusalem to engrave these images into their memories.

Occupation policies in Jerusalem have not only used ethnic cleansing methods to empty the city of its people, it has also used what Sari Hanafi, chair and professor of sociology at American University of Beirut, has called “Spacio-cide.” In Jerusalem’s case this is a new methodology that is part of the Israeli colonial project. It is ‘spacio-cidal’ (as opposed to genocidal) in that it targets land for the purpose of rendering inevitable the ‘voluntary’ transfer of the Palestinian population primarily by targeting the space upon which the Palestinian people live. The spacio-cide is a deliberate ideology with unified rational, albeit dynamic process because it is in constant interaction with the emerging context and the actions of the Palestinian resistance.*

Most Palestinians who haven’t been allowed to enter Jerusalem for many years have very little memory of the city. What they remember is usually from their last visit or from what their parents have told them or from the huge picture of the Dome of the Rock that won’t leave their living room wall. The Occupation authorities try their best to focus on the main religious sites in Jerusalem, especially in the media, to the exclusion of other Jerusalem areas and neighbourhoods. These religious places, however, are barely recognisable now with all the changes that have taken place over the years of occupation. Yet when people hear or see the word Jerusalem, the only images that come to mind are these religious sites.

With time, places can lose the features that make them unique and familiar, and in Jerusalem’s case, this loss is happening on purpose. The Occupation won’t stop its attempts to empty the city of Arabs and erase it from their memories, but Palestinian awareness about these policies could help to eliminate them. On the other hand, photography isn’t only about showing the beauty of places. It’s also about saving the memory in people’s minds to make sure that no matter what happens on the ground, it’s always going to be there, not only in the heart, but also in an immortal image in front of the eye.

Sabreen Taha is a Palestinian journalist, TV reporter, and activist who was born and grew up in Jerusalem. A year ago, she started a photography group in Jerusalem called “Shoot as You Walk in Jerusalem” to document life and expose the Occupation’s colonial policies in the city. For more information, visit www.nairuz18.blogspot.com, Facebook: http://goo.gl/WIERc, or follow on Twitter: @PalNairuz.

Restriction on movement is one of the major challenges for Palestinians who live under Israeli occupation. A complex set of laws dictates the roads that Palestinians can and cannot use. The roads that are not restricted harass the Palestinians with endless checkpoints and roadblocks. The truth is finally starting to reveal itself. It is evident that the Palestinian basic right to freedom is almost non-existent, and people from all around the world are joining together to help the Palestinians gain back their freedom.

Signe Smidt and Laerke Hein, from the non-profit organisation Here and Away, had the idea to organise the first official Palestinian marathon to shed light on the basic human right of movement that the Palestinians are deprived of and all the hardships they encounter because of it.

In collaboration with the Higher Council of Youth and Sports, Right to Movement Palestine Marathon will take place in the city of Bethlehem on April 23, 2013. The start and finish area is located on the historic site of The Church of the Nativity. The square in front of the church offers a great venue for gathering all the runners and their families and friends. Course maps will be published on the official website soon.

Ultimate Sports Service, a Danish-based company that specialises in professional technical solutions on timing and results services for sports events, will be handling race-timing. All runners will get their results immediately after the marathon.

In order to give as many people as possible the opportunity to participate, we offer four different distances:

- Full marathon – 42.195k
- Half marathon – 21.95k
- 10k road race
- 5k women’s road race

In order to train for the marathon, a group of young Palestinians and internationals meet weekly for a run. They use the public Facebook group called “Palestine Marathon Training” to stay in touch and plan the run. They motivate each other and create new friendships.

“We want to contribute to telling a different story than the one of conflict and hate. We want to move. Move things. Move with us.” -Here and Away

For more information and to sign up, visit Righttomovement.com, https://www.facebook.com/palestinemarathon, or follow us on twitter @righttomovement.
Football in a Refugee Camp

By Lana Shehadeh

“If we lived somewhere else we would be fine. But here things are difficult. We live under Israeli occupation on one hand, while on the other we are surrounded by very conservative Palestinians. Palestinians here are not accustomed to young women wanting to play football,” says Waed Abu Ktesh as she juggles a football in her hands.

The 22-year-old Palestinian woman lives in Al-Jalazone Refugee Camp, just 7 kilometres north of Ramallah City. Waed explains that she decided to form an all-women’s football team in her refugee camp to break away from societal restrictions on women.

The team trains twice a week. They start by meeting up at the entrance of Al-Jalazone Refugee Camp. Fourteen young Palestinian women, between the ages of 18 and 24, start by walking out of the camp, just down the street past Beit El Settlement, the village of Ein Senia, and the village of Jifna. This walk is meant as a warm up before the proper training.

“We don’t dare to run as a warm up, we are taking baby steps to get the camp accustomed to our training. Once people are more comfortable with a large group of women walking, we may introduce jogging,” said Waed as she chuckled, finding humour in her explanation.

The team then heads to Ramallah by bus, where they train in a proper football field. Once they get to the football field, explains Waed, they have complete privacy to play, run around, and scream during practice. Waed explains that some of the girls even get the chance to play without their headscarves because there are no males present or close enough to see.

“Most people don’t like how we dress, the trousers and fitted shirts. They don’t realise it helps us move easily,” says Waed with a giggle.

Waed was able to get jerseys and the option of shorts or trousers donated to her teammates from a local NGO. She explains that those who have chosen the option of shorts are also given long socks for protection and to cover their legs. She explains that such measures are taken so that she can avoid gossip in the refugee camp.

Restrictions from two worlds

Al-Jalazone Refugee Camp is neighbour to one of the well-known Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Beit El. Beit El is also home to the Israeli Civil Administration for the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Established in 1977, Beit El houses approximately 5,600 Israeli settlers on approximately 253 dunams of land (1.5 square km), which is a fifth of the size of Beit El.

Al-Jalazone has its own set of societal issues that need to be dealt with by young people like Waed Abu Ktesh.

“Our families are always worried about what people say. My father always asks ‘What do you think people will say about me? Don’t you care about your father’s honour?’ But I just tell him a random joke and make him laugh, and he forgets,” explains Waed.

