

A NEWSLETTER FROM PALESTINE

Hope Flowers School Newsletter, December 2007

On behalf of the Hope Flowers School students, staff and local community, we wish our Jewish friends a happy Hanukah, Christian friends a Merry Christmas and to our Muslim friends a Happy Eid. We also wish all humans everywhere a happy and peaceful 2008.

New Scholastic Year 2007-2008

The new school year started on 1st September 2007 with an increase in enrollments. The number of the students reached 300 from kindergarten to seventh grade. Most of the students this year come from the village of El Khader and the nearby areas. As a result of incredible efforts last year by our hard-working faculty and staff, the increase in the number of the students has been remarkable this fall semester/autumn term.

Again, we are starting this new scholastic year under difficult conditions, in which most Palestinians are obliged to live with road closures, unemployment and poverty. With great hope and trust we are starting this new semester with a renewed aim to educate towards building a more peaceful world.

Educational Progress

We were active this summer with various summertime programs, which worked well. With your continued support and faith in us, the Hope Flowers School has made great progress and we have been able to continue successfully with all of our activities and programs.

Scholarships

Hope Flowers School's mission is to protect children, and we are still working hard to keep children enrolled at the school when some are hampered by their families' financial hardship. The school has increased the number of scholarships offered to deserving students. This year, 60 students benefit from full scholarships and 30 students are beneficiaries of partial scholarships. The school managed to increase the number of scholarships with a grant received from USAID. This grant was implemented through a support program USAID gives to private schools in the West Bank, supporting the education of students in need of assistance.

Taking into consideration the school's educational progress and our successful outreach programs within the community, we believe the increase in enrollments demonstrates that our efforts with the scholarship program have been worth it.

Summer Activities

Training of school teachers in supporting war-traumatized children. This program started as a pilot project in 2006. During the pilot, we trained 15 Palestinian trainers and 30 teachers from 15 selected private and UNRWA (United Nations Relief & Work Agency) schools. The training program was divided into two parts. Part one was the training of trainers, in which Palestinian psychologists and school counselors received professional training in supporting war-traumatized children. Psychologists and school counselors were also trained as trainers and provided with skills and

knowledge to conduct teacher trainings in supporting war-traumatized children. The pilot program proved to be a success, and the project was extended to three years, starting in January 2007. During the three year program 180 teachers and school counselors from 90 schools in the southern West Bank (Bethlehem and Hebron areas) will benefit from the training. The training program aims to provide Palestinian teachers with skills and knowledge in identifying war traumatized children, managing their special needs and referring them to the right kind of professional support.

Integrating Students with Disabilities

Consistent with the Hope Flowers School's declared philosophy of promoting social justice, we started a special program in 2005 to integrate students with disabilities. The program focuses on children with both physical and psychologically-based learning disabilities.

The program has several parts: a media campaign to encourage wider social integration of people with disabilities, a teacher training program on integrating students with disabilities, an inclusive summer camp and working with disabled students in the school throughout the school year.

Interfaith Retreat

Interfaith dialogue has been going on since 2000, aiming to promote peace in the Holy Land through sincere interfaith dialogue. The project also creates space and opportunity for dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. A series of retreats have taken place during the last seven years, targeting different groups on both sides.

During summer 2007, an interfaith seminar was organized jointly by the Hope Flowers School and the Interfaith Encounter Association. The retreat took place on 23rd-24th August in Jerusalem. The topic was *The Position of Women in the Three Religions*. Discussions focused on the three perspectives of Islam, Christianity and Judaism and points of view from all three communities were exchanged. The retreat was attended by seven Christian and Muslim Palestinians and seven Israeli Jews. The meeting had no budget and accommodation for participants was donated by the Austrian Hospice in Jerusalem.

Training of Hope Flowers Staff on Compassionate Listening

Compassionate Listening as a form of pre-conflict resolution is one of the most important techniques the school uses in its peace education. Hope Flowers uses Compassionate Listening as a communication- and dialogue-building skill. A number of Compassionate Listening trainings have taken place during the last seven years. Several members of Hope Flowers School staff attended a summer seminar in early June 2007 organized by the Compassionate Listening Project, joining other Palestinians and Israelis from a variety of backgrounds.

