

UPAconnect

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UPA United Palestinian Appeal
Transforming lives, empowering communities since 1978



Letter from the Executive Director

Reflections - Life is a Struggle

Our passenger van made its way through the streets and alleys, passing all forms of life as experienced on these depressed paths. Peddlers went about their daily activities in hopes of earning a living that day. Trash collectors rushed in their horse-drawn carts to get rid of overflowing trash. Graffiti-filled walls stood silent amidst neighborhoods of ghosts and rubble. Idle children silently waited for another day to pass by.

Twice the size of the District of Columbia, the Gaza Strip is densely populated, impoverished and has lived under an Israeli imposed blockade since 2007. Gaza's population is about 1.8 million, over 50% are refugees and over 80% live under the poverty line or on less than \$2/day. Secluded from the world, about 90% of its main water supply is not suitable for drinking as the aquifer is polluted. And about 20% of the households have the luxury of running water for a few hours a week.

Due to the Israeli restrictions, people suffer power outages for up to 18 to 20 hours per day, explained our van driver Ustaz Kamel. "It's very difficult for me to find gas for my van." He went on stating different accounts of human suffering, recent Israeli violations, and inhumane living conditions while gracefully swerving the van through back allies, between dilapidated buildings and in and out of congested courtyards.

"David Cameron, the British prime minister," explained Ustaz Kamel, "was quoted in the Guardian saying that the Israeli blockade has turned Gaza into a prison camp. He came to this realization", continued Ustaz Kamel, "from reading reports... imagine if he had actually lived here."

"How did you hear this?" I asked.

"Just because I'm driving a van doesn't mean I'm illiterate. I have a Ph.D. in political science. I used to be a university professor at a university in the West Bank, but since the closure, I have been driving a van. I'm 55 years old. This is the only occupation I can find and I have to support my family. I have a responsibility."

With his statement I couldn't but reflect on life away from these unfortunate circumstances. How desperate life in Gaza can be! I guess that explains the Ustaz, which means "teacher." Everyone still calls him Ustaz. This is a title he earned, maintained and is proud of.

Through their plight, Palestinians have learned that education is the one asset that can't be confiscated, demolished or occupied. Education is a source of pride, employment and a means for a decent living. Unfortunately in Ustaz Kamel's situation that reality had been shattered. Employment is no longer viable, however his pride still intact he is struggling to persevere, to be resilient!

As we drove further inland we could no longer see the beautiful horizon outlined by the Mediterranean. We were in a maze between desolate buildings and deserted spaces. Suddenly the van came to a stop. "Here we are," said Ustaz Kamel. UPA Director of Programs in Palestine, UPA Gaza Program Coordinator and I followed Ustaz Kamel to a small, clean building, where we were met by our host Dr. Issa Tarazi.

Dr. Tarazi is the director of Near East Council of Churches (NECC) Committee for Refugee Work in Gaza. Established in 1952, NECC aims to strengthen and empower the Palestinian community in the Gaza Strip by providing educational and health services regardless of faith, color, gender, political affiliation or geographical locality. A UPA partner, NECC currently manages three primary health care clinics in Shejaiya, Darraj and Kherbet al Adas neighborhoods serving more than 160,000 people.

Led by the good doctor, we found our way into a crowded waiting room at one of the clinics where mothers and children waited to see the doctor. There I met Hasan. Hasan is 5 years old. He was there with his mother and infant sister who needed to be checked. Hasan watched the strangers as I approached him and made a gesture to shake his hand. He thought for a minute, moved something from his right hand to his left with great care, made sure it was concealed, and then shook my hand.

"What are you holding Hasan?" I asked. He hesitated for a minute then said: "Candy," he opened his fist to reveal a piece of hard candy that has obviously seen better days.

"Aren't you going to eat it?" I inquired.

"I found it yesterday at my uncle's house, I am saving it for my sister, she hates needles; she will cry all the way home and that will make my mother mad then she and my father will fight, I don't like when they fight. The candy will keep my sister from crying...that's why I can't eat it."

