

UPAconnect

Issue 15 • Summer 2017



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and more...

UPA United Palestinian Appeal
—Transforming lives, empowering communities since 1978—



Letter from the Executive Director

Life under tin roofs—50 years of suffering



Last week, a staff member brought a photo of two Palestinian girls from the UPA archives (at right) to my attention. The source and date of the photo are unknown. Seeing it, however, immediately took me back 50 years, to the 1967 war, when I was a boy living in Ramallah, West Bank.

It was the second day of the war. Our house was shelled on the first day and my family hid with other families in the basement of a neighboring house concealed by dense pine trees. Amidst the chaos, fear and confusion, I heard a man yelling:

"The Anglican orphanage was hit during the air raid. Two girls are injured. No one knows who they are."

"You used to play with the kids at the orphanage, didn't you?" my uncle asked. "Yes," I replied with great anxiety, anticipating what the next question would be. "Let's find out who these girls are," he said.

A bullet-ridden wall, two bullet-ridden little bodies stretched on the ground. I recognized Samar and Rima, two girls who were seeking shelter behind a wall. That memory is still gruesome 50 years later.

The third day of the war, I witnessed thousands of people walking into Ramallah. Men, women and children from three nearby villages—Emwas, Yallo and Beit Nuba—forced out of their homes by the occupying Israeli army.

The next day, as we later learned, the villages were completely demolished, the buildings, fields and groves bulldozed. All signs of life in these once vibrant agricultural communities were forever obliterated.



Displaced multitudes from the Gaza Strip, facing the same fate, made it across the Jordan River. Some settled in UNRWA refugee camps established during the Nakba in 1948. Others formed new camps like the one in Jerash, Jordan, known as "Gaza Camp."

As UNRWA started cutting back its program funding in recent years, UPA explored potential service opportunities to fill the gaps.

Gaza Camp is one of the most impoverished Palestinian refugee camps, with the most appalling conditions. Until recently, open sewers ran through the unpaved streets and alleyways where children played and people worked. There I spent many days about three years ago and got to know one family very well.

Life in the camp of displaced Gazans was almost as harsh as it must have been fifty years ago. The maze of narrow alleys through small courtyards led to a rusty steel door that had seen better days.

(continued on the last page)

Arts and Culture

Al-Kamandjati Association

Across towns, villages and refugee camps in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, thousands of marginalized children and youth ages 4 to 18 attended cultural performances organized by Al-Kamandjati Association. Established by Palestinian violist Ramzi Aburedwan, Al-Kamandjati held 40 musical performances and dozens of lectures, workshops and jam sessions.

The presenters included 200 Palestinian and 50 international musicians, craftsmen, artists and anthropologists. The 18-day festival brought music and creative artistic and cultural expressions to children and youth as a way of breaking social and cultural habits that traditionally consign music and culture to a form of leisure.

By bringing international cultural expressions to remote villages and marginalized communities, Al-Kamandjati endeavors to contribute to the cultural and artistic development that will ultimately provide hope and opportunities of self-expression to the young generation.

Al-Kamandjati, founded in Al Amari refugee camp near Ramallah, seeks to provide music education to Palestinian children living in refugee camps and villages throughout Palestine and Lebanon. Through its programs, children are able not only to develop an interest and skill set in music, but they are also better able to transcend daily hardships due to occupation and displacement.



Food Security Program

Reaching out to families in need during Ramadan

Thanks to your support in response to UPA's annual Ramadan appeal, hundreds of impoverished families living in the Gaza Strip and in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan were able to welcome the holy month with increased food security.

UPA staff and representatives hand-delivered 190 food packages to families in the Gaza Strip, with priority for female-

headed households and those with a disabled family member.

In Lebanon, 100 families living in Nahr El Bared refugee camp also received food packages distributed by UPA. The majority of recipients had lost their homes in the last war and now live in shelters made from shipping containers.



