

# CORNERSTONE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER

*...To bring good news to the poor*

*by: Naim Ateek*



Photo: World Vision

The existence of poverty in the world is scandalous. In the midst of so much individual and national wealth, and in the midst of so much waste of food and resources, the predicament of the poor grows more hopeless and desperate, and many of us do not even blush.

The statistics are staggering. According to the World Bank, 1.1 billion people live on less than \$1 a day and 2.7 billion live on less than \$2 a day – a total of 3.8 billion in the world living in abject poverty. About 25,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes. In Israel-Palestine the situation of the poor is increasingly getting worse. According to the UNDP report on poverty in July 2007, 70% of households in the Gaza Strip live below the poverty line, while 56% of West Bank households and 19% of East Jerusalem households live below the poverty line. Some 42% of households in the Gaza Strip live in extreme poverty and a majority of Palestinians, 58%, reported a decline in their household incomes in the last six months.

Poverty is an evil that must be eradicated. If some people can argue that in olden days the economic structures of life made it impossible to eliminate poverty, we have no excuses today. We know that it is feasible to conquer poverty. Our world possesses enough resources to drastically reduce the causes of poverty and provide a life of comfort and dignity to the disadvantaged and marginalized. Today it is possible to address the reasons for injustice and exploitation that are the major causes of poverty and to create just economic structures that can lend themselves to the reduction and even the elimination of poverty. The tragedy lies in the fact that our global and

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national leaders lack the will to do it.

Can we imagine the billions of dollars the countries of the world, even the poorest among them, spend on the purchase of arms that kill and destroy people when millions of their own citizens are dying of disease and hunger? Even a fraction of such expenditures can alleviate the poverty condition of millions. From our perspective of faith, what is happening in the world today is tragic and insane. It is an evil that must be condemned and transformed.

Apparently, many leaders are concerned about their national and personal security rather than human security—the health and wellbeing of their citizens. In his book, *Madness in the Multitude: Human Security and World Disorder*, F.O. Hampson (Oxford University Press, 2002) outlines three different understandings of human security. The first has to do with threats to the fundamental human rights of individuals. The second is humanitarian and has to do with threats that arise from armed conflict and war. The third is concerned with sustainable human development. The last examines a whole gambit of issues that threaten the wellbeing of people and stem from structural violence. These are the issues we need to be concerned about rather than the accumulation of destructive weaponry. (See also *The Ethics of Peace and War* by Iain Attack, Edinburgh University Press, 2005 p. 114).

When one looks at the Palestinian situation, it is clear that the Israeli occupation has subjected the Palestinians



Photo: Karin Brown

to all the above threats. The continuous deterioration of their situation is the result of war and armed conflict as well as systems of structural violence that have been imposed by the Israeli government. The number of people whose lives are threatened by structural forms of violence is immensely more than those who suffer from physical violence. The Commission on Human Security states that “More than 800,000 people a year lose their lives to [physical] violence. While approximately 2.8 billion suffer from poverty, ill health, illiteracy and other maladies.” (Attack p. 116)

Therefore, in our Palestinian situation, there is an intimate and direct link between poverty and occupation, between poverty and the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians. So long as the occupation persists, the Palestinians will remain humanly insecure and their poverty will worsen. Israel is well aware of the deteriorating economic conditions of the Palestinians.

In fact, we have been witnessing for a long time the presence of systemic structures of injustice subtly imposed by the Israeli government that have been intended to keep the Palestinians poor, humiliated, and suppressed. The objectives are quite clear – to drive the Palestinians into total submission and ultimately to push them out so that they would abandon their land and emigrate. In such circumstances, the greatest need of the Palestinians is justice. Justice takes priority over charity. We must not allow charity to become a substitute for justice.

Many people believe that the government of Israel has taken advantage and even abused the good will of the international community that has been alleviating the suffering and the economic hardships of the Palestinian people. The occupation is the responsibility of the government of Israel. Yet, the main burden of humanitarian aid has been borne by international relief agencies. In other words, the human responsibility has been

dumped on the shoulders of the international community, seemingly with no strings attached. While international relief agencies have been pouring millions of dollars in aid to the Palestinians, the government of Israel has been adamantly refusing to implement international law. At the same time, it has been entrenching and consolidating its occupation of the Palestinian territories by confiscating Palestinian land, building settlements, and refining its system of humiliation, control, and impoverishment of the Palestinians. In this sense, charity has inadvertently contributed to the prolonging and cementing of the occupation.

Moreover, the miserable conditions of the Palestinians and their need for humanitarian aid have left the impression in the minds of many people in the world that the Palestinian problem is basically an economic problem. People have forgotten that the core issue is political and not economic. The Palestinians have been expelled and displaced and their political and fundamental human rights have been denied. The aid they need from the international community is justice—the restoration of their political rights to their own land and the establishment of their own sovereign state in Palestine.

As Christians and as people of faith, we need to recognize the priority of justice as we continue to struggle against material poverty and work for its reduction and possible elimination. One of the beautiful verses in the New Testament comes from the letter of Paul to the Church in Corinth. “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus

Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Such words reflect the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. It is only genuine love that can express itself through personal sacrifice for the sake of others. Commenting on this verse, Gustavo Gutierrez wrote: “This is the humiliation of Christ, his kenosis (Phil. 2:6-11). But he does not take on man’s [ & woman’s] sinful condition and its consequences to idealize it. It is rather because of love for and solidarity with men [ & women] who suffer in it. It is to redeem them from their sin and to enrich them with his poverty. It is to struggle against human selfishness and everything that divides men [ & women] and enables there to be rich and poor, possessors and dispossessed, oppressors and oppressed.” (*A Theology of Liberation*. Orbis Books, 1988, p.300. See also pp. 291-302)