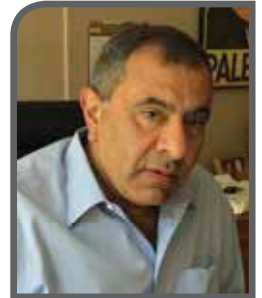
To eat or not to eat a piece of candy would have been a dilemma for a boy of Hasan's age anywhere else in the world. In Hasan's case, however, at age five, he has already established some priorities. He is trying to take care of his sister, his mother, and himself. He is striving to avoid his mother's anger and making an effort to evade his parent's fights.

Whether you are five and helpless or fifty five with a Ph.D., life in Gaza is a struggle; it is a daily effort to survive, and an ongoing fight to persevere. Against all odds, both Ustaz Kamel and Hasan have very little to count on. Despite that, both still maintain a sense of hope. They are struggling to imagine a different life beyond their reality and working to achieve it. I know both might, at some point, may be disappointed. Both deserve a better chance at living in this lifetime!

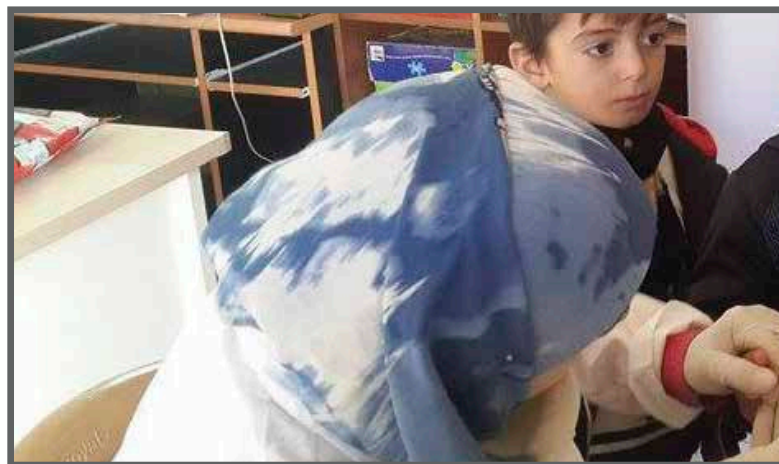
Sincerely,



Saleem F. Zaru
Executive Director



Quarterly Projects Update October – December 2015



Ma'an Development Center (Ma'an)

Last quarter, UPA supported Ma'an Development Center, a long time UPA partner, provide impoverished communities at the Nweimeh and Al-Auja schools in the Jordan valley with backpacks, stationary and other school supplies. Located in Area C, these schools are underserved and lack funds to equip their students with the most basic needs necessary for a normal learning environment.

This project also provided teachers with necessary educational tools and audio-visual aids. Such grants provided by UPA through your support helped lessen the burden on a student population suffering from a financially stricken school system in one of the most vulnerable areas of the West Bank.

Palestinian Health Care Committee (PHCC)

The committee in Nablus aims to detect anemic children due to malnutrition. Most recently through a grant from UPA, PHCC's services reached the city of Hebron by use of a mobile clinic. The distance between Nablus and Hebron is 50 miles; however, the travel time by car could be anywhere between 3 to 5 hours depending on checkpoints, closures and other unforeseen challenges typical of life under occupation.





The Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts

The project targeted children in some of the most impoverished areas in Hebron. Another component of this project included education on the importance of a balanced diet for mothers, especially those who are expecting. The project reached 1,000 mothers in the region.

The project exposed participants to some of the basic causes of anemia such as malnutrition and appetite disturbance. Through this awareness campaign early detection is promoted and the children stand a better chance of recovery.

Located in Beirut, Lebanon, the center works to improve the psycho-social well-being of Palestinian refugee children living in the local camps. By providing workshops that promote creativity, ARCPA aims to encourage free self-expression in a child friendly environment. They include writing, music, art and other creative activities.

The influx of Syrian refugees has added to the burden of already drained resources available to schools and camps.

By expanding its reach through such workshops ARCPA feels it can serve a greater number of children.

On November 12th, 2015, Burj El-Barajneh, located in the southern part of Beirut, was attacked by two suicide bombers. "Those attacks postponed many of ARCPA's workshops but did not disrupt any project from being completed on time," a representative of the ARCPA said.

They are committed to function under the most severe circumstances and UPA's support of such children's programs, through your generosity, will continue.