A local village elder explains that Palestinian society is gradually changing, but unfortunately many of the surrounding villages and refugee camps are still predominately patriarchal societies. He notes that although women are slowly advancing, some people have reservations, specifically those in villages and camps, and want to keep women away from the public eye. Most people have begun to accept that women attend university and possibly pursue certain careers; but practicing outdoor sports and being very active in society remain taboo.

Waed and many members of her team are persistent. They seem to be eager to change what they consider to be old and out-dated customs that restrict many women their age from advancing.
Palestinian Youth Take to the Stage

By Samah Hussein

One reason we are all drawn to theatre, and a reason the theatre is still a vital part of our culture after three thousand years, is its enduring power to engage our passions and important ideas in a way that is immediate and meaningful to the audience and the actors. That's why theatre is valuable as an educational tool.

Positive self-esteem, ability to communicate effectively, enjoyment of language and communication, good pronunciation and voice control, ability to share and present ideas, and theatre technique and confidence to perform and take part in shows are all skills gained through drama. It is for these reasons that the Friends Boys School (FBS) has been interested in developing customised drama classes as part of the school curriculum for grades seven through ten, and as part of the extracurricular activities that stretch our students' imaginations, deliver an inspirational learning experience for every one of them, regardless of the stage they are at, and enhance learning and communication in key areas of the school curriculum and beyond.

Ever since our school gave the students the opportunity to be part of after-school drama activity, there has been enthusiastic participation by students of various age groups. Our school stage has become the ideal place for students to let their imaginations soar, allowing them to explore their creativity and learn the tools they need to express their thoughts and ideas. The outcome has always been an excellent group of students who have confidently taken part in an annual theatrical performance that impressed the audience.

This year the FBS drama committee decided to adapt one of Mohammad al-Maghout’s plays, mainly because his poetic dish was the closest to that dreamy wandering, suffocation, and disillusionment with the reigning world. He was, with his sarcastic tone and bleak outlook, the closest to our imagination and poetic memory, and to the climate of Arab reality and its aborted dreams. He is the poet of the future as much as he is the poet of reality and contemporary times. Out of al-Maghout’s plays, Kharej Al-Serb (شرب خارج) was our choice.

Fourteen students from all grades were chosen to take part in the play. There were lots of obstacles that faced me as the director from the beginning. I was worried that since five of the participants plan to graduate this year I would need to ensure that the play did not interfere with their last year of studies! Getting funding was another issue. And finally the play was very long, which meant long hours of rehearsals during the winter. We started our rehearsals in November 2012, meeting for three hours every Friday and Sunday (our off days from school) over a period of four months, during which I focused on helping students to develop on-going confidence, self-esteem and, most importantly, skills in verbal communication. What I didn’t notice until a few days before the show was that during this period my fourteen angels were developing into mature individuals not only in the quality of acting on stage and understanding of the basic principles of dramatic form, but also in terms of commitment and communication skills and concepts that will make them more effective as future leaders. We had become one family!

Thanks to the beautiful dancers who shone on the day of the show, March 2 -- the day our play was premiered at the Ramallah Cultural Palace -- will always be a day to remember for the seven hundred people who attended the show.

Thanks to my FBS colleague Anan Barghoumy and the choreographer Sharaf DarZeid for being a wonderful team. Thanks to our school administration and the parents at FBS. Last but not least, thanks to my fourteen angels for showing me that it was worth all the long hours of rehearsals. Thank you for giving me the chance to share with you such a wonderful experience that will always be captured in our hearts!

Samah Hussein is an English language teacher and the theatre trainer at the Friends Boys School.
Aref Husseini

When he was in first grade, his teacher asked the class: “What are the benefits of trees?”

All of his classmates started to answer: “food,” “wood,” “fruit,” “shade.” But then Aref raised his hand and said, “Trees are very beneficial because we can tie a rope between them to dry our laundry.” His teacher was very upset with this answer that she had never seen in her guidebook and decided to punish him for “disrespecting her and the class.” Soon enough, his mother was called to school and found herself trying to convince the teacher that Aref had not understood the question. The truth, however, was that the teacher hadn’t understood his answer.

This incident led Aref to believe in the importance of making a real change in the Palestinian formal educational system. Since then, he has been determined to change people’s conformity to one way of thinking.

Born into a modest family in 1979 in Jerusalem, Aref was the second child of a carpenter father and a tailor mother. Today, Aref Husseini, an electronics engineer, holds a master’s degree in applied physics and leads one of the most influential NGOs in Palestine. At home Aref is the musician of the family with an established talent in playing the oud. To the society he is an emerging modern novelist with the recent publication of his first novel, Saturday Infidel. Aref has worked in several industrial and educational fields as a developer, researcher, and innovator, and has registered three patents.

His childhood dream and longing for a sustained change in his community led him in 2003 to found Al Nayzak Organization for Supportive Education and Scientific Innovation. Al Nayzak became a leading Palestinian NGO in supporting scientific and technological innovation. The organisation stands strong as it celebrates its ten years of incubating thousands of scientifically talented students and providing them with academic, professional, and financial support to improve their capacities and entrepreneurial projects. Al Nayzak continues to provide its services through its three branches in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Gaza, and opens this summer the first Science and Technology House in the country as a step towards Aref’s and the organisation’s dream in establishing the first Palestinian science museum. Further, Al Nayzak has received several national and international prizes such as the Palestine International Prize for Excellence and Creativity and the Welfare Association’s NGO Achievement Award. In 2008, Aref himself was chosen as one of the top 22 Arab Social Innovators by the Synergos Foundation for founding Al Nayzak Organization.

Since 2009, while not drifting too far from his role in founding and managing Al Nayzak, Aref has been a volunteer member of the national team responsible for evaluating and developing the official Palestinian technology curriculum at the Palestinian Curricula Development Center – Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Today he heads the national team for authoring the new Palestinian Official Technology Curriculum. Moreover, due to his immense personal efforts and through the help of Al Nayzak, he and a group of Palestinian engineers established the Palestinian subsection of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers-IEEE, where he was elected vice chairman.