The struggle must go on against poverty,

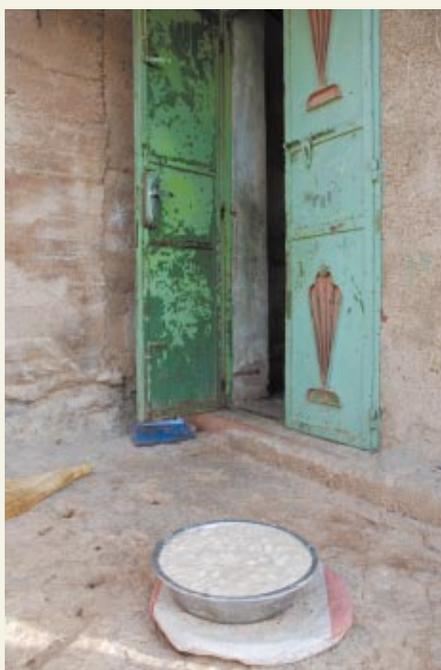


Photo: Karin Brown

dispossession, and oppression. It is our calling as children of God to continue to champion justice and liberation of all our brothers and sisters who are oppressed. In the community of faith, the needs of people must be met. When there is genuine love, there is sharing and when sharing takes place, people’s needs are met.

In his book, *Matthew and Empire*, Warren Carter (Trinity Press International, 2001) summarizes Jesus’ social and theological challenge to the Roman Empire. The community of faith as described by Matthew does not belong to the Roman Empire but is shaped by God’s empire and is, therefore, constituted not by wealth, gender, status, or ethnicity, but by becoming children of God, the heavenly father (Matthew 5:9, 45). This community has a different ethics regarding riches and the poor.

Community members serve God, not wealth (6:24). The goal of their existence is not exploitative accumulation through oppressive taxes and tributes. It is not conspicuous consumption and display; rather, wealth is to be used to provide what people need to live. A wealthy man is to divest himself of his “great possessions,” and give to the poor (19:21-22). Almsgiving is a vital practice marked not by reciprocity and calculated self-interest but the secret meeting of needs (6:1-4). The needs of beggars are to be met; lending to those who want to borrow circumvents increased wealth and indebtedness while making resources available (5:42). These practices begin to imagine a world that trusts God’s control (6:24-34), where economic

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justice matters more than imperial exploitation. (p. 127)

In summary, I would like to emphasize the following points:

1. It is our Christian and human responsibility to promote justice. It is easy to be charitable. It is harder to be just. In many ways, the poor do not need

our charity as much as they need justice. In Palestine, we must work for ending the occupation. It is the main reason for poverty.

2. It is incumbent upon us as people of faith to adopt and promote a more modest and simple lifestyle. We need to learn from the poor. Our pride and our self-sufficiency must melt away; and our trust and dependence must be always placed in God.

3. Material poverty is a crime against God and our fellow human beings and it is largely caused by injustice and exploitation. We must struggle against it wherever it exists. We must work against the unjust economic structures that make and keep the poor poorer and the rich richer.

4. We must recognize that everything we have is a gift from God. God is the owner of everything we have. We must be good and faithful stewards. We need to build a community of faith that, out of its love and gratitude to God, reaches out to others, especially to the poor and oppressed, and works diligently to achieve justice and liberation for them.

*The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek is the Director of Sabeel.*



Photo: Pablo Pitcher



## Christmas Greetings from Sabeel

On behalf of all of us in Jerusalem and Nazareth, we wish you all a Merry Christmas and blessings for 2008! We wish to express our heartfelt thanks for all of your hard work and everything that each of you does for justice and peace around the world.

With deep appreciation,  
The Sabeel Staff and Board

# Christmas and Poverty

by Robert W. Tobin

Christmas can be and often is a very difficult time not only for the poor but for those that by the standards of the majority of the world are rich indeed. It is not the meaning of Christmas or the bible story of Christmas that makes it so, but rather piles of dubious expectations that have been placed upon it, especially by western culture. The cultural lore that has made Santa Claus or his equivalent into a representative of materialism makes it hard for those who cannot attain the levels of giving and getting that are promoted by the commercial world. The deep and growing divisions between the haves and have nots are abundantly clear at Christmas in many places of the world.

The reality is, however, that the commercialism in the West that undermines the true celebration of the birth of God's gift of hope to the world also deadens our sense of connection to the majority of God's children who live each day in poverty. Christmas calls us to reflect upon our relationship to poverty at many levels. Failure to do so distorts our souls and weakens our spirits.

The birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is remembered because of who Jesus was, what he taught, how he lived, died, and was raised. Jesus himself probably did not grow up in abject poverty, but he certainly heard the cry of the poor

throughout his ministry. He saw the results of the Roman occupation and the ways injustice and unabated power create conditions of poverty and its resulting suffering, humiliation, and hopelessness. His mission to the impoverished proclaimed by both word and deed that God stands with the poor and the oppressed against the evils of tyranny, inequity, oppression and greed. Christian, Hebrew, and Muslim scriptures convey the same message. **If we neglect the poor and oppressed, if we do not share our wealth, if we turn away from the lost, the least, and the last, we have not truly heard the word of God.** It is not just the condition of the poor that is at issue. It is also the condition of our own souls.

The celebration of Christmas at its best is the celebration of hope. There is hope for the poor. There is hope for justice. There is hope for peace. There is hope because Jesus was born as the Word: "The Word was made flesh and dwells among us." God reached down into human history and declared that nothing, not angels or powers or things past or things to come, nor any creature can separate us from the love of God that was born in Bethlehem as the embodiment of hope.

So let us sort through the piles of crass materialism that contemporary Christmas too often offers, through the piles of meaningless gestures of the

## How to Help:

Sabeel has a small outreach program for needy families during the holidays.

If you would like to make a contribution, please use the enclosed envelope.

holidays, through the piles of denial of the dismal poverty that infects our planet, seeking once again the birth of hope. May our gift giving always include those who live in want. But even more may we give the gift of ourselves to those institutions and structures that seek to address the poverty of Gaza and the West Bank, the poverty of the vast majority of humanity, not with handouts but with political and economic action. Let us hold up the reality of life for our impoverished sisters and brothers to those whose policies create their misery. Let us hold fast to the message of the birth of Jesus which always points to the realm of God in which there are no poor, where justice reigns, and where peace is not a dream but a reality.