In 2014, 97% of UPA's operating expenses went to programs that directly benefited Palestinian communities in need.



Programs



Management



Fundraising

"Music for Healing": Simon Shaheen Benefit Concert

A benefit concert for the children of Gaza was held in the elegant Antiochian Orthodox Church in Potomac, Maryland on October 24, 2015. With over 350 attendants, the audience enjoyed music by 'oud master Simon Shaheen and the Qantara Ensemble. The evening reflected the dedication of the audience towards a brighter, healthier future for the children of Gaza.

The benefit concert supported UPA program **Healing Through Feeling**, a kindergarten-based UPA program in Gaza, which will enable Palestinian mental health practitioners help kindergartners and their caregivers, identify and address symptoms of trauma due to the ongoing situation in Gaza Strip.

The evening also featured **"Gaza Through a Child's Eyes"** – a UPA art exhibit of children's drawings collected from children's centers in Gaza. They demonstrate life from the children's viewpoint, a childhood that is hardly a childhood at all, but one filled with trauma and devastation. Art therapy



sessions help the children to release, express and deal with feelings resulting from ongoing war and conflict.

Again, we would like to thank our generous sponsors and friends of UPA who joined us to make this evening successful in support of an imperative cause.



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



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EMBRACING L I F E P R O J E C T

MAKING THE MIDDLE EAST CRANIOFACIAL CARE INSTITUTE A R E A L I T Y



The First Embracing Life Project Middle East Conference

Forty doctors and medical professionals gathered at the Dead Sea Spa Hotel last November to share research on craniofacial anomalies. Hosted by United Palestinian Appeal's Embracing Life Project, this conference is the first of what will become an annual conference series.

This year's conference featured doctors and medical practitioners from the Middle East as well as Great Britain and the United States. Each doctor's presentation focused on the challenges they face treating craniofacial anomalies and providing adequate care in their countries.

"The purpose of the conference is to one day make the Middle East and North Africa a cleft-free zone," said Dr. John van Aalst, director of the UPA Embracing Life Project.

Additionally, the doctors and the practitioners shared solutions to treating craniofacial patients and discussed how to improve their overall care. This conference series will also aim at developing a standard form of care for cleft and craniofacial patients. Next year's conference is scheduled for November 2016 in Amman, Jordan.

Making the Middle East Craniofacial Institute a Reality

The first Embracing Life Project Craniofacial Center was recently completed in Ramallah at the Al-Sheikh Zayed Hospital in the Palestine Medical Complex. The center is complete with four double occupancy patient rooms in addition to two operating rooms.

Constructing this center is part of the Embracing Life Project's mission which is to build the capacity of Palestinians surgeons and medical professionals in this field.

UPA's Embracing Life Project plans to establish similar craniofacial centers in Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon.



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Joining is quick and simple!

We invite you to join the UPA Circle of Hope monthly-giving program and become a sustaining supporter in 2016. Your monthly tax-deductible gift will help UPA expand its work to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians and contribute to the long-term socio-economic and cultural development of Palestinian society.

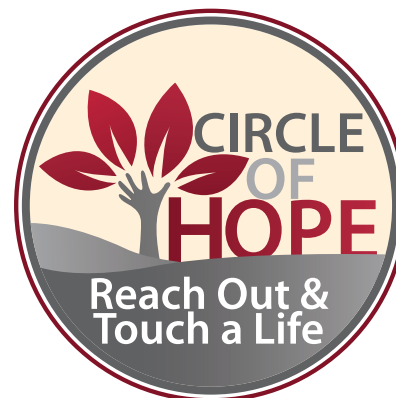
\$10 per month will provide one child with school, art and recreational supplies.

\$20 per month will provide one child with daily hot, nutritious meals.

\$50 per month will provide a food package for an entire family for 1 month.

\$60 per month will provide weekly trauma counseling for one child in Gaza for 6 months.

\$100 per month will provide a university scholarship for one student.



• **By Mail:** Fill out the enclosed donation envelope with your credit card information; indicate the donation amount and check, "Monthly."

• **Online:** Visit our Circle of Hope donation page at:
helpupa.org/hope

• **By Phone:** Call us at:
855-659-5007, ext. 202.

Thank you for reaching out and touching a life in 2016.