Aref now waits impatiently for the opening of the Science and Technology House as well as prepares himself for the special signing event for his novel, Saturday Infidel, at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair in April 2013, as it joins the group of “most popular books in the Arab World.” The novel was nominated for the Arab Booker Award and is soon to be translated into English.
Tareq Abboushi

Tareq Abboushi, a young Palestinian musician, a multi instrumentalist, a composer, and a bandleader is one of the rising stars of his generation. Tareq was born in Ramallah in 1978 and raised in an environment rich in art and music. His mother is the renowned musician, pianist and composer Dr. Lynda Abboushi, a very gifted architect and writer. Her father, Sameh Abboushi, is a very gifted composer and writer. Tareq was born in Ramallah in 1978 and raised in an environment rich in art and music. His mother is the renowned musician, pianist and composer Dr. Lynda Abboushi, a very gifted architect and writer. Her father, Sameh Abboushi, is a very gifted composer and writer.

Tareq lived in New York for many years, composing, performing, and teaching. He recently moved back to Ramallah where he teaches at the ESNCM.

While in New York City, he performed with such notable musicians as Simon Shaheen, Omar Faruk Tekbilek, and Grammy-Award-winner Dan Zanes in the United States, Canada, the Middle East, and Europe. His teaching profile during that period includes lecture demonstrations at Columbia University, New York University, Juilliard, and the University of Agder (Norway), among others.

Abboushi’s discography includes two albums with his group SHUSMO entitled One and Muntastic, as well as Amir ElSaffar’s acclaimed Two Rivers and Inana. He also appears in four albums with Dan Zanes: Little Nut Tree, Parades and Panoramas, House Party, and Night Time! (winner of “Best Children’s CD of the Year” by Amazon.com in 2002). He composed and recorded music for the award-winning film Chicken Heads (Best Short Film, 2010 Dubai Film Festival). His participation in other film scores includes the soundtrack for the film Encounter Point (Best Musical Score, 2006 Bend Film Festival), Man From Plains (2007), and the Oscar-nominated Rachel Getting Married (2008), the last two directed by Jonathan Demme.

Recently, Abboushi won second place in the composition category of the Palestinian National Music Competition. He is currently preparing to tour with Music Without Borders as musical director.

As a teacher, Abboushi has the gift of inspiring his students and transmitting to them his passion for Arabic music. Abboushi has cultivated a unique identity by creating an innovative and original type of music that utilises a wide range of influences with Arabic music at its core.

Artist of the Month

Tareq Abboushi

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Book of the Month

Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here

Beau Beausoleil and Deema K. Shehabi, editors

PM Press, 2012, 300 pages, $20.00

We All Come from There

“Before I was born on al-Mutanabbi Street, I was no one,” writes Iraqi fiction author Lutfiya al-Dulaimi in her essay about the intellectual, cultural, and social incandescence of al-Mutanabbi Street. The 142 poets and writers represented in the Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here anthology share an unblinking vision of what al-Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad means as a cultural centre, first and foremost for Iraq’s intellectual and creative community and secondly for all poets, writers, booksellers, and publishers from the Middle East and elsewhere. Al-Dulaimi continues, “That street was a paradise for readers and writers, an enchanted getaway for the passer-by to approach the treasures.”

On March 5, 2007, at the height of the war in Iraq, a car was exploded on al-Mutanabbi Street. More than thirty people were killed and more than a hundred wounded. Named after the tenth-century Arab classical poet, the street boasted a maze of bookstores, cafés, and outdoor book stalls. The anthology arose as a response to the bombing and as a response to the indifference of others to the suffering in Iraq. It asks of its readers:

Why is al-Mutanabbi Street so important? What is the meaning of culture? What does it mean when books are burned, destroyed, and thrown into rivers? How does a country protect its historical memory, and why do invaders want to erase memory? These questions haunt the anthology.

Alert readers will find their concept of humanity – in all its fragility and vulnerability – tested by some of the works in the anthology. Some essays are Kafkaesque, such as Muhammad al-Hamrani’s piece, “Escape from al-Mutanabbi Street,” where the writer’s life is saved because one of his kidnappers recognises him as a bookseller on al-Mutanabbi Street. The collection, which also features works from renowned poets Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Nazik al-Malaika, Saadi Youssef, Mahmoud Darwish, Adrienne Rich, Jane Hirshfield, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Ibrahim Nasrallah, amongst others, will surely delight, inform, and challenge the reader. One will begin to ponder where the street’s essence begins in each of us, as Beau Beausoleil, founder of Al-Mutanabbi Street Coalition, asks of the readers in his introduction.

The collection opens with an article by Lebanese-American journalist Anthony Shadid about the symbolic significance of al-Mutanabbi Street. He draws parallels between the Mongol sacking of the library of Iraq in 1258, “when the river turned black with ink,” and the 2007 bombing of the street of the booksellers. Maysoon Pachachi, an Iraqi filmmaker and contributor to the anthology, says, “We Iraqis seem to live with a very present sense of our history and the image of that (initial) destruction is embedded deep in our consciousness.”

In the end, the poems and prose in the collection help us turn our thoughts to al-Mutanabbi Street, in all its lament and splendour. It challenges us to re-examine the history of Iraq through literature and the arts. It asks us to engage personally in this continuum between writer and reader. In Verses for Everyday Use, Fadhil al-Azzawi writes, “In front of every great poet march a thousand small poets who plough the way for him, and behind every great poet march a thousand who wipe out his tracks.”
The Palestine Capital Market Authority (PCMA) was established in 2004 to oversee and regulate securities, insurance, and the financial mortgage and financial leasing sectors, along with other non-banking financial entities. The PCMA site is a SharePoint portal available in Arabic (default) and English.

The English home page uses a simple layout with four main sections: header, menu bar, content area, and footer. The header has the PCMA name and logo to the left and three menu shortcuts over a purple background to the right: Arabic (Arabic language switch), About (a brief summary about PCMA’s background, jurisdictions, and achievement), and Home (link to main page in English).

The menu bar consists of six cascading menus and a search box. Starting from the left, Capital Market Authority provides general information in several categories: historical overview, institutional objective (jurisdiction and mandate), PCMA Law (translation from Arabic), anti-money laundering (instructions and regulations), board of directors (names and positions), organisational chart (structure in PDF), strategic plan (PDF), and international cooperation (external relations and membership in related institutions).

Next is Securities, which is divided into sector overview (history and included entities) and a set of translated PDF documents covering the Securities Law, regulations, instructions, and licensed companies. The Insurance menu is similar and covers a sector overview along with relevant translated documents (insurance law, regulations, instructions, decisions, and a list of licensees).