And on Christmas Eve and whenever we give and receive gifts, let us give thanks for the ever-present Christmas gift from God, his son Jesus Christ.

*The Rev. Robert Tobin has been actively working for a just peace in Palestine-Israel since his first visit there in 1994. Robert is the former rector of Christ Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*



# Children are the future

by Margo Sabella

Palestinian children have been the silent victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Despite the fact that we see them walking to school, playing hopscotch or soccer, and doing normal activities in the midst of very abnormal circumstances, many of these children's smiling faces belie the fact that they are hungry.

With more constraints on the Palestinian economy since the onset of the second Intifada right through to the international boycott that was imposed on Palestinians after the January 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, many families have become increasingly burdened in their struggle to make ends meet. Affording even the most essential of food staples has become a challenge.

The escalation in violence reached unprecedented levels immediately after the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000. The first two years were some of the worst that Palestinians have ever witnessed. Israeli military incursions and consequent movement restrictions such as curfews and closures created an overwhelming sense of insecurity for the people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Many stories were told about parents dashing out to get baby formula, for example, only to return home empty-handed because of shortages or the threat of being shot at for violating curfew.

That time was characterized by a great sense of helplessness: markets were inaccessible, since curfews were imposed and little fresh food could be bought, if available. Later, when curfews were lifted for a few hours once or twice a week, people were allowed to go out and purchase food. With all the restrictions being imposed, many family breadwinners lost their livelihoods, their income declined, and often they were forced to use whatever life savings they had. In addition, many women sold their jewelry and other personal assets for cash, but all this soon ran out and people were left struggling even more. World Vision (Jerusalem, West Bank

and Gaza program) took part in relief efforts at the time in response to the need and delivered basic food staples to families in besieged West Bank towns, such as Nablus and Jenin.

Each year since 2000, additional tiers of restrictions have been imposed on the Palestinian population. The construction of the Separation Barrier, in addition to already restricted movement and access, has had a severe impact on those breadwinners who relied in the past on work inside Israel as the basis of their income. It is no surprise that the economic situation has continued to deteriorate, affecting more families. According to 2007 figures from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 58% of the Palestinian population is below the poverty line, while 30% of the population can be considered extremely poor. This invariably has an impact on the lives and wellbeing of children living under these circumstances.

As a child-focused organization, World Vision is concerned about what these figures mean in the present and how they will translate into the future if the situation is not reversed. These falling rates have had an impact on many aspects of children's lives: the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) states that 24 per cent of children under 18 years of age are living in extreme poverty, according to a 2007 report on the status of Palestinian children. Many families report that they have been unable to provide even the basic necessities for their children. In Gaza, World Vision staff have reported that some families were unable to send their children to school this year because they

did not have money to buy them new shoes or clothes. Families have also struggled with buying school books. A schoolgirl from a West Bank village said that she has seen children pick up discarded sandwiches during recess, because their parents were unable to provide a packed lunch or an allowance due to hardship.

Many children are malnourished, which is exhibited by the stunted growth in 9.9 per cent of children under five in the West Bank and Gaza, according to statistics from the PCBS. The fact that they are not getting the proper nourishment also has adverse effects on their cognitive and behavioral



Photo: Pablo Picher

development and their overall health.

Some of World Vision's projects have deliberately been concerned with addressing children's nutrition. A pilot project in cooperation with the Middle East Children's Institute offers over 200 girls in Beit Rima village in the Ramallah district a healthy home cooked meal. This is part of a comprehensive after school program that includes art and drama therapy in order to alleviate the effects of the conflict on these children.

World Vision's programming in the West Bank and Gaza has focused on improving the wellbeing of children in order to mitigate some of the effects of poverty. All World Vision programming is done in coordination and cooperation with the local community in order to encourage their ownership and inevitably their full responsibility for the continuing development of their village when it is time for World Vision to leave.

The key to the future of development among Palestinians is the emerging generation of children. If they grow up in a friendlier and healthier environment, they will thrive and be able to influence nation building and development of their own society, gradually enabling humanitarian and development agencies to withdraw. World Vision hopes to see the next generation transformed and empowered to control their own destiny. Let us pray now for the will to make it so.

*Margo Sabella is the Communications Officer for World Vision - Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza. She is a native of Jerusalem.*



# Education as a means to end poverty

*“We must... do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect... We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue”.*

*From Thomas Macaulay, “Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian Education,” Macaulay, Prose and Poetry, selected by G. M. Young (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp-721-24.]*

by Munir Fasheh

Today, 170 years later, Macaulay’s policy is accepted as ‘natural’; today, educated Indians and educated Arabs embody Macaulay’s policy and ‘dream’.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean there was no resistance to such a policy. Gandhi,

Tagore, and Mohammad Iqbal in the Indian subcontinent spoke strongly against British education – not only for political reasons but also, and more so, for ethical, social, cultural, and daily living reasons. They spoke against its hypocrisy and logic. In a heated discussion between Gandhi and Nehru in the 1940s, Nehru got angry

and asked Gandhi, “Isn’t your goal to get the British out of India?” Gandhi responded that his greatest fear was for the British to leave but for their institutions to stay. Similarly, in 1929, Palestinian peasants organized a conference in Jaffa, in which they raised the fundamental and concrete issue that the danger of British education lay mainly in dismantling families, communities, and their relation to land as their source of livelihood; i.e., dismantling their ways of living. Educated Palestinians (those who are Arab ‘in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect’) either had their livelihood not connected to the land or had that connection severed. Their nourishment and nurturance were not connected to what the soil produces.

The belief that education can end poverty reflects – more than anything else – poverty in the imagination and, consequently, in the options we can create in living. Can there be a more striking example of such poverty than offering children and students a single path to learn, to know, to progress? The dominant form of education cannot end poverty; if anything, it can only continue to deepen it. To end poverty, we need to look for what caused it in the first place: greed, robbing people of what they have, and the belief in a single path for progress. Pluralism is the suppressed attitude and value; education has been instrumental in eroding it. It is unimaginable to impose the same food on all children, or impose the same suit on all youth, but imposing the same suit (curriculum) on the minds of all students is not only accepted but also demanded and embraced!

