



CNEWA-Pontifical Mission

the papal agency for Middle East relief and development

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The Cost of War

War, no matter how cruel and harsh, will one day end. The question is: can anyone assess the actual cost of war on the lives of those who witness it? As we meet more people from Gaza, we continue to discover the ramifications of the past wars.

Gaza & Jerusalem meet in Florence, Italy

It's relatively easy for Palestinians from Jerusalem to meet with friends and relatives in the West Bank as Jerusalem ID holders are allowed to travel or drive into the West Bank cities. However, for Palestinian friends wishing to meet a friend from Gaza, it is very challenging indeed. The only way to meet up must take place in a foreign country if the Gazan gets the exit permit from the Israeli authorities.



Florence, Photo by my daughter as she met her friend

My daughter joined the "We are not numbers" project which is a youth-based project that aims at writing narrative untold stories of Gaza's youth. As a writer, she has connected with several young people from the Gaza Strip including a young 19-year old woman. This 19-year friend was recently accepted to study Fashion & Design in Florence, Italy and has been there for almost three months now. Last week, my daughter, whose studying Italian Language in Perugia, took the train to Florence, as the two decided to meet up for the first time.

Upon hearing the untold stories of her friend, my daughter was deeply saddened by the psychosocial situation that her Gaza friend described; what she has lived through and endured. She couldn't but notice her reaction to loud sounds - something that we would perceive as "normal" in a city, such as an ambulance passing by on its way to the hospital. She has a collection of medicines that she takes each day, most of which are anti-depressants. The girl is only 19-years old but is clearly traumatized from four wars over the course of her childhood. Her friend told my daughter: "I thought that as soon as I leave Gaza, my life would change, and I'd overcome my fears and forget about the war but here I am, three months later, and startle at a sudden, loud noise".

Hearing this story, after some 10 months from the last war on Gaza, I couldn't but meditate on hundreds of thousands of children and youth in Gaza who live each day in the same situation, with no reprieve and nor ability to escape.

PMP Gaza Program Update

Repairing damages at institutions

The Rosary Sisters School in Gaza was able to complete the renovation work of the kindergarten, even with a two-week delay into the new scholastic year. The heavy bombardment of the adjacent street slightly moved the building which required reinforcement of the foundation. The school protection wall had to be pulled down and rebuilt. Pontifical Mission was able to co-fund the rehabilitation works thanks to the generous donation of our HQ, CNEWA-US, CNEWA Canada, as well as the Diocese of Stockholm and Children's Relief



PMP Director & staff visit the school to assess the work done

Bethlehem.

The YMCA in Gaza received its share of damages to the building as well as the solar panel system (which was recently installed by PMP with funding from Misereor), and the playgrounds. Thanks to the generous donation from Embrace the Middle East and Children's Relief Bethlehem, restoration and rehabilitation work to the damaged infrastructure was completed during the year, as well as rehabilitation of the entrance to the YMCA. In particular, a generous grant from Embrace the Middle East and Children's Relief Bethlehem, enabled the YMCA to rehabilitate the football playground, which can now provide both male and female teams of the YMCA and clubs throughout Gaza with a safe space to play, which in turn will provide an income for the YMCA.

It was a pleasure to visit a workshop to prepare young female leaders, as part of the scout and leadership program. The program, funded by Kindermissionswerk & Embrace the Middle East, was put on hold for over a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and activities recently resumed for 20 male and female scout troops in the Gaza Strip.

Seventeen Christian-based institutions in Gaza

With the official inauguration of the Arab Orthodox Cultural Center in September 2021, the number of Christian institutions in the Gaza Strip rose to 17. All of these institutions serve around quarter of a million people in Gaza on an annual basis. The new AOCC is spacious and well equipped to host local and international events and conferences, with a gym and multi-purpose hall. PMP is currently supporting the employment of 16 youth at the AOCC with generous funding from Embrace the Middle East and hopefully Friends of the Holy Land.