The fourth menu item, Mortgage Financial, provides an overview of the sector along with instructions (PDF files) and the two current licensees. Financial Leasing follows with an overview, a brief on the draft law, a few circulations, and a list of licensees. The last menu item, Research and Development, offers a summary of the R&D directorate of the PCMA.

The main content area spans the full fixed width of the page and follows a breadcrumb (navigation) and the current text title.

The footer has two additional menus: Site Map (all main menu items and submenus on one page) and Contact Us (mailing and contact information of PCMA and its main departments). A tag line with copyright concludes the page.

The PCMA website could be enhanced by enriching its English version with similar content available in Arabic, for example, news, stocks and indicators. Links to social media, user e-services, and some light media may be helpful.

Abed A. Khooli is a SharePoint, BI, and Web development specialist. He can be reached at akhooli@arabic2000.com (www.arabic2000.com).
Exhibition of the Month

Gaza's Spring Exhibition

“For some miles around Gaza the sprawling cactus stands eight or ten feet high, and from six to fifteen feet across. The area presents a complicated maze to an invading army; when strengthened with trenches and held in force, it proved almost unassailable by frontal attack. The defenders, with their infantry and machine-gunners protected by the hedges, and the observers for their artillery on the high ground behind, enjoyed an extraordinary control over troops advancing to the attack across the open plain to the east and south. Towards the sea the position was screened by steep and heavy sand-dunes. Outside the cactus, to the north and north-east of the town, was a wide olive-grove, and nearer the sand-dunes an expanse of orange-groves,” wrote Paul Daley in Beersheba: A Journey Through Australia’s Forgotten War in 1917.

Almost a century later, cactus has certainly lost its defence powers against tanks and F16s, but it hasn’t completely lost its charm. This spring, a family from Gaza is going to recapture the charm of the city’s ancient cacti and succulent plants in Gaza’s first Spring Exhibition.

Jawdat and Faten Khoudayr, curators of Gaza’s Spring Exhibition, have been collecting cactus and succulent plants from Gaza and countries around the world for over 15 years. With one of the biggest collections in Palestine, the family aspires to see a more green and environment-friendly Gaza. Cactus plants require little water and excel in warm atmospheres, making Gaza a perfect environment for growing them.

Unlike other plants, cactus grows more beautiful with age, blooming beautiful flowers of all kinds and colours. Some cactus plants are used for medical purposes, such as aloe vera, which is used in herbal medicine and cosmetics, and hoodia, used as an appetite suppressant. The cactus trees mentioned by Daley give excellent prickly fruit, a delicious summer fruit with many nutritional benefits.

On April 12, the first Gaza Spring Exhibition will be inaugurated at Almat’haf Hotel, overlooking the Mediterranean. The exhibition will highlight elements of the beauty of Gaza, such as its flowers, palm trees, sea, seashells, and fish (on the side grill!). Visitors will be able to entertain their senses with a rainbow of spring colours and scents, and – hopefully – be inspired to plant their own gardens.

The Arabic word for cactus is sabbar, a derivation of the word saber, or “patience.” Thus, a sabbar plant can encapsulate the essence of Gaza in a way like no other: a dry, rock-like plant that requires little care but is able to defend itself with prickly thorns, yet blooms the most beautiful flowers of all plants. This is the Gaza we know and it is the Gaza we love; and in order to survive the hardships imposed by the unnatural realities of life in Gaza, a lot of saber, and sabbar, is needed.
Note: Please make sure to contact the venue to check for the latest updates.

**East Jerusalem (02)**

The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, tel: 627 1711; Centre for Jerusalem Studies, tel: 628 7517

**CONCERTS**

Tuesday 9
19:30 Choir St.Michel, St. Anne’s Church

Thursday 11
16:00 Opening Ceremony of The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, Invitations only, ESNCM

**TOURS**

Saturday 6
10:00 The Old City Ramparts, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

Saturday 13
10:00 The Armenian Quarter, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

Saturday 20
10:00 Khaski Sultan, Centre for Jerusalem Studies

**Bethlehem (02)**

**CONCERTS**

Monday 8
19:30 Choir St.Michel and Olive Branches Choir, organised by The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, Bethlehem Convention Palace

Thursday 11
19:00 Piano recital by the French pianist Jean Sebastien Dureau, Organised by The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, Lutherum Church

**TOURS**

Sunday 7
9:00 A tour to the city of Nablus, PACE

**Ramallah and Al-Bireh (02)**

Dar Zahran Heritage Building, tel: 296 3470; The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, tel: 295 9070; Al Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque, tel: 296 5922; Franco-German Cultural Centre, tel: 298 122; Ashtar for Theatre Production, tel: 298 0037; Palestinian Association for Cultural Exchange (PACE), tel: 240 7611

**ART**

Monday 1
11:00 Photo exhibition by Alice Hanna Jean Francois Bednarski, Fadwa Rouhana and Zahran Jaghab, Dar Zahran Heritage Building

**CONCERTS**

Friday 5
19:00 Piano recital by the French pianist Jean Sebastien Dureau, Organised by The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, ESNCM

Friday 12
19:00 Choir St-Michel and Jerusalem Choir, Organised by The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, Lutherum Church

**TOURS**

Sunday 7
9:00 A tour to the city of Nablus, PACE

**LITERATURE**

Monday 15
19:00 “A journey through the life, times, and perceptions of Rosa Luxemburg,” An event of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Ramallah Office in cooperation with Ashtar Theatre Ramallah and Freedom Theatre Jenin, Ashtar for Theatre Production

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

Monday 1
18:00 Fikrun-Lecture: Looking back to the future? Franco-German Cultural Centre

Thursday 4
10:00 NEW: “ONLEIHE” IN RAMALLAH, Franco-German Cultural Centre

Friday 26
14:00 “Nuwar Nisan,” children’s festival is organised by the Goethe Institute, Franco-German Cultural Centre

**Hebron (02)**

**CONCERT**

Thursday 11
18:00 Chamber Music, Organised by The National Conservatory of Music ESNCM, Dar Al-Tifel

**TOURS**

Sunday 28
9:00 A tour to the city of Hebron, PACE

**Nablus (09)**

**CONCERT**

Wednesday 10
18:00 “Plattln in Umtata,” in German with English subtitles, Franco-German Cultural Centre

Sunday 14
18:00 “Pina Bausch,” in German with Arabic subtitles, Franco-German Cultural Centre