Language reflects reality and at the same time shapes it. Thus, before we talk about how education can end poverty, we need to clarify what we mean by words and abstractions such as ‘poverty’ and ‘education’. When ‘education’ is mentioned, what comes to mind is rarely images of swimming, cooking, conversing, walking, playing *tablah* [Palestinian drum], dancing, planting, riding a bicycle, contemplating, sewing, or storytelling. What comes to our minds are schools, textbooks, tests, and grades.

The above discussion points to the importance of differentiating between two kinds of abstractions: one which is rooted in life and another which is

fabricated in institutions. We need to differentiate between education as a concept that is abstracted from real situations where learning happens naturally with a specific meaning in each particular context, and education as an abstraction that has belittled the

“ To end poverty, we need to look for what caused it in the first place: greed, robbing people of what they have, and the belief in a single path for progress. ”

thousands of ways in which people live and learn. Learning, which is an abstraction from countless life activities, disappears and, in its stead, an abstraction grows that was formulated in official institutions by licensed experts and professionals. Education is an abstraction that shows no trace of its origin. Similarly, we need to differentiate between poverty as an abstraction that was formulated in the age of development, and poverty as a word that has many meanings in the lives

of people. In this article, I use poverty to refer to the situation of a person who has been robbed of what s/he has or has been rendered worthless. Ending poverty, in this sense, is related to regaining what people have been robbed of, to freeing the self from the pattern of consumption in living, and to rethinking dominant professional meanings. Professional words and meanings are given by ‘experts’ with an aura of science and scholarship. Such words dwarf people and ignore them as sources of meaning and understanding. They haunt them by making their worth dependent on arbitrary tests, committees, and symbols. In short, they are words that pollute our minds.

We feel, see, and talk about the pollution of soil, air, and water, but rarely about the pollution of the mind. This is mainly done through rootless words, such as development and education, which – as Uwe Poerksen says – sound friendly, good-intentioned, positive, and expert-related, but they mask brutality. With a word such as ‘development’ (in the form it was conceived and implemented since



Photo: World Vision

1949), one can ruin an entire region<sup>2</sup>. An education that considers destroying a car a crime but destroying the Earth as progress (as what physics and chemistry, for example, have been doing for at least a hundred years); an education that believes that having computers in schools is better than having *tablabs* or that accepts graduates of teachers' training colleges but not illiterate storytellers as fulltime teachers; is an education that produces poverty rather than alleviates it. Such education makes it possible for us to continue to live in insane systems and impoverished worlds.

What does all this mean in relation to ending poverty within Palestinian society? Putting it concisely it means:

\* Unplugging ourselves from the consumption pattern in living. Stated differently, living simply and with what is available in one's surroundings.

\* Bringing back pluralism as a natural aspect in life, as an attitude, as a way of living and as a value. This includes systems of knowledge, ways of learning, and sources of worthiness of people. Diversifying learning journeys necessarily requires retrieving appropriate amounts from the educational budget and allocating them to support various ways and settings.

\* Bringing back the well being of people, communities and nature as a fundamental value in living, which means avoiding doing anything that is harmful to such well being.

\* Reducing the situations where people are compared along a linear measure that claims to be objective and universal. A crucial aspect of a community is whether it considers every person valuable or not. Giving failure "certificates" to young



Photo: Karin Brown

people is an outcome of an impoverished ideology; healing from it is a prerequisite to ending poverty of our imaginations, our senses, and our worthiness. As early as 1908, the well-known Palestinian educator Khalil Sakakini refused to use this poisonous concept of failing students in his schools.

\* Healing from that plague of the modern world in which we start with what is wrong and trying to fix it. This means that we must start with what we are not poor in, with what is beautiful, inspiring, healthy, and abundant.

\* Re-inverting the dominant way of learning and knowing: we need to start with life, with experiences and real interactions rather than with words and concepts.

\* Recovering the fundamental right (which ironically, or may be intentionally, was – seemingly not considered at all in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) to independently investigate meanings of dominant words; i.e. to co-author meanings.

These characteristics are related to another aspect that has been eroding within

Palestinian society (as well as within others): hospitality and generosity. They are crucial in ending poverty. A main challenge, then, is how and in what sense they can be embodied in education. It is also worth mentioning here that the above mentioned characteristics are necessary but not sufficient factors in ending poverty. In this sense, this article is a call to rethink the basic assumptions and meanings related to education and poverty.

I would like to end this article by telling the story of a dear American family that has two wonderful children. The daughter is energised by school; it satisfies her curiosity and brings out her creativity. For their son, on the other hand, school makes no sense; it stifles his natural curiosity and creativity; it is unable to see what he does well, beautifully, and what he does that is good for the community, respectful of others, and giving of himself.<sup>3</sup> Which one is the true nature of schools? The fundamental issue that the question raises is to regain a pluralistic attitude in various aspects of living because it is crucial for the well being of people and of nature.

1-The Arab Human Development Reports, the Dubai Initiative, and official conferences in the Arab world are good examples of such embodiment that carries Macaulay's logic.

2- An excellent example of this is the film "Darwin's Nightmare" written and directed by Hubert Sauper.

3-These aspects of his worth are what are embedded in Imam Ali's statement, "the worth of a person is what s/he yuhsen". The word yuhsen in Arabic has several meanings: does well, beautiful, good, gives from self, and respectful. For more on this, see <http://www.almoultaqa.com/aljami3ah.com/>

Dr. Munir Fasheh is the founder and former director of the Arab Educationl Forum at the Center of Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. He has returned to establish the forum in Palestine.