UPA staff visit Ahmed (center), 68 years old, who lives with his 10 family members in a partially demolished home. His neighbors were killed during the 2014 Gaza war.



One of the children, among nine in this family, excitedly opens a food package. His mother (not pictured), Wegdan, 35 years old, lost her husband and has been unable to work, so the family relies on charity.



Two boys who live in Jerash Camp, Jordan, pick up a food package for their family.



UPA Healing Through Feeling staff delivers a package to Alya (right), 59, who cares for her five children. Three of her sons are disabled. Her home, rebuilt after being demolished in 2014, is not suitable for living and floods during the winter rains.

A third of the families who benefitted from the distribution in Lebanon are Palestinian refugees who fled Syria, becoming refugees again. None of the families supported by the distribution have a steady income, and most of the recipients have not completed primary education. They mainly rely on support from UNRWA, which is limited.

Food packages included cheese, cooking and olive oil, lentils, rice, tea, dates, sugar, canned meats, beans, dry milk, tuna, tahini, macaroni, dried fruit and spices.

And in Jerash Camp (also known as "Gaza Camp") located in Jerash, Jordan, UPA representatives handed out food vouchers so 100 families can purchase essential food items.



The boy at right, one of nine siblings, excitedly opens a food package, as one of his younger brothers enjoys the moment. Since their father (not pictured) is blind, he is unable to support the family. Instead, the eldest daughter, 27, is responsible for looking after her siblings and finding support for their household.



EMBRACING LIFE PROGRAM

Training Doctors, Transforming Lives

This spring, during the Embracing Life Program's (ELP) annual international delegation, the ELP team completed 44 craniofacial surgeries free-of-charge at the ELP West Bank Surgical Unit (located in Ramallah's Palestine Medical Complex) and at the Beit Jala Government Hospital.

UPA also started training local Palestinian speech therapists, dentists, and orthodontists to provide the necessary care for patients with cleft lip and/or palate in the West Bank.

Speech and language pathology experts from Cincinnati Children's Hospital trained 20 local therapists from across the West Bank on how to diagnose speech disorders in cleft patients. In addition, an orthodontist from Guatemala trained 9 local dentists and orthodontists from across the West Bank

on how to provide pre-surgical orthodontic treatment to cleft infants to achieve optimal surgical results.

UPA is now planning the next ELP regional conference, which will be held in Amman, Jordan. The conference will focus on ways to provide care for all patients with cleft and craniofacial conditions throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

According to a 2013 study, the incidence of CLP in the occupied Palestinian territories is 1.05/1,000 live births. In general, boys are slightly more affected than girls.

To learn more about the Embracing Life Program, please visit:
www.helpupa.org/embracing-life



Sarah, a speech-language pathologist from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, screens a young patient.



Cindy van Aalst, RN, volunteer, and ELP master feeding specialist, shows a mother in Ramallah how to use a special feeding bottle for her baby daughter who has a cleft lip. Cindy is also training her Palestinian counterpart to take on this role.



Speech pathologists from Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center train Palestinian speech pathologists.

Letter from the Exec. Director (cont.)

(continued from the first page)

"Ahlan wa Sahlan" ("Welcome" in Arabic), yelled Abdullah as we approached. This was his way of alerting the inhabitants that a guest was approaching.

Inside the room, an elderly man resting on a mattress repositioned himself with difficulty trying to make room for me to sit beside him.

"Assalam Alaykom" ("Peace be with you"), I greeted as I shook his hand. Abdullah kissed his father's hand (a sign of respect for elders in a family). "Wa Alaykom Assalam. Welcome to our home," replied Saber ("Patient" in Arabic).

"Yaba" said Abdullah to his father. "This is Saleem. He is visiting the camp for a few days."

The room was about 12 square feet, with a dirt and partial concrete floor. The roof was tin sheet metal, the walls were cinderblock and the space they enclosed was dark and damp. While I visually scanned the surroundings, Saber's words resonated in my mind, "Welcome to our home."