**TOURS**

Sunday 7
9:00 A tour to the city of Nablus, PACE

**Jenin, Qalqilia, and Tulkarem (09)**

**ART**

Tuesday 16
15:00 “A journey through the life, times, and perceptions of Rosa Luxemburg,” An event of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Ramallah Office in cooperation with Ashtar Theatre and Freedom Theatre Jenin, Freedom Theatre

**TOURS**

Sunday 14
9:00 A tour to Sebestia & Jenin City, PACE
Cultural Centers

East Jerusalem (02)

Al-Jawal Theatre Group
Tel/Fax: 267 4338, 473 0993
sanabeltheatre@yahoo.com
Sanabel Culture & Arts Theatre
Tel: 671 4338, Fax: 673 0993
sanabeltheatre@yahoo.com
The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music
Tel: 627 1711, Fax: 627 1710
info@ncm.birzeit.edu, ncm.birzeit.edu
The Magnificat Institute
Tel: 622 6609, Fax: 622 6701
magnificat@custodia.org
www.magnificatstitute.org
Turkish Cultural Centre
Tel: 591 05301, Fax: 532 3310
kudustur@netvision.net.il, www.kudusbk.com
Wujoud Museum
Tel: 628 0916, www.wujoud.org, info@wujoud.org
Yabous Cultural Centre
Tel: 628 1045, Fax: 628 1372
yabous@yabous.org, www.yabous.org

Bethlehem (02)

Al-Harah Theatre
Tel: 276 7758, alharahtheater@yahoo.com
info@alharah.org, www.alharah.org
Alliance Française de Bethléem
Tel: 275 0777, afbeth@pf-p-o1.com
Anat Palestinian Folk & Craft Center
Tel: 277 2024, marie_muslim@yahoo.com
Arab Educational Institute (AEI)-Open Windows
Tel: 274 4030, www.aecenter.org
Artas Folklore Centre
Mob: 0597 524 524, 0599 679 492, 0503 313 136
artasfc@hotmail.com
Badi Centre
Tel: 277 7086
Beit Jala Community Based-Learning & Action Center
Tel: 277 7863
Bethlehem Academy of Music/ Bethlehem Music Society
Tel: 277 7141, Fax: 277 7142
Bethlehem Peace Center
Tel: 276 6677, Fax: 276 4670
info@peacecenter.org, www.peacecenter.org
Cardinal House
Tel: 276 4778, info@cardinalhouse.org, www.cardinalhouse.org
Catholic Action Cultural Center
Tel: 274 3277, Fax: 274 2939
info@ca-c-b.org, www.ca-c-b.org
Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation
Tel: 276 6244, Fax: 276 6241
info@chp.ps, www.chp.ps
Inad Centre for Theatre and Arts
Tel: 276 6263, www.inadtheater.com
International Centre of Bethlehem-Dar Annadwa
Tel: 277 0047, Fax: 277 0048
info@diyar.ps, www.diyar.ps
ITIP Center “Italian Tourist Information Point”
Tel: 276 0411, itlpcenter@yahoo.com
Nativity Stationary Library
Mob: 0599 850 447
Palestinian Heritage Center
Tel: 274 2381, 274 2642
mahasaca@palestinianheritagecenter.com
www.phc.ps
Palestinian Group for the Revival of Popular Heritage
Tel: 274 7945
Relief International - Schools Online Bethlehem Community Based-Learning & Action Center
Tel: 277 7963
Sabreen Association for Artistic Development
Tel: 275 0091, Fax: 275 0092
sabreen@sabreen.org, www.sabreen.org
Tent of Nations
Tel: 274 3071, Fax: 276 7446
ntations@pf-o1.com, www.tentofnations.org
The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music
Tel: 275 8726
info@ncm.birzeit.edu, www.birzeit.edu/music
The Higher Institute of Music
Tel: 275 2492
dhi@hotmai.com
www.thehigherinstituteofmusic.ps
Turathuna - Centre for Palestinian Heritage (B.Cin.)
Tel: 274 1241, Fax: 274 4440
pdcacud@bethlehemu.edu, www.bethlehemu.edu
Hebron (02)

Al Sanabl Centre for Studies and Heritage
Tel: 256 0280, sanabelssc@yahoo.com
Al Sanabl Centre for Studies and Heritage
Tel: 274 1241, Fax: 274 4440
www.highiom@hotmail.com
The Higher Institute of Music
Tel: 275 3071, Fax: 276 7446
ntations@pf-o1.com, www.tentofnations.org

Yes Theater
Tel: 229 1559, www.yestheatre.com, info@yestheatre.org
The International Palestinian Youth League (IPYL)
Tel: 222 9131, Fax: 229 0652
info@ipyl.org, www.ipyl.org

Jericho (02)

Jericho Community Centre
Tel: 232 4357, 232 3401, 232 3402
cmcul@jericho.ps, www.jericho.ps
Municipality Theatre
Tel: 232 2417, Fax: 232 2604

Yabous Cultural Centre
Tel: 628 1045, Fax: 628 1372
yabous@yabous.org, www.yabous.org

Jenin (04)

Cinema Jenin
Tel: 260 2462, 260 2455
info@cinemajenin.org, www.cinemajenin.org
Cinema Jenin
Tel: 250 3345, info@cinemajenin.org, www.cinemajenin.org
Cultural Centre for Child Development
Tel: 238 6290, Fax: 239 7518
nuteleb@hotmail.com, www.nuteleb.cjb.net
Teffal Telefax: 237 5950
Cultural Centre for Child Development
Tel: 237 2863, Fax: 237 8275, arafatn24@yahoo.com
French Cultural Centre
Tel: 238 5194, Fax: 238 7593
info@freedomtheatre.org, www.nablusculture.ps, info@freedomtheatre.org

Nablus (09)

British Council- Al Najah University
Tel: 237 5950, information@ps.britishcouncil.org
www.britishcouncil.org.ps
Cultural Centre for Child Development
Tel: 238 6290, Fax: 239 7518
nuteleb@hotmail.com, www.nuteleb.cjb.net
Hakoura Center
Tel: 238 6290, Fax: 239 7518
nuteleb@hotmail.com, www.nuteleb.cjb.net
Cultural Heritage Enrichment Center
Tel: 237 2863, Fax: 237 8275, arafatn24@yahoo.com
French Cultural Centre
Tel: 238 5194, Fax: 238 7593
info@freedomtheatre.org, www.nablusculture.ps, info@freedomtheatre.org