# Psychological and Emotional Effects of Poverty

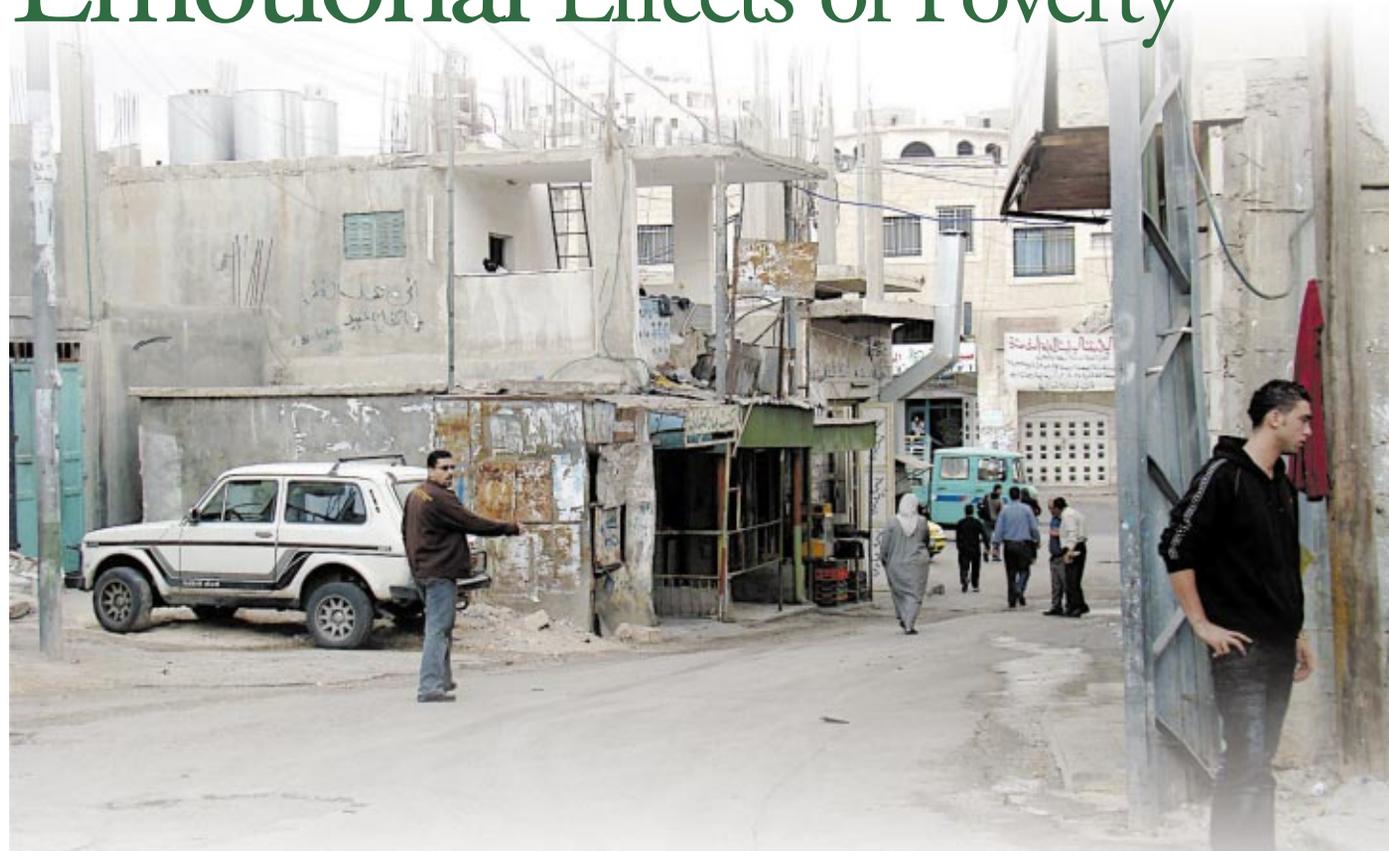


Photo: Pablo Picher

by Viveca Hazboun

“We are blessed with poverty.” I thought I would start this article with this surprising comment about poverty. Poverty has been associated with an increased incidence of mental illness, but I cannot concentrate on this pessimistic outlook. I reflect about my own childhood, growing up after my parents who had been affluent in Palestine suddenly became poor refugees, and how this traumatizing experience left us struggling to survive. My father worked very hard to support his family. I grew up eating less at meals so that the rest of my family would have more to eat. This

left me feeling proud and enjoying a healthy slim figure. My mother sold a wedding piece of jewelry that she had to buy me my first watch, which I still keep with great appreciation. Growing up as a Palestinian refugee, surrounded by people who also lost a great deal of material things but often also lost loved ones, left me feeling grateful that my loss was only material. Our family, though injured by the war, was spared the tragedies of human loss. For that we all felt very grateful, but the real loss of life had surrounded us and of course had affected our lives. This capacity to feel gratitude is one of the sources of creativity and passion that I believe inspires people to

overcome their difficulties, venture into a new brave world of altruism and giving, growing and maturing, serving and being exhilarated by the capacity to do so. The loss of life due to this political traumatic experience of ours touched us personally when in 1991 I lost a fetus of sixteen weeks due to exposure to tear gas that was used rampantly at the time by the occupying forces. This personal tragedy only reinforced my desire to serve people and to look at each person as my child and family.

It is evident that all that is traumatic is not necessarily traumatizing, but with the recent trauma that we are surrounded by

throughout the world it is only reasonable to deduce that traumatic events do have an impact on the human being, often in a negative and paralyzing way. Trauma is mentioned here because being poor or becoming poor due to a traumatic war experience complicates the picture even further. Occasionally, traumatic and life threatening events leave people feeling exhilarated with their survival and with their life, and they seem to be empowered by the experience. They do not seem to let material or human losses and imposed poverty crush their creativity or passion. The limiting factors that play a role in determining which direction the reactions to poverty will take in a certain human being are multi-factorial and complex as human beings are. There are certain categories that can help us sort this out. As human beings are an amazing mosaic and piece of art consisting of a mind and a body, genetic heredity, environmental impact, learning, habits, modeling and last but not least spiritual identification, we can conclude that the reaction to poverty can be a highly individualized experience which needs to be dealt with at all these levels.

For most, poverty is experienced as frustrating and limiting their capacities and existence. For some, poverty has played a very serious destructive cycle in their lives which may lead to mental illness, socio-pathic behavior, or towards self-destructive behavior as seen in drug or alcohol addiction or gambling.