Women's Empowerment Program

Women's empowerment is an important focus at the Hope Flowers School. The number of women who benefit from our women's training courses has grown from 15 to 30 women since October. This project is an important community resource as it develops women's potential in the workplace and wider society. In these courses women learn how to use computers or improve their skills, developing their knowledge-base, leadership skills and ability to empower other women both practically and psychologically. As women's computer skills improve, they are better qualified for job opportunities, and they increase their active involvement in society. Local families benefit directly from this, and the Hope Flowers School is proud to offer this vital resource to families in the community.

Day-to-day life & challenges

- **Construction of the security wall:** the construction of the wall has already started and it grows ever closer to the school – it is only 200 meters away from us, clearly visible to the children. Not only is the route of the wall problematic, but also the fencing and wall construction make life more difficult. The wall has been the school's biggest nightmare for the past few years. Now it exists and it is almost complete.
- **The approach-road to the school:** part of the road leading to the school has been destroyed. This is the route the faculty, staff, children and school buses take every day to school. The road's poor quality causes great difficulty in reaching and leaving the school. Unfortunately it will be even worse in winter. We have been contacting supporters and making funding requests to raise support to rehabilitate the road leading to the school.
- **Poor nutrition:** “a hungry man is not a free man”. A sad reality is that local children here face malnutrition and related conditions such as anemia. Due to high unemployment, currently at 45% in the Palestinian Territories, many parents find themselves financially unable to provide adequate nutrition to their children.

New web address

The school has a new web address at **www.hopeflowersschool.org** and we encourage you to take a look periodically to find details of developments at the school.

How you can help Hope Flowers School

A major part of our work is to deal with financial challenges. As mentioned in past newsletters, the school has had financial hardships for the last four years (especially from the effects of the *intifada* and the financial embargo of Palestine). With economic deterioration in our area, many families lost their incomes and financial resources and, as a result, a great number of students by necessity had to stop paying tuition fees, which caused us many financial difficulties. Therefore we have been depending more than ever upon donations from international friends and supporters to meet our basic needs and priorities. We pay a monthly sum of \$8,000 to cover staff salaries and an additional \$3,000 for running costs.

We are also seeking support for various projects aimed at expanding and fostering the school's philosophy of peace and democratic education. We still need additional funding to obtain a new school bus and upgrade the school's facilities.

We greatly appreciate your support – moral encouragement, rooting for us in your own country, financial support and helping us find new funding, educational and institutional contacts. We encourage you, if you are able, to make what might be the trip of a lifetime to Bethlehem, or to urge others to do so, and we welcome guests to our guest accommodation at the school. We will be glad to provide you with any information you may need about our work and activities – check our website to see if it's there first.

*With best wishes to you from us, the coordinators, staff and children
at the Hope Flowers School in Bethlehem, Palestine.*

Bank Details

You can send donations to one of the following addresses, or make a credit card donation through PayPal on our website. Your support does make a difference.

NB. Please notify us when wiring donations so that we can track them with our bank.

<p>Directly to the Hope Flowers School bank account in Palestine:</p> <p>From USA: Arab Jordan Investment Bank, Amman, Jordan. Chips ID 136008, SWIFT AJIBJOAX a/c Palestine Investment Bank (Beneficiary Bank) for further credit to "The Hope Flowers School", a/c no. 73535, Bethlehem Branch 76-411, Palestine. <u>Correspondent Bank:</u> Chase Manhattan Bank, New York</p> <p>From Europe: Arab Jordan Investment Bank, Amman, Jordan. Chips ID 136008, SWIFT AJIBJOAX a/c Palestine Investment Bank (Beneficiary Bank), for further credit to "the Hope Flowers School", a/c no. 73535, Bethlehem Branch 76-411, Palestine. <u>Correspondent Bank:</u> Deutsche Bank AG, Frankfurt, Germany</p> <p>By Postal Mail: You can send a check by registered mail to: The Hope Flowers School PO Box 732, Bethlehem, West Bank Palestine, via Israel</p>	<p>In USA: You can make a tax-exempt donation to the Hope Flowers School in USA through: Orange County Middle East Peace Fund, PO Box 5891, Orange, CA 92863-5891, USA. Please indicate that it is for the Hope Flowers School.</p> <p>In United Kingdom: Hope Flowers School NatWest Bank, Street, Somerset Sort Code: 60-21-01 Account No: 47539453</p> <p>People in UK can send cheques made out to "The Hope Flowers School" to Hope Flowers School UK PO Box 2427 Glastonbury Somerset BA6 8XX</p> <p><i>(Enquiries to: Palden Jenkins, contact details below)</i></p>
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