Ramallah and Al-Bireh (02)

A. M. Qatan Foundation
Tel: 296 0544, Fax: 296 4886
info@qattanfoundation.org, www.qattanfoundation.org
Al-Kamandjati Association
Tel: 297 3101, info@al-kamandjati.com, www.al-kamandjati.com
Al Kasaba Theatre and Cinematheque
Tel: 296 5292/3, Fax: 296 5294
info@al-kasaba.org, www.al-kasaba.org
Al-Mada Music Therapy Center
Tel: 241 3196, Fax: 241 3197
info@al-mada.ps, www.al-mada.ps
Al- Rua’a Publishing House
Tel: 296 1613, Fax: 197 1265, Mob: 0599 259 874
ali.ruu@gmail.com
Al-Rahhalah Theatre
Tel: 286 8091, alarahhalah@hotmail.com
**Bethlehem (02)**

**Alexander Hotel** (42 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 277 0780, Fax: 277 0782

**Al-Salam Hotel** (26 rooms; bf; mr; cf; res)
Tel: 276 4083/4, Fax: 277 0551, samhotel@p-ol.com

**Angel Hotel** Beit Jala
Tel: 276 6980, Fax: 276 6884
info@angelshotel.ps, www.angelhotel.ps

**Beit Al-Baraka Youth Hostel** (19 rooms)
Tel: 222 9288, Fax: 222 9288

**Bethlehem Bible College Guest House**
(11 rooms; mr; pf)
Tel: 274 1190, guesthouse@bethbc.org

**Beit Ibrahim Guesthouse**
Tel: 274 2513, Fax: 274 4250
reception@luthchurch.com
www.abrahams-herberge.com

**Bethlehem Hotel** (209 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 277 0702, Fax: 277 0706, bhotel@p-ol.com

**Bethlehem Inn** (36 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 2424, Fax: 274 2423

**Bethlehem Star Hotel** (72 rooms; cf; bf; res)
Tel: 274 3249 - 277 0285, Fax: 274 1494
htstar@palnet.com

**Bethlehem youth hostel**

**Casanova Hospice** (60 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 274 3981, Fax: 274 3540

**Casanova Palace Hotel** (25 rooms; bf; res)
Tel: 274 2798, Fax: 274 1562

**El-Beit Guest House** (beit sahour) (15 rooms)
TeleFax: 277 5857, info@elbeit.org, www.elbeit.org

**Everest Hotel** (19 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 2604, Fax: 274 1278

**Grand Hotel** (107 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 1602 - 274 1440, Fax: 274 1604
info@grandhotelbethlehem.com

**Golden Park Resort & Hotel** (Beit Sahour)
(66 rooms; res, bar, pool)
Tel: 277 4414

**Holy Land Hotel**
Tel: 277 8962/3, Fax: 277 8961
holyllandhotel@hotmail.com, www.holylandhotel.net

**House of Hope Guesthouse**
Tel: 274 2325, Fax: 274 0928
Guesthouse@houseofhopemnd.org

**House of Peace Hostel**
Tel: 276 4739, http://www.houseofpeace.hostel.com/

**Inter-Continental Hotel** (Jacir Palace)
(250 rooms, su, bf, cf; mr; res)
Tel: 276 6777, Fax: 276 6770

**Lutheran Guesthouse “Abu Gubran”**
Tel: 277 0047, Guesthouse@diyar.ps, www.diyar.ps

**Manger Square Hotel** (220 Rooms; bf; cf; mr; res; cr)
Tel: 277 8886, Fax: 277 8887
fabusdayeh@mangersquarehotel.com
Web: www.mangersquarehotel.com

**Murad Tourist Resort**
Tel: 2759880, Fax:2759881, www.murad.ps

**Nativity Bells Hotel** (72 rooms; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 274 8980, Fax: 274 8870
nativitybells@palnet.com, www.nativitybellsotel.ps

**Nativity Hotel** (89 rooms; bf; cf; mr; res)
Tel: 277 0680, Fax: 274 4083
nativity@nativity-hotel.com, www.nativity-hotel.com

**Olive Tree Hotel** (20 rooms; 6 su; res; sp; bar; wifi-lobby)
Tel: 276 4660 Fax: 275 3807
olivetreehotel@yahoo.com
Facebook: olive tree tourist village

**Paradise Hotel** (166 rooms; cf; bf; mr; res; su; pf)
Tel: 274 4542/3 - 274 4544, paradise@p-ol.com

**St. Antonio Hotel** (36 rooms; mr; cf; res; pf)
Tel: 276 6221, Fax: 276 6220

**Santa Maria Hotel** (83 rooms; mr; res)
Tel: 276 7374/5/6, Fax: 276 7377, smaria@p-ol.com

**Shepherd Hotel**
Tel: 274 0656, Fax: 274 4888
info@shepherdhotel.com, www.shepherdhotel.com

**Shepherds’ House Hotel**
(Facilities: Restaurant and Bar, WiFi)
Tel: 275 9690, Fax: 275 9693

**St. Nicholas Hotel** (25 rooms; res; mr)
Tel: 274 3040/1/2, Fax: 274 3043

**Saint Vincent Guest House**
(36 rooms)
Tel: 276 0967/8, Fax: 276 0970
svincent@p-ol.com, www.saintvincentguesthouse.net

**Talita Kumi Guest House** (22 rooms; res; mr; cf)
Tel: 274 1247, Fax: 274 1847

**Zaituna Tourist Village**
Tel: 275 0655

**Jericho (02)**

**Al- Zaytouna Guest House** (7 rooms; bf; res; mr)
Tel: 994 3038, 0505 348 892

**Hisham Palace Hotel**
Tel: 232 2414, Fax: 232 3109

**Inter-Continental Jericho**
(181 rooms; su; bf; cf; mr; res; ter; tb)
Tel: 232 1255, Fax: 232 2189
reservation@jerichoresorts.com, www.jerichoresorts.com