Behavioral analysis of the symptoms and the way they are reinforced would also be crucial to the understanding of the intricacies of the human being's reaction to poverty.



Photo: Pablo Pitcher

Environmental factors that seem to aggravate the situation and allow the persistence of poverty are evident when wars persist with no opportunities for work. Even education and self development become contingent on the nonexistent financial stability.

Biological and or biochemical medical limitations that may contribute to the perpetuation of the cycle of economic limitation often need state support which often is lacking in developing nations that are trying so hard to exist. Genetic/ hereditary traits that limit the capacity of individuals from changing with interpretive or behavioral interventions become their accepted existence. It seems as though sometimes, in situations of poverty, one becomes accustomed to the devil one knows and is not willing or able to venture to face another, unknown existence.

It is important to realize that despite all of the above factors, there are many situations that science cannot seem to explain and understand so far, and that Hope and Faith play a big role in giving people the courage not to be paralyzed by the burdens of poverty. Willpower and the determination to change the

restricting forces are the tools needed to give oneself another chance in life or to find and live with inner harmony despite the restrictions of poverty.

A clinical vignette is indicated here to give this a bit of a scientific perspective. A lady in treatment was breast feeding her infant in the therapy session and began to cry, wondering how she would feed the other kids at home. She expressed a wish to be given a bomb to detonate at the check point of the occupying forces. If she became a martyr, then at least her children would be proud of their mother. The therapy included giving the woman a project of embroidery to get busy with and she was paid for this work. She overcame her destructive impulses and now runs an organization of her own where two hundred women embroider and their products are sold overseas.

Simplifying the many different psychotherapeutic interventions is an injustice to each and every one of those categories. They deserve to be elaborated on and discussed thoroughly and separately. This is beyond the scope of this article. However, I hope that this brief presentation helps the reader to become familiar with the author's attempt to understand and intervene in the cycles of poverty as they become a destructive force, hoping to encourage the readers to believe that it is possible to turn a negative situation into a positive one and helping the patient to adopt a new direction that is less self harming and limiting and more optimistic.

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# Roots of Poverty in Palestine

Poverty in Palestine has its roots in nearly 60 years of economic and military dominance by Israel which has extended to cover almost every aspect of Palestinian life. The World Bank estimates that the economy of Palestine should have grown by 5% in recent years but has actually contracted by 40% since 2000 because of restrictions caused by the occupation.

Although the dominance over Palestine has been growing since the State of Israel was established in 1949, it increased significantly in the aftermath of the 1967 war through the subsequent military occupation and associated settlement movement. More recently, following the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on March 2006, and its refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, renounce the armed struggle or abide by agreements previously made by the Palestinian Authority, the international community suspended aid to the Palestinian authority and Israel withheld Palestinian tax revenue for more than a year. This had severe consequences as the PA has lost three quarters of its monthly income and was unable to pay salaries to public sector employees. This exacerbated the poverty that Palestinians were already experiencing so that a quarter of 3.8 million Palestinians have no income, while at least 4 out of 10 Palestinians live under the official poverty line of less than US\$ 2.10 a day and unemployment stands at least 40 per cent.

Israeli military activity has destroyed much of the Palestinian civil infrastructure - such as the only power

plant in Gaza, which nearly 18 months after the June 2006 air attack is only able to export one third of the power it was designed to provide - with profound impact on daily life, physical and mental health and community morale. The occupation of the West Bank and continued military control of the Gaza Strip has involved Israeli destruction of homes, agricultural land and infrastructure as well as separation of communities from water and land resources needed for agriculture and a productive economy.

In August 2005 Israel withdrew its settlers and armed forces from Gaza Strip. Yet Israel remained in effective control by retaining control of Gaza's air space, sea space and external borders, which resulted in a denial of access to markets, foodstuffs, medicines and fuel. This denial has become extreme since June 2007 when Hamas gained effective control of Gaza's internal administration. The crossings to Israel and Egypt were closed and all imports and exports were stopped except for very basic humanitarian supplies. 65,000 jobs were lost in the manufacturing and construction industries within a month. Agriculture was severely disrupted with inputs of seedlings, fertilizer, pesticides and materials for greenhouses prevented from entering. At the same time farmers have been obliged to sell their produce at a loss within Gaza because they are not allowed to export any of it

In the West Bank, the separation wall is now nearing completion. Israel plans to restrict commercial traffic into and out of

the West Bank to five crossing points similar to the Karni crossing in Gaza. This will reduce the commercial traffic substantially as well as increasing transport costs because everything crossing the border will have to be transferred from one truck to another. This additional burden of West Bank's economy will drag it further into unprofitability. Movement restrictions are not only applied at the border. A network of nearly 600 checkpoints, settler-only roads and military areas within the West Bank separate communities from one another and make travel for trade, employment or social purposes difficult, time consuming and expensive. More than 60,500 West Bank Palestinians living in 42 villages and towns will be enclosed and unable to access their agricultural land or water without permits to use Israeli controlled gates which are often locked. Another 500,000 Palestinians will require permits to cross the checkpoints to trade, use markets and seek employment.



Photo: Aspire

# Two separate economies inside Israel

by Jafar Farah

In spite of the significant gaps in socio-economic levels between the Palestinian Arab and Jewish communities, the Arab minority has the potential to contribute billions of shekels to the state economy.

Israel, ranked number 23 out of 177 countries by the 2006 UN Human Development Index report, prides itself as its status of “the only developed country in the Middle East.” With its sophisticated exports and high standard of living, Israel’s economy has been growing at almost 5 percent a year for the past four years, and state economists claim that this trend will only continue. While the most well-off sector of the population has enjoyed the fruits of this growth, the weaker members of the population have lingered behind. The Arab population, almost 20 percent of the population of the state, has not been party to the economy’s growth, despite the enormous economic potential of this community. In fact, the Arab community’s standard of living has actually declined in the past few years due to lowered incomes and welfare cuts as a result of the economic reforms of 2003.