Moving forward

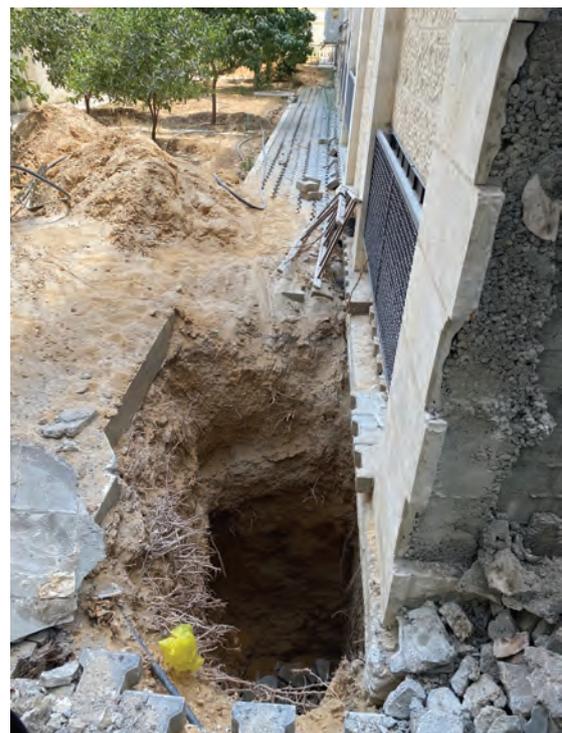
Since I received a six-month permit to visit Gaza in September, I had the opportunity of visiting Gaza on a monthly basis to visit our partners, assess ongoing projects and discuss current and future needs.

Malnourished and underweight children

As a result of the extreme poverty in Gaza, chronic malnourishment and stunted growth is a chronic problem among children. With generous funding from PMK and CNEWA, the PMP was able to support NECC's malnourishment program at all three mother & child clinics (In Shija'ia, Rafah and Darraj). More funding is required to continue providing this vital service. In fact, the rate of malnourished children stands at approximately



Serious cracks to the walls of most of the classrooms



Reinforcing the foundations



Inauguration of the new Arab orthodox Cultural Center

33%, while underweight children are around 13%.

Psychosocial support

In addition to supporting the psychosocial program at NECC's three Mother & Child Clinics, PMP launched a special psychosocial program in cooperation with AISHA Association for Woman and Child Protection, which provides free access to psychosocial support for children and their parents from Al-Shate' Refugee Camp. Activities were organized at the Brotherhood Park in Al-Shate' Refugee Camp, which was installed by CNEWA/PMP in 2002 with generous funding from George & Marie Doty. The Brotherhood Park facilities are open year round and requires upkeep and maintenance. To date, the park requires donor funding to rehabilitate the public restrooms and the playground which serves the entire community.

Al-Ahli Arab Hospital

During my visit last week, I visited with the hospital's director, Ms. Suhaila Tarazi, and the Medical Director of the Hospital, Dr. Maher Ayyad, to discuss the general health situation in Gaza and the hospital's needs. I was shocked at the various programs and medical needs required. The hospital requires scanning equipment to be able to scan the brains of children with epilepsy for proper diagnosis and treatment. Parents cannot afford the cost of operations to remove children's tonsils due to complications; equipment is required for this procedure. In addition, for children with various orthopedic complications require special equipment to be able to treat conditions at an early stage. The hospital also plans to continue breast cancer screening for local Gaza non-refugee women, especially those from the Beit Hanoun area as the hospital is witnessing an elevated number of breast cancer diagnosis among women from this area. It is probable that this area is heavily agricultural and could be related to chemical fertilizers or insecticides. We believe that in addition to providing a breast cancer screening program at Al-Ahli, we need to run a study to verify the causes.

The hospital also wants to continue women's bone density screening and tests to diagnose osteoporosis. Women in particular, have been detected with Vitamin D deficiency.

As long as Gaza remains under siege, humanitarian support will continue to be an urgent need. However, whenever possible, developmental projects are also implemented to help the people, mostly the youth, to remain steadfast and build a future in their homeland.

Joseph Hazboun



Discuss future programs with Al-Ahli administration



Psychosocial activities program at the Brotherhood Park



Leadership training for young female scout members