**Jerusalem Hotel**
(22 rooms)
Tel: 232 2444, Fax: 992 3109

**Telepherique & Sultan Tourist Center**
(55 rooms)
Tel: 232 1590, Fax: 232 1598
info@jericho-cablecar.com

**Hebron (02)**

**Hebron Hotel**
Tel: 225 4240 / 222 9385, Fax: 222 6760
hebron_hotel@hotmail.com

**Nabulus (09)**

**Al-Qaser Hotel** (48 rooms; 7 regular suites, 1 royal suite; bf; mr; res)
Tel: 234 1247, Fax: 234 1847

**Bethlehem to Jericho**

**Bethlehem to Jericho**
Dar al Balad
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 9073

Divano Café and Restaurant
Tel: 275 7276
divanocafe@gmail.com

Grotto Restaurant
Barbecues and Taboon
Tel: 274 8844, Fax: 274 8889

Golden Roof
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 274 3224

King Gaspar Restaurant & Bar
(Italian, Asian and Mediterranean Cuisine)
Tel: 276 5301, Fax: 276 5302

Il'Iliyyeh Restaurant
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 277 0047

Layal Lounge
Snack Bar
Tel: 275 0655

La Terrasse
Middle Eastern and Continental Cuisine
Tel: 275 3678

Limone
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 231 2977, Fax: 231 2976

Nabulus (09)
Salim Afandi
Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 237 1332

Qasr al-Jabi restaurant
Tel: 238 4180

Zeit ou Zaater (Al-Yasmeen Hotel)
Continental Cuisine and Pastries
Tel: 238 3164, Fax: 233 3666

Ramallah and Al-Bireh (02)
911 Café
Mexican, Italian, Oriental
Tel: 296 5911

Andareen Pub
Mobile: 0599 258 435

Al Falaha
Msakhan and Taboun
Tel: 290 5124

Akasha
Oriental
Tel: 295 9333

Allegro Italian Restaurant
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
Italian fine cuisine
Tel: 298 5888

Al-Riwaq All-day Dining
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
International, Swiss and Oriental cuisine
Tel: 298 5888

Ashwaq Seafood, Breakfast, and Pizza
Coffee Shop, Lebanese and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 1776

Andre’s Restaurant
French and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 296 64778

Angelo’s
Western Menu and Pizza
Tel: 295 6408, 298 1455

Azure Restaurant and Coffee Shop
Continental Cuisine
Telex: 295 7850

Baladna Ice Cream
Ice Cream and Soft Drinks
Telex: 295 6721

Bel Mondo Italian Cuisine
Tel: 258 6759

Cæsar’s (Grand Park Hotel)
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 298 6194

Cafè de La Paix
French Cuisine
Tel: 298 0880

Castello Restaurant & Café
Oriental
Tel: 297 3844/55

Chinese House Restaurant
Chinese Cuisine
Tel: 296 4081

Clara restaurant and pub
Mobile: 0597 348 335

Dauod Basha
Tel: 297 4655

Darna
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 0901

Diwan Art Coffee Shop
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6483

Do Re Mi Café (Royal Court)
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 4040

Elite Coffee House
Italian and Arabic Cuisine
Tel: 296 5169

European Coffee Shop
Coffee and Sweets
Tel: 2951 7031, 296 6505

Express Pizza
American Pizza
Tel: 296 6566

Fawanees
Pastries and Fast Food
Tel: 298 7046

Fuego Mexican and Tapas Grill
Tel: 29 9426 - 1700 999 888

Hosh l’il-Iliyyeh Restaurant and Gallery
Traditional Palestinian Cuisine (Birzeit)
Mobile: 0599 689 914

Jasmine Café
Tel: 295 0121

K5M - Caterers
Cake and Sweets
Tel: 295 6813

Khuzaama Restaurant
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 298 8289

La Vie Café
Cafe, Bistro & Bar
Tel: 296 4115

La Vista Café and Restaurant
Oriental and Western Cuisine
Tel: 296 3271

Level 5
Fusion European
Tel: 298 6666

Cann Espresso
Arabic and Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 2220

Mac Simon
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 297 2088

Mr. Donuts Café
Donuts and Coffee Shop
Tel: 240 7196

Mr. Fish
Seafood
Tel: 295 6555

Mr. Pizza
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 240 3016, 240 8182

Muntaza Restaurant and Garden
Barbecues and Sandwiches
Tel: 295 6835

Na3na3 Café
Italian and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 296 4656

Nai Resto Café - Argeleh
Tel: 0596 403 20

Newz Bar
Lounge and “Le Gourmet” Pastries’ corner
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
Tel: 296 5888

Osama’s Pizza
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 295 3270

Orjuwan Lounge
Palestinian-Italian Fusion
Tel: 297 6870

Rama café
Resto/Bar
Tel: 296 5376

Peter’s Place Restaurant & Bar
( Taybeh) Palestinian Cuisine
Tel: 298 8054, Mob: 5047 043 029

Pesto Café and Restaurant
Italian Cuisine
Tel: 297 0705, 297 0706

Pizza Inn
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 296 1181/23

Philadelphia Restaurant
Middle Eastern Menü
Tel: 295 1999

Plaza Joudna Restaurant and Park
Middle Eastern Menü
Tel: 295 6020, Fax: 296 4693

Pronto Resto-Café
Italian Cuisine
Tel: 298 7312

QMH
Tel: 297 3451

Roma Café
Italian Light Food
Tel: 296 4228

Rukab’s Ice Cream
Ice Cream and Soft Drinks
Tel: 295 3467

Saba Sandwiches
Falafel and Sandwiches
Tel: 296 0116

Samer
Middle Eastern Food
Tel: 240 5338 - 240 3088

Scoop
Tel: 295 9189

Sangria’s
French, Italian, and Mexican Cuisine
Tel: 296 6808

Sinatra Gourmet
Italian and American Cuisine
Tel: 297 1028

Sky Bar (Ankars Suites and Hotel)
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 2062