Figures of the National Insurance Institute show that poverty among Arab families is increasing, even though improvements have occurred among poor Jewish families. The poverty rate among Arab families has risen from 52 to 54 percent in the past few years, and almost 146,000



Photo: Pablo Pitcher

Arab families and 400,000 Arab children live below the poverty line. The average annual income of an Arab worker stands at just \$7,700, compared to the \$19,000 annual income of their Jewish counterparts. Despite Israel’s burgeoning hi-tech market, only 0.15% of Arabs are employed in this industry.

This situation, however, cannot be fully attributed to the recent economic policies of Israel. Two separate economies have existed in Israel for years, and the issue of employment and the status of Arab citizens in the economy lie at the root of this predicament. In particular, the employment figures of Arab women indicate a large economic potential that remains underutilized — Arab women constitute half of the total number of Arab students at universities in Israel, yet only 18% of Arab women are employed. According to the Mossawa Center economist, Amin Fares, full employment of Arab women could contribute 6.2 billion NIS to the Israeli GDP.

*Mr. Jafar Farah is the Founder and Director of Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, which supports capacity building for NGOs, conflict prevention, and equal socioeconomic status for Arab Israelis.*

# SABEEL SPRING WITNESS VISIT

February 28 – March 7, 2008 (9 nights inclusive)

- Meet with Palestinian Christian and Muslim leaders of civic and religious organizations and Israeli advocates for justice.
- Learn the stories of Palestinian Christians and share the worship that sustains their faith.
- Share thoughts and reflections with others from around the world who are working to end the conflict.

TRIP INCLUDES VISITS TO COMMUNITIES IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AND ISRAEL WITH 4 NIGHTS IN JERUSALEM, 3 NIGHTS IN BETHLEHEM AND 2 NIGHTS IN THE GALILEE

COST: \$1050 per person, \$200 single supplement, includes all accommodations and meals for 9 nights plus all ground transportation. Does not include airfare, transfers to/from the airport, and any additional nights requested in hotels.

## INFORMATION, REGISTRATION, AND TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Contact Sabeel at [world@sabeel.org](mailto:world@sabeel.org), call 972 2 532 7136, fax 9722 532 7137

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More info: [youth@sabeel.org](mailto:youth@sabeel.org)

### SABEEL SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

November 12 - 19, 2008

More info: [sabeel@sabeel.org](mailto:sabeel@sabeel.org)



# The Gaza Tragedy

The following facts and figures are provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on November 28, 2007. To read the full report go to [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org).

Since June 15, 2007, when Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, the people of Gaza have faced shortages of food, medicine, and raw materials for commerce and industry. The Israeli sanctions on fuel, forthcoming reductions on the delivery of electricity, and further restrictions on imports, will have additional repercussions for the densely populated Gaza Strip. The humanitarian concerns in the Gaza Strip are increasing as a result of these events.

## Human Casualties

From mid June until the end of October 2007, 142 Palestinians, including 12 children, were killed and 293 were injured, including 17 children.

## Health

Due to the lack of spare parts, much of the equipment of the Ministry of Health is no longer functioning. 20% of essential drugs and 31% of essential medical supplies were at zero availability in October 2007, while 11 out of 18 psychiatric medications in use in primary health care facilities have been unavailable since August 2007. The UNRWA Community Health Program and Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution have observed a growing proportion of the population experiencing psychological symptoms.

## Food security

Although most critical UN humanitarian food supplies are being allowed in, only 41% of Gaza's food import needs are currently being met. 1,200,000 Gazans are now receiving food assistance from the UN which is only able to meet 61% of caloric need. Significant price increases and shortages of basic food commodities have been reported in Gaza since July. The purchasing power of the population is extremely low, resulting in a reduction in expenditure on food and clothing.

### Water and Sanitation

In October, the public provider of water and sanitation services received 50% of the amount of fuel it needs to operate its wells, pumping stations and treatment plants. Since July, Israeli authorities have denied coordination for spare parts and equipment required for a number of essential projects. As a result, 210,000 people are able to access drinking water supplies for only 1-2 hours a day. The poorest households who cannot afford to buy water from private companies have started to alter their hygiene and sanitation practices.

### Shelter and Relief

The lack of access of goods into the Gaza Strip has meant that humanitarian projects valued at \$213,000,000 are on hold. The suspension of UNRWA and UNDP housing and construction projects has translated into the loss of an estimated 1,380,000 work-days for the construction sector, thereby increasing unemployment and economic hardship for thousands of workers and their families.

Table 1: Poverty level in the oPt, and in the 16 governorates.

	Poverty Level			Total
	Hardship cases	Below poverty line	Above poverty line	
<b>West Bank</b>				
Nablus	23%	31%	48%	100%
Jenin	26%	36%	38%	100%
Salfit	34%	39%	27%	100%
Tulkarem	31%	29%	40%	100%
Qalqiyah	31%	30%	39%	100%
Toubas	36%	27%	37%	100%
Hebron	28%	31%	41%	100%
Bethlehem	24%	26%	50%	100%
Ramallah	19%	28%	53%	100%
Jericho	27%	23%	50%	100%
Jerusalem	4%	15%	81%	100%
<b>Gaza Strip</b>				
Gaza City	37%	28%	35%	100%
North Gaza	46%	27%	27%	100%
Rafah	44%	26%	30%	100%
Khan Younis	46%	29%	25%	100%
Deir al-Balah	44%	27%	29%	100%
<b>Overall</b>				
	30%	28%	42%	100%



## The Peace Tapestry Continues!

Squares are coming in for the Peace Tapestry for Sabeel's 7th International Conference sent from people around the world which have a single theme: peace for all peoples and especially those who live in Palestine and Israel. Where is your square?

### Why a peace tapestry?

As a symbolic start to Sabeel's Seventh International Conference, November 2008, this tapestry will be unrolled to express both our obligation and our concern for peace. We as people of the global church have a special message to share – to let the people in the Middle East know our desire for real peace. This vision will be relayed, three 'squares' in a row, creating a "path of peace."

### How do you make your square?

1. Use a solid piece of cotton as background material, 30x 30cm or 12 x 12in.
2. Embroider, sew, knit, paint, draw, or write on any type of material – use your imagination!
3. Please put your name on it.