Abdullah excused himself, so Saber and I had a chance to talk. The conversation quickly focused on how he, his wife and two children ended up here fifty years ago.

"During the 1967 war we were forced out of Gaza and came to Jordan," he said. "Abdullah was 3 years old and his sister was only 2. My wife and I vowed not to have more children until we are able to give the children we bring into this world a better life.

"That never happened, and it gives my wife great sadness. To compensate for this, God gave us four grandchildren. Thank God for his blessings."

Fifty years later... the misery continues for people like Saber and his family.

"Thank God for his blessings," repeated Saber. One must have a great deal of faith to see blessings amid this misery.

The extended family of nine lives here, each living with his or her own challenge. Saber's right leg was amputated due to diabetes. His wife, Umm Abdullah, is so old and frail, suffering from a broken heart from the events of 1967 and not having more children, that life is a constant struggle. Abdullah's sister, Fahima, had polio the year after they left Gaza and walks with great difficulty.

Abdullah, the breadwinner, does day labor when he is lucky enough to find it; a 15 Jordan Dinars/day wage (equivalent to \$22.50) has to suffice. His wife, Muna, is a selfless human be-

ing. Crowded and suffocated in a one-room home with eight other people, she is everyone's caregiver, including her four children, all under the age of 9.

Fifty years later... a breadwinner, a caregiver and their four children are trying to make a life of their own in the same conditions that their parents and grandparents thought unfit for any newborn.

Fifty years later... the suffering continues. Will they ever see better days?

Abdullah returned with a large tray of food and freshly baked bread. His son Saber, named after his grandfather (as if grandfather and grandson were given the name Saber for a reason), carried a soot-stained aluminum teakettle in one hand and four small stacked tea glasses in the other.

"Time for lunch," announced Abdullah as he walked in. Despite the poverty and scarcity of resources, he insisted on Arab hospitality at its best. The meal probably depleted two day's wages. I was touched and humbled.

Since that visit, I have often remembered my conversation with Saber and reflected on his family. Last month, just as Ramadan started, I managed to call Abdullah on his cell phone and talked to him and his father. With great sadness Saber shared with me the news of the death of his wife and the more exciting news: a newly born son to Abdullah and Muna.

"We were blessed on the first day of this Holy Month with another boy. His name is Atallah ("Gift from God"). Thank God for his blessings."

"Congratulations," I replied. "This is great news."

"Fifty years ago", he continued, "My wife and I were so desperate that we tried to stop the continuity of life until things improve. Later I realized that life can't be stopped, despite the circumstances. Our past is miserable, our present bleak, the only hope we have lies in the future. We see this hope through the eyes of the new generation."



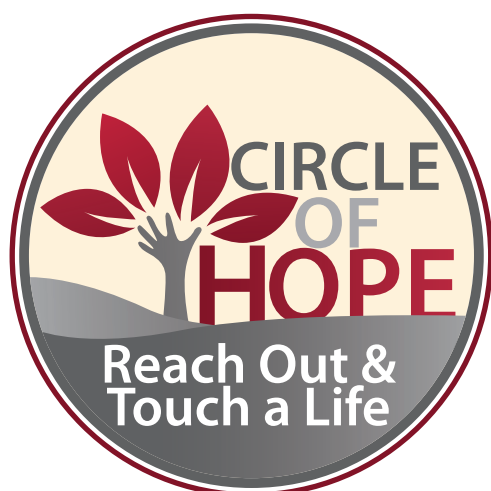
Next year is United Palestinian Appeal's 40th anniversary. For the last 39 years, it has worked to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and contributing to the long-term socio-economic development of Palestinian society.

UPA's work at Gaza Camp and other camps is inspired by the silent endurance, resilience, faith and hope of people like Saber. Hope, once lost, is now nurtured through the life of the new generation.



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Help support marginalized Palestinians

In 2016, 97% of UPA's operating expenses went to programs that directly benefited Palestinian communities in need.



UPA is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible according to applicable laws.



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