Sparkles Bar
Cigar bar
Movenpick Hotel Ramallah
Tel: 295 5888

Stone’s
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6038

Tabash (Jifna Village)
Barbecues
Tel: 281 0932

Tal El-Qamar Roof
Middle Eastern and Western Menü
Tel: 298 7905 6

TCHE TCHE
Tel: 296 4201

The Vine Restaurant
Continental Cuisine
Mobile: 0595 403 020, 0568 403 020

THE Q GARDEN
Roof-top garden - International Cuisine
Tel: 295 7727

Tomasso’s
Pizza and Fast Food
Tel: 295 9991/2

Tropicana
Mexican Cuisine, Oriental Menü, and Zarb
Tel: 297 5611

UpTown (Ankars Suites and Hotel)
Continental Cuisine
Tel: 295 2602

Values Restaurant
International and Sea Food
Tel: 296 6997

Vatche’s Garden Restaurant
European Style
Tel: 296 5966, 296 5988

Zam’s Premium Coffee
Coffee Shop Style
Tel: 295 0000

Zaki Taki
Sandwiches
Tel: 296 3643

Zamn’s Premium Coffee
Masyoun
Coffee Shop Style
Tel: 298 1033

Zarour Bar BQ
Barbecues and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 296 6767, 296 4480

Fax: 298 4357

Zeit ou Zaater
Pastries and Snacks
Tel: 295 4455

Ziryab
Barbecues, Italian, and Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 295 9093

Gaza Strip (08)
Al Daar
Barbecues
Tel: 288 5827

Al-Deir
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 283 6100/200300

Fax: 2834000

Almat’haf
Mediterranean Cuisine
Tel: 285 8444, Fax: 285 8440

Al-Molouke
Shawarma
Tel: 286 8397

Al-Salam
Seafood
Tel: 282 2705, Telefax: 283 3188

Avenue
Tel: 288 2100, 288 3100

Big Bite
Fastfood
Tel: 283 3666

Carino’s
Tel: 286 6343, Fax: 286 6353

LATERNIA
Tel: 288 9881, Fax: 288 9882

Light House
Tel: 288 4884

Marna House
Telefax: 282 3322, 282 2624

Mazaj Coffee House
Tel: 286 8035

Mazaj Restaurant
Tel: 282 5003, Fax: 286 9078

Orient House
Telefax: 282 8008, 282 8604

Roots - The Club
Oriental Cuisine
Tel: 286 8866, 282 3999, 282 3777

Hebron (02)
Abu Mazen Restaurant
Tel: 221 3833, Fax: 229 3111

Al Quds Restaurant
Tel: 229 7773, Fax: 229 7774

Golden Rooster
Telefax: 221 6115

Hebron Restaurant
Telefax: 222 7773

Orient House Restaurant
Telefax: 221 1525

Royal Restaurant
Tel: 222 7210
As Palestine continues its struggle for independence, it has already begun to acquire sovereign cyberspace recognition. A difficult three-year international debate resulted in the ‘Occupied Palestinian Territory’ being officially assigned the two-letter suffix, “.ps,” in the ISO 3166-1 list for the representation of names of countries or territories. The successful struggle to attain country code 970 led the way for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the international corporation that manages the country code Top-Level Domain (ccTLD) system on the Internet, on 22 March 2000, to assign Palestine its unique country identifier, “.ps,” in line with other sovereign nations such as .fr for France and .ca for Canada.


**Universities:** Birzeit University www.birzeit.edu, An-Najah University www.najah.edu, Al-Quds University www.alquds.com, Al-Azhar University (Gaza) www.alazhar-gaza.aq, Arab American University www.aauj.edu, Bethlehem University www.bethlehem.edu, Hebron University www.hebron.edu, The Islamic University (Gaza) www.iugaza.edu, Palestine Polytechnic www.ppi.edu

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Long Live the People

While Barack Obama was giving a speech to some Israeli youth, Rabee’ Eid, a conscientious Palestinian “heckler” from the town of Eilaboun (near Tiberias), interrupted him and shouted, among other things, “Did you see the apartheid wall?” A day later, fate had it that Rabee’ would get his wish: an unusual sandstorm hit the region and, instead of travelling by helicopter as planned, the President of the United States had to be driven to Bethlehem through the Bethlehem checkpoint which is adjacent to the notorious and monstrous-looking apartheid wall. This is the Holy Land, after all, and we’re used to miracles! To remain in this mystical setting, it’s worth mentioning that we also had a decent number of locusts that invaded southern Palestine a few weeks ago; an eerie reminder of one of the plagues that struck ancient Egypt when gross injustice prevailed.

Divine intervention and signs of the times aside, reality on the ground remains the same pre- and post-President Obama’s visit, which got huge media coverage. I don’t believe any Palestinian expected great drama; in fact, apprehension, mistrust, and even anger because of four years of missed opportunities laced with hollow promises were the predominant Palestinian feelings. Analysts claim that President Obama’s new approach or strategy is to bypass the political establishment (specifically the Israeli political establishment) and go directly to the public; to the youth in particular. He hopes that they will pressure their governments into making peace with their respective foes. The same analysts, however, cast serious doubt on the efficacy of this new strategy, for reasons beyond the scope of this column.

Irrespective of whether or not this new strategy will work, it is vital for the public to put pressure on government – through non-violent means, of course – in order, at least, to ensure coherence between the government and the people. The question is how far should the public go? And how tolerant should government be? A political activist who normally posts daring material on his Facebook page recently posted a critical remark after a young lady informed him that although she often agrees with what he posts, she’s afraid to “like” it for fear of being targeted. “If we don’t have the courage to even express our opinion,” he wrote, “how will we have the courage to fight occupation? Bury your fear!” he concluded.

Palestine is blessed with powerful labour unions that boldly take government head-on when it comes to labour rights. Budding human rights associations with international affiliations are sprouting everywhere and playing an important role in ensuring the protection of human rights and transparency. Syndicates, unions, and associations of professional sectors, however, leave much to be desired since most are weak and fragmented mainly because of factional rivalry and everlasting financial problems, which, in turn, are partially due to a weak economy. Nevertheless, these associations exist, and they ought to shape up in order to play their role in building our nation.

Freedom of expression, tolerance, unions, peaceful resistance, and lobby groups are but some basic elements of a culture that any civilised nation should embrace, a culture which forms the basis for proper rules of engagement between the public and the government and which serves as a guarantee for a functional society. With the growing power of Israeli squatters in the new Israeli government, Palestinians have very little faith in Obama’s approach to honour his commitment to a two-state solution (which is almost a joke now); his call for the public to play an active role in politics and social issues, however, should be picked up and acted upon. For us Palestinians, this is, in fact, essential.
Al-Baraem, Bank of Palestine’s initiative to train and qualify female and male football players for the Qatar 2022 World Cup.