Send your Peace Square soon to:  
Sabeel, PO Box 49084, Jerusalem 91491

'There is no path to peace, peace is the path'  
*Mahatma Gandhi*



# Ramadan and Poverty

by: Zahra Khalidi

**R**amadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. It is during this month that Muslims observe the Fast of Ramadan. Lasting for the entire month, Muslims fast during the daylight hours and in the evening eat small meals and visit with friends and family. It is a time of worship and contemplation, a time to strengthen family and community ties.

Ramadan is a special time of year—a time when Muslims around the world take a step back from their daily routines and focus on community, charity, fasting, and prayer. It is considered the most venerated and blessed month of the Islamic year. Prayers, fasting, charity, and self-accountability are especially stressed at this time; religious observances associated with Ramadan are kept throughout the month.

The most prominent event of this month is the daytime fasting practiced by most observant Muslims. Every day during the

month of Ramadan, Muslims around the world get up before dawn to eat the Suhoor meal (the pre dawn meal) and perform their fajr prayer. They break their fast when the fourth prayer of the day, Maghrib (sunset), is due.

Laylat al-Qadr, which falls during the last third, commemorates the revelation of the first verses of the Qur'an and is considered the most holy night of the year. Ramadan ends with the holiday Eid ul-Fitr, on which feasts are held.

During Ramadan, Muslims are expected to put more effort into following the teachings of Islam and to avoid obscene and irreligious sights and sounds. Purity of both thought and action is important. The fast is intended to be an exacting act of deep personal worship in which Muslims seek a raised level of closeness to God. The act of fasting is said to redirect the heart away from worldly activities, its purpose being to cleanse the inner soul and free it from harm. Properly

observing the fast is supposed to induce a comfortable feeling of peace and calm. It also allows Muslims to practice self-discipline, sacrifice, and sympathy for those who are less fortunate, and is intended to make Muslims more generous and charitable.

Ramadan is also a time when Muslims are supposed to slow down from their worldly affairs, focus on self reformation, spiritual cleansing and enlightenment, and establish the link between God almighty and themselves by prayer, supplication, charity, good deeds, kindness, and helping others.

Since it is a festival of giving and sharing, Muslims prepare special foods and buy gifts for their family and friends and for giving to the poor and needy who cannot afford it. This can involve buying new clothes, shoes and other items of need. There is also a social aspect involved - the preparing of special foods and inviting people for the Iftar meal (the meal to break the Fast).

The above-mentioned festivities, however, take place in Muslim countries that are blessed with stability and peace. Unfortunately, in Palestine, due to increased impoverishment and economic straits resulting from arbitrary Israeli measures after Oslo and especially after the the Aqsa Intifada, people have been unable to enjoy the warmth and festive spirit of Ramadan. Increased family visits have been impossible as the West Bank has been severed into three almost separate districts in the north, central areas and south, apart from the currently total separation from Gaza due to the

“ Ramadan is a special time of year—a time when Muslims around the world take a step back from their daily routines and focus on community, charity, fasting, and prayer. ”

checkpoints and the Wall. This has caused impediments in the face of family ties and festivities, especially if a wife and husband come from different areas of the north and south of Palestine for example. Relatives such as siblings, uncles and aunts, grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, nephews and nieces do not see each other any more on these occasions. so members of the younger generation grow up without knowing each other or becoming close.

Moreover, the economic situation has deprived hundreds of thousands of children, adults and elderly citizens from the joys of Ramadan as heads of households are unable to guarantee even the provision of the basics, let alone the sweetmeats and luxuries of Ramadan.

The roots of poverty in the Palestinian territories during the recent period revert to a number of factors which accompanied the siege imposed by the Israeli military machine during the Aqsa Intifada. The most important of these factors are the killings, destruction, razing of agricultural land, and the uprooting of trees. In addition, Palestinian cities were declared closed zones and transformed into cantons and large prisons, while villages were isolated from each other by the Israeli occupying forces who have utilized more than 500 new checkpoints in the West Bank over the

last six years. The wheels of the Palestinian economy have almost ground to a standstill as more than 120,000 Palestinian workers were deprived of their jobs in Israel due to the checkpoints. Moreover, the Israelis continue to destroy Palestinian infrastructure and they have confiscated over 250,000 dunums of agricultural land and have razed 80,000 dunums in order to build the separation Wall, thus causing detriment to the situation of approximately 16500 farmers. The Israeli occupying forces also uprooted approximately 1,35 million trees and destroyed 70,000 houses either fully or partially, in addition to causing half a million injuries and more than 4500 martyrs. On the economic level Palestinian losses have reached almost \$16.5 billion between direct and indirect losses.

The plight of Palestinians has thus worsened dramatically since September 2000, with 2.4 million now living in poverty, according to a report recently published by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Additionally in a study of territories including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, the UN agency said the economic crisis had accelerated with the number of households below the poverty line increasing 26 percent in the year up to March 2007. Seven out of ten

## All I Have

Tawfiq Ziad

I never carried a rifle  
On my shoulder  
Or pulled a trigger.  
All I have  
Is a flute's melody  
A brush to paint my dreams,  
A bottle of ink.  
All I have  
Is unshakeable faith  
And an infinite love  
For my people in pain.

Palestinian households in general suffer from poverty today; with a ratio of nine out of ten in Gaza and one out of two in the West Bank. Only one out of three people have a job and each employed person supports six dependents. More persons are experiencing deep poverty and food insecurity than ever before, with children in Gaza experiencing unprecedented rates of malnutrition.

All these indicators obviously mean that Ramadan this year constituted a form of torture for the Palestinians who were forced to remain in restricted areas, hardly able to visit their relatives or to provide even the most basic foodstuffs for their children, with the knowledge that they should be having a good time during the holiest month of the year in the whole Arab and Muslim worlds.

*Zahra Khalidi is the Monitoring and Development Consultant at the Arab Thought Forum.*

## Purpose Statement *of* Sabeel

*Sabeel* is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

*Sabeel* also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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