



SITUATION UPDATE

Gaza visit, 10-11 April 2019

I visited Gaza the next day following the Israeli elections. I was rather disappointed to hear that Netanyahu (Likud) and Gantz (Blue & White new party) got even votes as this would mean that Netanyahu will form the next government of extreme rightists who support him and to whom he made extreme promises among which the annexation of parts of the Palestinian Territories (West Bank).

Unlike the Palestinian population in Israel, East Jerusalem and the West Bank who were rather disappointed by the outcomes of the recent Israeli elections and the probability that Netanyahu will continue to lead the new government in Israel; I was surprised by a general sense of relief among the community in Gaza. The reason from the viewpoint of the Gazans is that Netanyahu doesn't need to prove himself to the Israeli public, which means minimum threat of an imminent attack on Gaza. If someone else won the elections, then the new leader will have to prove he is worthy most probably by attacking Gaza.

People in Gaza are tired and weary, all they want is a way out of the ongoing daily suffering, poverty, unemployment, lack of services and of security.



Rosary Sisters School, Gaza

We started the day by meeting Michaela Hofmann from the German Representative Office at the Rosary Sisters School. Thanks to their generous donation, Sr. Nabila was able to furnish the new labs and secondary classrooms in preparation to open the 11th and 12th grades over the next couple of years, starting September 2019. In previous years, with generous support from Kindermissionswerk, the school opened the 9th and 10th grades which made this new step possible.

We also toured the newly built facilities which include an impressive auditorium funded by Saudi Arabia, this last edition concluded the ambitious expansion project launched over 10 years ago. Today, the school requires \$40,000 to finalize needed rehabilitation work at the kindergarten.

Al-Ahli Arab Hospital

We have several ongoing programs with the Hospital: a three-year employment project that will end this year, a malnutrition program for underweight children, a special fund for poor and elderly Christians in addition to an emergency grant to rehabilitate the water network completed earlier in the year. We just received approval for the 1st cycle of the early detection and treatment of breast cancer and we hope to receive approval for the required equipment and the remainder of the program cost. Approximately \$150,000 is required at this stage.



The hospital administration shared their desire to renew the employment project, not only because of the employment opportunities they provide, but also because this program enhances the capacities of the hospital and enables it to continue offering their valued services.

Near East Council of Churches



Our historic and valued partner – NECC, continue to run and develop their three Mother & Child clinics and the vocational training centers. We just concluded a psychosocial program for mothers and children at the three clinics. This program is extremely important and continues to be a priority as a result of the three major wars and the continued sporadic attacks on the strip; not to neglect the injuries and fatalities resulting from the 54-week events of the “march of return” protests at the borders. Therefore, another cycle of psychosocial support is urgently required.

NECC submitted a proposal to open a graphic design program at the VTC targeting young women to help them enter the job market. This is a three-year program after which it will be incorporated in the NECC annual budget.

The Scout Troops

At Dr. Tarazi’s office, we met with Dr. Bishara Khoury, representative of the Orthodox Scout. Both the Orthodox and the Catholic scout leaders developed a beautiful program that foresees cooperation and joint activities with some 20 scout troops from Gaza as well as activities involving the female members of the scout movement. Embrace the Middle East approved partial support and we’re looking for other funding resources to complete the program as planned.

The Arab Orthodox Cultural Center

Together with Dr. Issa and Dr. Bishara, we toured the premises of the center which is being completed with a generous grant from Saudi Arabia. Upon completion, the center will provide high quality services for the international and local communities: hosting conferences, workshops, training programs, etc. and is expected to create 16 permanent working opportunities.

Current needs: \$15,000 to complete a strategic plan to run the center upon completion of the works; and \$100,000 to provide training and employment for 16 youth for 12 months. During this period, the center would start functioning, earning income and becoming self-sustainable.



YMCA

We met with the Chairman and some members of the newly elected board of the YMCA. It was exciting to feel the harmony among the members of the new board which faces serious challenges. Along with the Executive Secretary, Hani Farah, we discussed the final preparations for launching a micro-business program targeting the unemployed youth members of the YMCA. The program will provide training and capacity building in micro-business for some 40-50 young people; will review the proposed projects submitted by the youth, and then will select 8-10 project that has the potential of success and self-sustainability who will be receiving loans through the Palestine Development Fund in Gaza. We thank our partner “Friends of the Holy Land” for their support of the program.



In addition, preparations are underway for the installation of a photovoltaic solar panel project that will provide free and environmentally friendly electric supply, thanks to the support of Misereor.

The YMCA also require some \$25,000 to rehabilitate the soccer playground. This project is extremely important as it will provide a substantial income for the YMCA by renting the playground to other clubs enabling the YMCA to cover its running cost as well as benefit their own male and female soccer teams.

Latin Parish of the Holy Family

Our last visit was with Fr. Mario da Silva, Latin Parish Priest, at the St. Thomas Aquinas Training Center. A couple of years ago, PMP supported Fr. Mario to establish the center and launch the first training and capacity building courses for Christian youth to improve their employment opportunities and strengthen their faith and sense of belonging to the Holy Land. The Latin Patriarchate will be constructing a 2nd floor to the Center to provide a much-needed space as the demand for the services of the Center is increasing. The idea is also to open the center for Muslim students which would be another unique opportunity of encounter and cooperation between the members of the society.

PMP is looking for funding to support the training courses (\$15,000 out of the \$30,000 annual cost). In addition, PMP will continue to support the parish Oratorio program and the summer camp.



As you can see, a lot was done over the past years for the Gaza Christian community and institutions serving over 200,000 people. Some more is still required to strengthen the community especially during these difficult times. We only pray and hope that one day soon, the political leaders will have the decency and the courage to look beyond their limited shortsighted vision and thirst for power; and be able to seek the benefit and wellbeing of the local community who has been suffering the consequences for over two decades now.

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